

Report

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an exponentially growing number.”
While school districts were not required to complete the survey, 113 of the state’s 152 districts did so, including Yankton, Bon Homme, Gayville-Volin, Irene-Wakonda, Vermillion and other area schools.

SCHOOL BUDGETS

School budgets have changed dramatically in the last two fiscal years. In 2010 South Dakota state Legislature froze the per-student allocation and then followed that in 2011 with cuts.

The report shows:

- Statewide, school districts have enacted general fund budget cuts totaling \$38.3 million.
- On average, school district general fund budgets decreased 5.8 percent.

- Statewide, school districts plan to reduce general fund balance levels by \$25.6 million.

According to Bietz, the Yankton School District cut nearly \$1.2 million, a 6.7 percent cut. Compounding the issue for YSD is the decreasing student enrollment. In 2010-2011 the average daily enrollment was 2,747; this year that number is 2,665, which equals a nearly \$360,000 hit to the district. Because of the two losses of revenue, the general fund reserve balance will significantly decrease.

“Following the audit of the 2010-2011 school year, our general fund balance was at \$4,029,300,” Bietz said. “If projections stay true for fiscal year 2011-2012, we will spend \$1,784,385 of that to fund the budget.”

Bietz said districts that do not have decreasing enrollment — for the most part the schools in the Sioux Falls I-90, I-29 corridor — are better able to handle the decreased per-student enrollment.

“Don’t think that they are not struggling as well,” he said. “Brookings, who I believe had an increased enrollment of 80 students this year, also has a passed opt-out of \$750,000 per year for 10 years. So they have a yearly net revenue of nearly \$1.1 million that the Yankton School District does not.”

COST SHIFTS

The Legislature has allowed districts to transfer money from the capital outlay and pension funds to cover specific general fund expenses, most recently with Senate Bill 91.

The report shows:

- Statewide, school districts plan to use \$15.9 million in capital outlay revenue to supplement and balance their general fund budgets.

- Statewide, school districts will collect \$2.4 million in new pension fund levy revenue to supplement and balance their general fund budgets.

- Statewide, school districts were approved to receive \$7.6 million in new or expanded opt-out revenue to supplement and balance their general fund budgets.

“Yankton has already been taking advantage of this program,” Bietz said. “We spend approximately \$800,000 capital outlay dollars on general fund expenses. We are already spending approximately 25 percent of our capital outlay funds on general fund expenses.”

In addition, Bietz said that the district already uses the pension fund levy to pay for the state retirement requirements of the district, a savings of nearly \$300,000 per year to the general fund.

JOB LOSSES

In response to state aid cuts, school boards were forced to cut staffing.

The report shows that statewide:

- School districts have eliminated 464.8 full-time positions, including 27.8 administrative positions, 265.8 certified positions and 171.2 classified positions.

At YSD, one administrative position (middle school assistant principal) was cut, 16 full time teachers (5.5 at the elementary level, six at the middle school and 4.5 at the high school) were cut and 17 classified positions (library assistants, paraprofessionals, custodians and bus drivers) were eliminated.

“We had already been working

to find savings to the district in terms of salaries,” Bietz said. “Even before the cuts were passed this last year, our classified and administrative personnel had not had raises for three years. This year we negotiated a two-year pay freeze for certified staff as well. But when 87 percent of your general fund expenses are salaries and benefits, it limits the room you have to work

with to find savings.”
Gertsema said that he feels Yankton took a bigger hit than many schools in the state. “The average amount of general funds cut was 5.8 percent ... and about 60 schools are using opt-out revenue to fund their budgets,” he said. “So what it shows is Yankton was a very efficiently operated district before the cuts and there is

a growing discrepancy between the revenues available here and those available to other schools. We did cut deeper and eliminated programs and teaching positions that I felt we really didn’t want to cut.”
Gertsema said he is glad that ASBSD did the independent survey.

“It brings a perspective to the educational budget situation for our local readers,” he said. “I hope they review it and analyze it and see that providing a quality education for our students continues to be a need in our community.”
To see the entire report go to <http://www.yankton.net/Costly-Cuts.pdf>.



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