

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Budget dominates workshop discussion

The Comal ISD Board of Trustees on Tuesday again approached the precarious position of trying to make decisions based on incomplete information from Austin. During a budget workshop, the school board looked at revenue scenarios for the district, including budget shortfall targets and proposals for operations and personnel cuts.

“We have the projected lows and the highs of the cuts,” Dr. Marc Walker, superintendent of Comal ISD, told the board. “But it’s highly unlikely that any of the figures we look at tonight will be lower than the low figures or higher than the high figures.”

Administration is projecting a \$17.8 million shortfall for the 2011-12 school year. However, Dr. Walker warned the board that he believes that number may still be too low.

To date, 70 teaching positions and 90 non-teaching positions have been eliminated, with most of those positions accounted for in retirements and resignations. All campus and department budgets have been reduced by 10 percent, plus maintenance, technology and transportation budgets have been slashed.

During past meetings and workshops, the board has voiced a consensus toward using a portion of the district’s \$58 million fund balance to save teaching positions.

“I do think that we can spend some fund balance, but at the same time, we have to think in terms of we’ve got to reach the baseline,” Dr. Walker said. “If we don’t work toward that baseline—where revenue equals expenditures—we will be worse off the second year than we were the first year. I’m trying to get to the point where we can sustain whatever we have without using fund balance.”

The school year 2012-13 will be even more of a challenge for Comal ISD.

“We estimate another \$11.6 million we’ll have to cut in the second year of the biennium,” he said. “That’s 250 more teachers, on top of all of the cuts we’ve already made.”

Dr. Walker addressed Monday’s announcement by the Texas Education Agency of individual district allotments from the \$830 million recently released in federal aid. Comal ISD stands to receive \$2.6 million.

“Clearly, the Senate bill has already used that money as a revenue source. The House bill has not,” he said. “We will only get it one year. Next year, you’ve got to add that amount back in (from district revenues).”

Dr. Walker strongly suggested that the budgets currently being considered by the Texas House and Texas Senate will be challenged in the courts by school districts.

“I have a hard time using a lot more money than we have because of the unknowns,” said Bill Swint, board member. “I think we could blow through money in a hurry and find in two years we don’t have that many choices. We’re going to be boiling it down to the have-to-haves.”

David Spencer added his opinion.

“It’s maddening trying to predict what could happen when we go forward. I find solace in knowing where we are in relation to other school districts. Others will go under well before we do (because of Comal ISD’s healthy fund balance). It is likely that other districts will grieve this before we do because we have the ability to take the sting out. It is likely that the system will be thrown into court.”

Because Tuesday’s meeting was a workshop, no action was taken. The school board continued the dialogue regarding the budget, which must be approved by the end of August.

“Until we see what the real dollars are, at the end of the day this is just an educated guess,” said Carol Keller, school board president. “It is too premature to make these decisions.”

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