

**Staff Comments – 4J Budget Survey**  
**Summary of Responses to Open-Ended Questions**  
February 2009

**Question #20: Comments on Budget Reduction strategies.**

There were 152 responses to this question. Those responses that suggested additional things to keep, additional reductions, or efficiencies were added to the responses for questions #21, #22, and #23. To be included in the summary below, the idea must have been mentioned twice or belong to a common set.

Several comments advocated an approach or philosophy to use when making reductions. These included:

- 5** believing increased **efficiency** (including decreased waste) could make the difference,
- 4** advocating measures that would **retain staff** (even at less than full time employment),
- 2** suggesting the focus be on the **large cuts**,
- 2** arguing that reductions should be made in **areas that can be restored** once the economy improves,
- 2** felt 4J should be working at the state level (reduce unfunded mandates, increase income taxes),
- 2** stating the cuts should be **visible and felt** by the community, not just absorbed within 4J.

Of the budget reduction strategies presented in the survey, twelve options received follow-up comments. In order of frequency they are:

- 32** people said **don't increase the staffing level** (student:teacher ratio) at all.
- 19** respondents said **postpone new math adoptions**, one suggesting a 10 year cycle.
- 14** people felt the **reduced school year** was the most equitable way to go; **6** preferred a four day week; **1** respondent said school time should not be reduced at all.
- 12** people advocated **reducing district administration**, although **3** said no more restructuring. **2** suggested administrators rescind their most recent pay raise.
- 4** respondents wanted to **close/consolidate elementary schools**, **2** thought Alternative Schools should be closed instead, **1** said we shouldn't close schools at all.
- 5** people suggested **reducing building administration**. Most frequently mentioned was decreasing the number of High School Principals and sharing one Elementary School Principal between two schools.
- 4** respondents suggested **reducing athletics** (the only extracurricular activity named).
- 3** people thought **materials and supplies budgets** could be reduced.
- 3** people thought the District should **spend reserves**.
- 2** people felt reducing building maintenance would just cost more in the long run and anger the community.
- 2** people rejected the ideas to reduce/eliminate mentoring programs or equity-based school funding.
- 2** people supported reducing physical education time, central office support services.

Several people expressed confusion over the meaning of "increase the staffing ratio by 1.0/2.0 and others were surprised that this question did not require forced ranking of responses, as had previous questions.

**Question #21: Are there some other programs, services, or activities, or district initiatives, we should consider as a high priority as we struggle with balancing the district budget?**

There were 318 responses to this question. If responses were more focused on service reductions or efficiency, the ideas were added to the responses for Questions #22 or #23. To be included in the summary below, the idea must have been mentioned twice or belong to a common set.

The most people, **34**, advocated to **maintain staffing ratios** in classrooms. Put another way, **8** respondents said to maintain staff/FTE that provide direct services to students. Expressed as a value, **5** people said to **put students first**.

The following **programs** were mentioned as important to keep:

# responders	program
<b>25</b>	<b>Reading Programs (e.g., Read Right)</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Music</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>Physical Education</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Arts</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Literacy Programs</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Elective programs in general</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Math</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Drama</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Talented and Gifted</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Foreign Languages</b>

Services that targeted specific populations were also mentioned in the survey:

- 25** advocated for **Special Needs** education and staff,
- 23** supported intervention programs that help **at-risk youth/Title One**,
- 13** mentioned **ELL** student services,
- 4** people referenced the **Minority Student Achievement** programs.

**Nineteen** people thought it important to maintain **Counselors/psychologist/behavior support** specialists. **Eleven** respondents said **Nurses/Health Services** were vital.

Other services mentioned were:

- 7** felt **athletics** should be maintained,
- 6** stressed the importance of **technology and technology staff** at the schools,
- 3** said **libraries** were important,
- 2** advocated for the **after school programs**.
- 3** felt **extracurricular activities** kept kids in school.

**Alternative schools** were listed by **6** people as high priority. **Summer School** we mentioned **twice**.

**Staff development** was mentioned by **6** people as very important.

In the central office, **Human Resources** was deemed a high priority by **4** responders, **Finance** by **3**, and the **Family Community Coordinator** by **2**.

