

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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School Board aims to preserve teachers' jobs

The projected budget shortfall, specifically avenues to preserve teachers' jobs with the aid of the district's fund balance, dominated School Board discussion on Thursday.

Tied to the budget discussion, however indirectly, was an update on the district's 2008 bond program, a look at energy management efforts, and the approval of a \$400,000 donation from the Smithson Valley Athletic Booster Club for a scoreboard.

At a board workshop last week, trustees directed the Comal ISD administration to add fund balance to remedies addressing the projected \$16.8 million shortfall to prevent the elimination of teachers' positions.

"We made a few significant changes (from the draft proposal of last week)," said Dr. Marc Walker, Superintendent of Comal ISD. "While we have no earthly idea of what's going to happen at the state level, we are going on the best-case scenario, which is (a shortfall of) \$16.8 million."

By adding an estimated \$3 million per year over the biennium from the district's \$57 million fund balance, "we could add back about 40 more teachers from our initial projection."

"If the projections stay like this and we go forward, I do think attrition will take up all of the positions targeted for elimination," Dr. Walker said. "If the

projections change dramatically, and I have heard a possible \$32 million budget cut for our district, I will have to change with it.”

Dr. Walker mentioned the possibility of the school board declaring a financial emergency and starting the process of a reduction in force (RIF) in the fall if the budget cuts become more severe.

Board member David Spencer applauded administration’s financial management.

“I hope that our teachers and our staff and taxpayers recognize that we have been fortunate in that we have an administration that has been financially competent,” he said. “We have a very healthy fund balance and that provides us with some options that other folks don’t have.”

Dr. Walker and Board members expressed frustration with the timing of notifying teachers of the district’s intentions for next school year by the March 31 board meeting and approving a budget for next school year by August, while not knowing what the state budget looks like until probably after Labor Day.

Thomas Bloxham, assistant superintendent for support services, gave the school board an update on Bond 2008 construction projects, which include:

- Phase 3 of Canyon High School is virtually complete. This phase includes the completion of a performing arts center and the red turf on the athletic field. Tours of these new facilities are offered to the community on Monday, Feb. 28, beginning at 7 p.m.
- Renovation work at Smithson Valley High School involves the opening of a small branch office of Randolph Brooks Federal Credit Union for students and staff, new science labs, two-toned green turf on the athletic field and a resurfaced track.
- Continued construction on Kinder Ranch Elementary School, which carries the Garden Ridge Elementary design prototype of a

“green” school featuring a garden roof, site orientation to maximize sunlight but not the related heat, and an HVAC system that is expected to bring down electricity bills by 20 percent.

Bloxham also updated the board on the district’s energy management plan.

“We’ve added square footage with the addition of four new elementary schools over the past two years and we have not increased the utility budget at all,” he said. “The less utility bills we have, the more teachers we can keep. This really helps when we’re in a financial situation like we are now.”

The scoreboard planned for Smithson Valley High School is expected to benefit students by providing higher scholarship amounts; developing increased media arts career path training and opportunities; encouraging community advertising and involvement; attracting playoff games to generate further revenue; and promoting booster club membership.

Booster Club Vice President Byron Crutcher assured the Board that the booster club would maintain the scoreboard, which should be in operation in about six weeks.