

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Fund balance tops Trustee budget discussion

By the end of the budget workshop on Tuesday, the Comal ISD School Board appeared united and ready to dedicate a portion of the district's \$57-million fund balance, or savings account, toward rescuing teaching positions.

The complicated information surrounding the district and state budget shortfalls changes daily, and Dr. Marc Walker, Superintendent of Comal ISD, spent the better part of three hours explaining administrative recommendations to address the district's anticipated \$16.8 million shortfall, and answering individual board member's questions.

"When we get to March, we're going to have to do something with 1,300 teachers," Dr. Walker told the board, describing the state law that requires contracts to be offered to teachers by April 12. "I would like to have a figure in mind tonight to run those scenarios for you."

Administrative budget recommendations, which are about \$1.6 million shy of the \$16.8 million estimate, include the elimination of 110 teaching positions, among other deep cuts in staffing and operations in all departments and at all campuses in the district.

Board members' recommendations for fund balance scenarios ranged from \$7 million to \$11 million over two years. Trustees expressed the desire to dedicate the fund balance to keeping teachers in the classrooms.

"Clearly, (with the proposed cuts) services will be affected," Dr. Walker said. "We're eliminating more teachers than anything else. I would like to prioritize adding teachers back first."

Because this was a board workshop, no votes were taken. However, administration will include the board's input in future budget planning scenarios.

“I still think it’s better to use the fund balance toward one-time expenditures,” Dr. Walker said. “If we get down the road and find out we need to invest more of our fund balance, we can do that. Over the past five years we have wanted to save money. We have wanted to create a healthy fund balance and now we’re here.”

Administrative recommendations presented to the board include:

- Freeze all hiring of new staff
- Relocate/reduce Central Office personnel, totaling \$1 million
- Reduction of administrator positions at the elementary level
- Class size increases at every level; reduction of athletic periods for secondary coaches
- Reduction of department and campus operating budgets by 10 percent
- Zero technology budget for computer rotation
- Zero budget for deferred maintenance
- Elimination of all-day Pre-K (the Pre-K program would become half-day at select campuses)
- Smaller elementary schools would share nurses, librarians and/or counselors.

Dr. Walker emphasized the \$16.8 figure is best-case scenario.

“If we have to take a \$26-\$29 million cut, we cannot operate the district,” he said. “There is not that much money left to cut. We’d have 50-60 students in every classroom. All we would have left is to reduce teachers and increase class sizes.”

A link has been added to the district website, www.comalisd.org, that includes information about the budget planning scenario process. In addition, an email address dedicated to questions, comments and concerns regarding this process has been established, budget@comalisd.org.