**Three** people said that now was not the time to close schools (although their reasoning varied).

**Three** people advocated for **vertical articulation** to remain a priority.

**Question #22: Are there some other programs, services, or activities, or district initiatives, we should consider eliminating or reducing as we struggle with balancing the district budget?**

There were 296 responses to this question. Some were combined with Question #23 – efficiency measures – if the suggestion was focused on how to do things differently versus doing less or none. Answers from other questions that referenced reductions were included below. To be included in the summary below, the idea must have been mentioned twice or belong to a common set.

**Athletics** was the most discussed subject, with **40** people saying there should be no subsidy for athletics (which meant the programs were either eliminated or totally fee-based). **Twenty-two** people advocated **changing boundaries/pulling out of OSAA** and having a community-based intramural program in order to save travel time and money. **Two** suggested postponing upgrades to football fields.

Changes in **administrative costs** were mentioned by **54** people. By category, 4 suggested non-specific decreases in administrative costs; 28 recommended changes at the central office; 17 looked to administrative/office staffing at schools for reductions; and 5 advocated keeping administrators (and teachers) at schools by decreasing their commitments to district committees.

**46** responders advocated **not adopting the new math program**. Another 5 people suggested not adopting any new program, some specifying language arts.

Professional development was another topic frequently raised. **Twenty-nine** people suggested that **profession development seminars could be reduced, modified, or suspended for a year**, especially the use of external consultants/speakers. Another **14** responders suggested there be a **decrease in the number of in-service planning and professional days**.

**32** people said 4J should **close/consolidate schools** (at all levels). Another **14** suggested that **alternative/charter schools be closed**.

**Not providing food/refreshments**, either for community events or staff events, was a place where **24** responders believed 4J could save money.

Another **17** responders discussed **testing**: 6 suggested eliminating 4J math and reading tests/screenings, 4 wanted fewer standardized tests, 3 advocated doing no more tests than required by the State, 3 felt there was just too much testing, and 1 suggested changing the frequency of testing for students at/above grade level.

**17** comments on the survey indicated people thought a **slower pace** for acquisition and use of new **technology** should be considered.

The following **student programs** were listed as areas to possibly eliminate or reduce:

# responders	program
<b>11</b>	<b>After school programs</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Positive behavior support/EBS</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>PE requirements that exceed State mandates</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Summer School</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>IHS</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>ESL/ELL</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Field trips</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Middle School track</b>

Some **planning/evaluation tools** that are being implemented were suggested as places where the District could cut back. These included: Curriculum mapping (4), Tripod survey (4), Syllabus Maker (3). The **teacher mentoring program** was also mentioned by 4 responders as a place to cut back.

**Eight** people mentioned that **TOSA positions** could be reduced/eliminated.

**Eliminating school choice** was recommended by 7 people.

Reducing/eliminating **out-of-state travel/conferences** was how 7 people thought the district could save resources.

**Six** responders suggested that 4J not have **graduation requirements** that exceeded State mandates.

**Six** people suggested that reductions should be taken in “elitist” schools/classes where the students have other strong predictors of success.

**Three** people gave ideas for savings in the **kindergarten program**: eliminate lunch for ½ day kindergarteners; assign all students within transportation zone to morning classes (and eliminate afternoon busses); only offer all day programs (saves on transportation).

There were over thirty ideas mentioned once. They included events (“Mr.” pageant), school programs (Middle School drama), teacher workload/performance issues (give full-time teachers full time schedules), and 4J administrative decisions (gap funding).

**Question #23: Are there some other efficiency measures or cost savings ideas we should consider as we struggle to balance the district budget?**

There were 463 responses to this question. In addition, those responses to previous questions that contained efficiency suggestions were moved to this section. It is possible that a responder would put the same idea in more than one place and thus counted more than once. However, in the time available staff was not able to review individual surveys in order to eliminate duplicates. To be included in the summary below, the idea must have been mentioned twice or belong to a common set.

Many people focused on the ideas listed as examples in the survey question:

**243** respondents said there should be **energy conservation measures** (even mandates) in all buildings. Several people advocated site-specific solutions.

- 2 people thought 4J should install energy producing features (e.g., solar panels).

**199** people supported **investigating four-day weeks**. There were a lot of suggestions on how this would work – teacher hours, student hours, athletics program implications, etc. This idea got the most negative comments of any of the suggestions, with 20 people stating their opposition to the idea. The most commonly raised concern was the impact a 4-day week would have on families where both (or the only) parent worked.

