

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 17, 2010

Memorandum

TO: All Employees
FROM: John P. Welch



John's Journal
Reflections from the Superintendent

Dear Colleagues:

As you probably are aware, our state is dealing with a major revenue shortfall for the second year in a row. The current forecast predicts a shortfall of \$2.6 billion, which will translate to significant cuts to public schools.

The House and Senate have not yet released their budget proposals. But based on the governor's proposed budget, we anticipate state funding cuts to Highline to be in the range of \$5 to \$8 million—about the same level of cuts we took last year.

The reductions we will be compelled to make this year will be tougher than ever. We will have to find ways to cut a budget that is already very lean after reducing expenditures by more than \$10 million over the past two years. Our reserve fund is at bare minimum, so it can't provide any cushion. As we build our budget for next year, we absolutely must prioritize our most critical work. And we will be forced to decide what work we can no longer continue to do.

Since 70 percent of our budget goes to pay for personnel, it is not possible to make cuts this deep without reducing staff. Last year, we lost 35 classified staff positions and 20 central office, management, and non-classroom teaching positions. We always try to make teacher cuts a last resort, but the vast majority of our employees are teachers. As a result, we were forced to reduce 63 teaching positions last year. Thankfully we were able to hire back all but a few certificated and classified staff due to retirements and attrition.

Right now, the school board, the senior leadership team, and I are in the process of developing funding priorities with input from principals and department heads. These are the things we are keeping in mind as we set priorities:

- Our vision of seeing every student graduate from high school ready to succeed in post-high school education, the work world, and community life. Our funding priorities will reflect the most important work that moves us toward that vision.
- Our strategic goals represented by LEARN—Learning environment, Excellent staff, Achievement for every student, Resource stewardship, and Neighbors and community.
- Our commitment to equity—recognizing that some students and schools have higher needs than others, we will continue to move toward a system of distributing our resources according to need.

In order to fund our highest priority work, we will have to face the fact that some other work will not be funded. We will look to see if there are places where we can still gain efficiencies; however, we want to be careful not to erode the basic functions that keep our district running. This will not be an easy task, and it will take our collective best thinking, including yours.

You will again have the opportunity to provide input on budget priorities through our website and in community budget workshops. The workshops will be scheduled for mid-April. We will let you know the dates and locations once they are firm.

The comment form will be posted on our website by the end of this month. In addition to letting us know your thoughts, you may want to contact your state senator and representative regarding your views on education funding.

The legislature is scheduled to adjourn on March 11. We will not have a clear picture of the amount of our budget shortfall until then. After staff and community input is gathered in April, district staff will develop a recommended budget, which will go to the school board on May 26. A public hearing on the budget will be held in June. The board is expected to adopt a final budget in August.

These are difficult times, not just for schools and organizations, but for individuals and families. I know many of you are feeling the pinch. I know many of our families are hurting. This is a time for us to come together to seek the highest and best interests of the whole community. We *will* continue to do our most important work to serve our children and their families.