

School Board Listening Session

Comments/Suggestions/Questions

- What is the cost for the use of the Round-Up Grounds for football games and what does the District charge for RV parking on our property during Round-Up?
The current lease agreement with the Pendleton Round-Up Association is \$10,525 per year plus 50 percent of all gross gate receipts over \$12,115 from high school football games. (In the last several years, the District has only paid the lease amount; gate receipts have not exceeded \$12,115.) This lease agreement allows the District access to not only the "Round-Up Stadium," but also the "Indian Village Area" and "Fallon Field." Round-Up parking on School District property is turned over to local service clubs of Pendleton. They help park the vehicles and clean up at the end of the week.
- On average, what are the total dollars fundraised by athletic teams?
On average over the years, PHS athletic programs have raised approximately \$100,000-\$150,000 per year. Last year, the athletic programs raised approximately \$180,000.
- What is the current pay to play for Pendleton athletics?
*Pendleton High School pay to play - \$75.00 per sport
Sunridge Middle School pay to play - \$45.00 per sport
There was a discussion within the group about what other districts charge athletes and whether Pendleton should increase the pay to play fee.*
- When Buck Boosters makes a donation, what are those dollars used for? Are they paying for coaches?
The Booster Club is a huge supporter of the Pendleton athletic program. Its donations are used for supplies, equipment, and to help offset transportation and lodging expenses. Donations from the Booster Club are never used for personnel costs.
- What does a \$2.4 million reduction look like for the Pendleton School District?
The District addressed the enormous challenge that it has in making further reductions. It will be virtually impossible to retain the comprehensive program with the same staff-to-student ratio. The District is currently working with the community, staff and School Board to look at all District programs.
- What does the alternative school cost the District each year?
The current budget for the alternative school is \$630,000. The District reports alternative education students to the Oregon Department of Education, and then is billed by Umatilla-Morrow ESD – the agency that delivers the services to the students – for 95 percent of the revenue received from the state. UMESD also leases a wing of the old Hawthorne Elementary School for approximately \$5,000 per month. The District was asked by the community forum group to look at what it would cost to bring the alternative school into the District. Would the District see a savings by doing this? Would this be educationally beneficial to the students?

- All of the elementary schools used The Vert for their winter programs. Who paid for the rental of that building?
There was no cost to the District for the use of the facilities. Programs were moved to this location due to the limited space in our elementary buildings.
- Could the District eliminate computer classes and incorporate more technology into the everyday learning of all students?
The District addressed the current needs in technology, as well as an interest in taking the necessary steps to achieve our goals in this area. Currently, middle and high school students are required to take computer technology courses. Many students require significant instruction in order to successfully utilize all technology.
- Is the District addressing the loss of vocational opportunities for students as the budget is reduced?
The District understands that past budget cuts have resulted in fewer vocational opportunities for students. Additionally, the District is exploring all options, including partnerships with BMCC and local businesses.
- Can the District use TOSAs (teachers on special assignment) as principals?
TOSAs cannot evaluate staff, so in most buildings this would not be possible.
- Are employees going to be asked for salary/benefit concessions as the District has done in the past?
At this point the District has not had any discussions with employee groups regarding concessions. The District and Board are committed to providing a full academic year to students.
- Can the District shorten the school year for a second time?
Yes, the District has the ability to shorten the school year again. Anytime the District falls below the state-mandated instructional hours, we are in violation of state standards. Following the 2009-2010 school year when 13 days were eliminated, the District was required to provide a plan to the state on how it would restore instructional hours in the following year (which we did).
- Is the District looking at a four-day school week?
The District has formed a committee consisting of teachers, administrators and Board members to research the financial and academic benefits of a four-day week. A four-day school week lends very little in cost savings for a district. The District would see minimal savings for transportation due to the fact that we are reimbursed by the state for 70 percent of our transportation costs. Personnel costs are unaffected by the four-day week model due to the lengthened day. There is also very little research to prove that this model provides an educational benefit to students. All larger districts similar in size to Pendleton that tried a four-day school week went back to the traditional five-day week within a year.
- Is the alternative school a state mandate? Could the District shift its focus back to the core subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic and eliminate the alternative school and charter school?
Alternative education is not mandated by the state, so changes in this area are possible. With regard to the Nixyaawii Charter School, our current contract is effective through 2014. The Board is looking at all possibilities that would save the District money and be educationally advantageous to students.

