

Parents pan proposed changes to CKSD's elementary band, orchestra program

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CENTRAL KITSAP — Parents in Central Kitsap School District are unhappy about a proposal to delay the start of band and orchestra programs from fifth grade, the last year of elementary school, to sixth grade, the first year of middle school.

The plan is part of a cost-saving package the district is putting together to trim \$4.7 million from the 2020-21 school year budget. Some of the shortfall, including projections of declining state revenue, stems from the impact of COVID-19.

The district is also projecting declining enrollment in the fall resulting from the [departure from Bremerton of the USS Carl Vinson \(/story/news/2020/01/09/uss-carl-vinson-aircraft-carrier-depart-bremerton-august/4421203002/\)](#), which will be homeported in August in San Diego, and from the opening in Bremerton of a [new charter school \(/story/news/local/2019/11/20/charter-school-finds-home-manette/4250466002/\)](#), Kitsap County's first. The impacts of COVID-19 do not appear to be driving the enrollment reduction, district officials have said.

No layoffs are proposed at this time, Superintendent Erin Prince has said. But positions that go vacant as a result of retirements and resignations will be left unfilled, and some teachers will be reassigned, according to an informational video on the district's website about the budget cuts.

Delaying the start of the band and orchestra programs is expected to save \$496,000, Paula Bailey, the district's finance director told the school board on Monday. Regular music instruction will continue at the district's elementary schools.

More than 3,700 people as of Monday afternoon had signed a change.org petition posted by parent Krista Radke calling for the district to rescind the proposal.

"Music creates successful people," said the petition statement. "Not only do we see this as an emotionally charged issue at this time of great uncertainty in our world, we see this as having a great negative impact on our children's education."

Music teaches discipline and skills that are transferable to other academic learning, the petition states. Band and orchestra are the only electives available in elementary school, whereas middle school students have multiple elective opportunities, meaning students who don't start band or orchestra in fifth grade might skip the chance to take up an instrument, the petition states.

"Fifth-grade band sets the table for everything that follows and ultimately engages more students than introducing it in sixth grade," said Christopher Duenow, a former Central Kitsap High School director of bands (1992-99), who signed the petition. "It would be a short-sighted decision on the district's part if you moved forward with this cut."

The savings from delaying the start of band and orchestra is part of \$1.65 million in proposed cuts to teaching positions, including three "teachers on special assignment" who will be reassigned to the classroom (\$471,000 in savings) and eliminating 5.5 secondary teaching positions (\$682,000 in savings).

The district has also eliminated five administrative positions through attrition for a savings of \$534,000. Reductions in classified staffing (non-teaching, non-administrative positions) will give \$138,600 in savings.

Staffing reductions and reassignments will yield \$2.3 million in total savings with another nearly \$2.4 million in savings yet to be identified.

Bailey told the school board district officials have heard projections from the state of \$4 billion to \$10 billion in lost revenue over the next biennium from economic fallout related to the impact of COVID-19. The district next year will feel the impact of Gov. Jay Inslee's veto of increased spending on transportation, school counselors and other support staff, cuts Inslee made to offset the state's budget shortfall.

The possibility of late or defaulted property tax payments with the economic fallout from COVID-19 also could slow the district's revenue stream.

"Even in the uncertain times ahead, we are committed to serving your students and our families and our community in the best way possible," Prince said in the explanatory video. "Thank you for your support. We will continue to keep you informed. Together we will get through this stronger than ever."

The school board will consider the proposed package of cuts at its 6 p.m. May 13 meeting, which will be held remotely by the Zoom online meeting application. Comments will be taken in writing before and after the meeting. The school board president will note topics that were submitted prior to the board meeting.

All public comment submissions will be provided to each board member. The superintendent or designee will respond to the individual public comments following the board meeting.

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