

# North Kitsap School District plans for fall staffing cuts

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NORTH KITSAP -- North Kitsap School District is bracing for the possibility it will have to cut up to 19 teaching positions in the fall.

The school board last week approved a resolution authorizing the cuts officials say are needed in part because of economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

School districts are required to notify certificated staff (teachers and teaching specialists) by May 15 each year about any non-renewal of contracts or layoffs.

"We have not received any guidance from the legislature or from (the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) that states this deadline will be extended or adjusted," Superintendent Laurynn Evans said.

## Impact of COVID-19 on schools

One reason for the projected revenue loss is lower enrollment. Enrollment numbers typically decrease over the year but concerns and precautions related to COVID-19 appear to be driving a higher rate of departures.

The norm for North Kitsap's enrollment drop is about 0.6%. For kindergarten through eighth grade, this year's decrease was about 1%. For high school students (grades 9-12) it was a 2% decrease.

North Kitsap lost about 60 students between the beginning of February and March 13, after which all Washington school buildings were closed for the rest of the year to thwart the spread of coronavirus.

"Families left for various types of homeschool, online academies, and some just some just stopped coming," Evans said. "We continue to work to contact these families regarding their enrollment status."

Then there's the impact of COVID-19 on the state's budget, which is the primary funding source for schools. North Kitsap officials have been getting "weekly warnings" from state officials that they expect a \$4 billion to \$6 billion decrease in the total state budget.

"We anticipate at least some manner of impact to K-12 education," Evans said. "We are currently navigating uncharted waters on a host of fronts due to the coronavirus crisis. Enrollment, state budgeting and district budgeting are all tightly related to one another. Right now, there are many unknowns as we look to next year, but we do know that the economic and social impacts of this crisis will be felt for some time into the future."

## Higher salaries, health insurance

The district is also seeing increased costs not directly related to COVID-19.

A change last year to the system for school employees' health insurance benefits has cost districts more than they are getting from the state, according to North Kitsap officials.

For North Kitsap, healthcare costs for next year not entirely covered by the state are projected to increase by about \$1.75 million.

Staff salaries and the district's operating costs are increasing at a rate that outpaces the state's inflationary increase in its budget of 1.6%, the district reported. North Kitsap officials say that's largely because the state's pledge to fully fund basic education, including staff salaries, generates less that it costs in reality to run the district.

The state allocates school districts funding for a certain number of employees per school. They typically use local funds and other sources to hire

additional staff and to offer salaries, negotiated with bargaining units, above what would be covered by the state's allocation. As staff move up the local salary scale, the costs for individual districts outpace what's allotted by the state.

"For example, with no change in the teacher salary table, on average teacher pay is projected to increase 1.8% on tenure raises alone," the district stated in an email. "Approximately 85% of our costs are on salary and benefits, and so this has a significant impact on our budget."

North Kitsap considers itself fortunate to have a tenured and experienced staff, Evans said. But the state no longer takes teacher experience into account when applying its per school allocation model, so districts with more experienced staff must make up the difference.

## Other cost increases

In another budget hit, the district's costs to participate in Washington State's risk management pool, which provides coverage like an insurance policy, will increase by 25%, or about \$200,000, next year.

All agencies participating in the risk pool got a heads up about the increase, spokeswoman Jenn Markaryan said. "This is not specific to North Kitsap," she said in response to a question whether the increase stemmed from a [\\$5 million lawsuit settlement \(/story/news/2019/12/02/north-kitsap-school-district-settles-suit-over-sexual-assaults-special-needs-bus/4334369002/\)](/story/news/2019/12/02/north-kitsap-school-district-settles-suit-over-sexual-assaults-special-needs-bus/4334369002/) the district reached in late 2019 with families of special education students alleged to have been sexually assaulted on a school bus in 2015.

Finally, the district expects about \$500,000 less from the state for transportation. State budget increases for transportation that were set for next year were vetoed by Gov. Jay Inslee as part of the state's response to the anticipated economic impact of COVID-19.

Evans said it's still early in the budget process, and there are many unknowns.

"While we hope we will not have to fully enact the parameters of the resolution, we have to prepare for scenarios that include enrollment declines and revenue shortfalls in the coming academic year," Evans said.

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