

May 11, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

These are very difficult times. Developing a plan to staff our buildings with highly qualified instructors, fund our student programs and still reduce \$413,000 out of our general fund is proving to be complicated. Even given these fiscal challenges, we have the vision and the human resources to continue to improve our schools. Recent "Suitable Funding" forums have given the Board and the administration some real clarity about how our district can improve. This Thursday, the Budget Reduction Committee will conduct the third and last meeting to find \$150,000 in general fund cuts. It is my job to find an additional \$150,000 in personnel cuts for next school year as well. The remaining balance of \$113,000 will be deducted from our contingency reserve account to make ends meet for next school year.

Personnel Reductions: Normal attrition of staff, i.e., resignations, and retirements is the first and most preferred means of achieving a reduction in force (RIF); however, a RIF of professional staff may be necessary. I intend to honor the Negotiated Agreement and the process it spells out. This letter is an important part of the process, communication. Ongoing communication to our certified staff will be a high priority throughout this entire budget planning time.

Attrition the past two years: The total certified staff in our district has gone from 87.5 to 84. Class sizes have increased in each school. The Board of Education and the administration know that it will be hard to cut any more classroom teachers without hurting student learning and programs; however, the administrative team has found areas where teachers do not have a full schedule and/or are not fully certified for the subjects we need them to teach. I have recently talked to three teachers about moving them to half-time as a short term cost saving measure. If they do resign this week, at Monday's BOE meeting the Board will approve a motion to re-hire them part time. Their benefits, including health insurance would stay fully funded.

Elementary and ECDC School Staffing: We have had two resignations this spring at the ES (6th math and 4th grade). Our plans are to hire just one person to fill these two openings. Shelly Finney has done an excellent job in her current role, but she will be in the classroom, full-time next year. Exactly where we will place her has not yet been decided. Our Reading Recovery program will be recommended to the BOE to end. This will free up Robyn Rome and Jason Hajek to be used elsewhere. Mrs. Rome has done a lot of tier two interventions, as has Mr. Hajek. Coach Hajek will continue as half-time ES PE, but will also be needed for HS PE. With the loss of Ginny Titus' HPEC preschool program, we want to put Robyn Rome in Ginny's pre-school classroom to serve students in a program that generates Head start revenue. It will look just like our 4 year old at-risk classrooms in the ECDC. This classroom will also help off-set the long waiting list for tuition based pre-schoolers. Traditionally, 2nd grade has had five teachers, but the upcoming class is smaller than normal and we will be moving Mindy Cornelsen to an open Kindergarten position. This school year, Kindergarten numbers were higher than we would like (21-22 per class) and our incoming all-day K numbers are again very large.

Middle School and High School: A MS and HS schedule with completely unaligned class times continues to make it difficult to efficiently share teachers. We believe we can make it work, but many puzzle pieces are still missing. Both HS and MS have fewer teachers this year, than in years past. The HS has seen four teacher resignations this spring. Just today, I received resignations from Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Glodden. We also have two math openings to fill. Filling these big shoes is going to require some specially certified instructors. We need two more math teachers and two more science teachers or we need to get creative with our current staff and their certification. More puzzle pieces to make us whole again.

Hugoton Learning Academy: This public charter school and their 80 students generated enough FTE revenue to completely fund all the salaries (Emily Snyder 1.0, Dennis Gonzales .5, Barb Trujillo .5, Michael Burrows 1.0 and Jan Kilbourne .2). Then, great news came from KSDE in late August. We received a second year of grant money (\$195,000)! Currently, the enrollment has grown to over 90 students and this school should remain fully sustainable next school year in its current location. We are planning for Ms. Trujillo and Mrs. Snyder to switch places (MS social studies) and we need Mr. Kilbourne to be the .5 math instructor for the HLA. All these individuals have done an excellent job.

Since 78-80 percent of our operating expenses (general fund) are personnel costs, it is not possible to make these reductions without eliminating staff positions. Classified staff will not be immune from reductions. These details will not be shared in writing to the certified employees. As we make these difficult decisions, we realize that there are names, faces, and careers behind these positions, and that makes this process gut-wrenching.

But unfortunately, there is no way to balance our budget without such steps. Last Monday at a special BOE meeting, I notified the Board that, regretfully, the Administration has identified the \$150,000 in personnel reductions. Will the two recent HS resignations change our plan? Certain teachers and some classified staff will still need to be reduced. The Board will consider these Reductions in Force on Monday, May 16th.

Our primary goal, as we face this very difficult challenge, remains on providing quality academic instruction with more limited resources. Make no mistake: reductions of this magnitude will have a fundamental effect on public education as we know it today in Hugoton. But as we restructure, the District will make the most effective use of our more limited resources, and we will continue our efforts to improve student achievement.

Sincerely,

Mark K. Crawford