- **23** people gave **school schedule alternatives** to the 4-day work week: 15 suggested a shorter school year; 4 suggested the year-round school model, 3 advocated extending Winter Break and/or Spring Break by another week and adding that week at the end of June (since energy costs would be lower), and one person suggested a shorter winter break.

**167** respondents agreed with **courier/mail service on alternate days** (or less).

**157** people said 4J should stop **mailing payroll warrants**. Many people suggested payroll warrants be delivered to each site. Others advocated e-mailing a secure version to each employee (e.g., a PDF).

**151** people liked the idea of using **surplus property** as a revenue source. Seventeen people expressed concerns that now was not the time to sell property. Civic Stadium was the property most often named, although people had different views as to what would happen to the property were it sold. Several people endorsed the idea of 4J developing surplus property as a way to provide an on-going revenue stream.

**136** respondents agreed 4J should **increase rental fees and usage charges**. Some people advocated a larger percentage of the rental fees should go directly to the site.

- **3** responders advocated advertising 4J facilities for rent as a way to increase revenue.

**112** respondents supported **on-line learning** and other technology-enhanced training opportunities.

- **5** respondents also suggested online courses for students in summer school, night school, IHS, and taking electives.

**106** respondents agreed with the idea to look at **Alt ed consolidation/reorganization** and drop out recovery.

**104** people said 4J should **adjust transportation distances**.

- Other ideas for transportation efficiencies included: using LTD versus school buses (2), consolidating bus routes so buses are more full (3), charging for bus transportation (3), not using private taxis (2), reducing the number of stops in each route (1), using biodiesel (1), and only bussing special needs children (1).

In addition to responding to the suggestions listed in the survey, the respondents offered other ideas for increase efficiency.

**32** people advocated ways to **use (waste) less paper**, highlighting e-mailing progress reports, grade slips, and newsletters to parents. Other ideas included making fewer copies and duplexing more, decreasing published materials from the central office (e.g., the calendar), automating student registration and fee payments, and automating special education reporting requirements. **Five** people suggested process improvements for printing and mailing, when it cannot be avoided.

**25** respondents had ideas on ways to **decrease payroll costs** district-wide. Nine suggested a wage freeze; 6 advocated an early retirement incentive; 5 suggested everyone take a small pay cut; 3 thought 4J should offer or require Leave Without Pay or furloughs; and 2 people thought the employee agreements should be reviewed.

**17** respondents had ideas of **staffing changes**, including reducing administrators/central staff (7), reducing IA's hours (5), especially on "teacher days", not having classified staff at sites 12 months/year (2), reorganize support staff (2), and increased use of Instruction Assistants (1) in lieu of certified teachers.

**15** people suggested **enhanced revenue** by increasing grant applications (6), selling surplus technology (3), fundraising/business sponsorships for supplies, sports programs, dances, or extra enrichment programs (4), promoting food catering to parents/personnel, asking voters to approve an additional levy (1), and assessing the UO a fee when they use 4J classes to test a new education program (1).

**16** respondents suggested ways for the district to **"go green"**, including recycling programs, waste reduction strategies, gardening programs, and brown lawns in the summer.

**14** people suggested consolidating/**centralized programs** for purchasing and ordering supplies (11), quality control of school programs (2), and hiring (1).

**8** people had ideas about efficiencies for **custodian service**, including 6 who advocated that students take responsibility for cleaning their classrooms. One person suggested deferring "cosmetic" maintenance. Another felt lead custodians should have more decision-making authority.

**7** people suggested increasing **parent volunteer** programs (5), e.g. garden/grounds upkeep (2).

**7** people advocated reassessing what is **contracted out versus provided in-house**, including food services, test administrators, dance/cheer coaches, consultants, and transportation.

**6** respondents suggested increasing **student fees**, include book rental fees at high schools (2), class fees (2), onsite student parking (1), and extracurricular activities (1).

Other ideas that were mentioned more than once were:

- Spend reserves (2)
- Consolidate the 4J and Bethel School Districts (2)
- Advocate legislature close ESD and devote those resources to 4J (2)
- Eliminate the mileage reimbursement for staff within district (2)
- Improve asset management of personnel's technology tools (2)
- Schools carry over surplus funds from one fiscal year to the next (2)