- The District should lower the administrative overhead costs to save dollars.
The Board is working to align the District budget to obtain the best educational benefits for students District-wide. There are many administrative costs that the District cannot control, such as PERS (Public Employee Retirement System).
- One community member asked that the District maintain its focus on updating the curriculum and continue to purchase textbooks District-wide.
- Can the District move the budgeted dollars for supplies/equipment to salaries/benefits and apply for grants to purchase supplies/equipment District-wide?
There was a discussion around the lack of time and personnel to dedicate to grant writing. Should the District use current resources to pay for a grant writer? Everyone involved agreed that grants were a great source of untapped revenue for the District and would work to involve the community where possible to help with the procurement of those funds.
- How many students transfer out of the Pendleton School District each year? Could we limit those numbers? Does the District interview those students and families that wish to transfer?
134 students (63 elementary, 31 middle school, and 40 high school) have transferred out of the District during the 2010-2011 school year. We have 25 students that have transferred into the District. The Board has had many discussions around limiting or eliminating out of district transfers. By eliminating transfers the District could be faced with a situation where other districts become charter schools and the District loses the ability to have input on those transfers. All parents or guardians of any student requesting a new transfer out of the District are interviewed.
- Can the District shorten the school year for a second time? If so, could we offer missed curriculum to students online? A community member suggested that if we shortened the school year all non-educational activities be eliminated (pajama day, skating parties, reward parties/assemblies).
Anytime the District falls below the state-mandated instructional hours, we are in violation of state standards. The District has not pursued the idea of offering online services to all students as solution to save money.
- Could the middle school and high school be combined in order to reduce costs?
There was a discussion around the capacity of the high school and whether it would be academically advantageous to the students. There were concerns raised regarding combining 12+ year old students with 18 year old students when there are over 1,400 students in the building. The Board and District did not feel this would be academically beneficial to students.
- Could the District layoff (Reduction In Force) employees on any basis other than seniority?
The ability of the District to layoff staff based on performance was discussed by the group. Certified and classified collective bargaining agreements outline a process that must be followed. Layoff (RIF) language varies as per the contract.
- Does the District have the ability to fire all employees and rehire employees who would cost the District less?
The Board stated that other districts have tried this approach and found it to be fatal. This type of approach would impact employee morale and be a deterrent to

future employees or individuals wishing to move to this area. A community member expressed their concern that eliminating staff with experience and education would have a negative impact on the education of our students.

- Has the District established a student-to-teacher ratio?
The District has specified class size targets that we attempt to maintain. However, due to budget constraints these targets are not always met.
- Has the District explored the possibility of using the community to provide “the arts” to students?
The District is exploring all options and no decisions have been made regarding the elimination of programs in the District.
- A community member expressed concern with the growth boundary and a lack of housing in Pendleton which forces families to live outside the area.
- Are there teachers in the District who are nearing retirement, and could the District benefit from this?
Yes there are teachers in the District who are retiring. When possible, the District will absorb those positions.
- How does the staff feel about this budget shortfall?
Jon Peterson and Michelle Jones will meet with staff to discuss District options for the budget shortfall after all information from the community has been gathered and compiled.
- Has the District looked at coaching salaries and compared them to other districts nearby?
During the negotiation process, all salaries and benefits are compared with other districts across the state.
- Could the District close another elementary building?
Currently, there are several unused classrooms at the middle school and high school. All classrooms at the elementary level are being utilized.
- One community member suggested that the District eliminate substitutes and educational assistants and replace them with volunteers from the community.
- Could employee benefits (health insurance and/or PERS) be reduced?
PERS rates are mandated by the state. Health insurance premiums are mandated through the Oregon Educator’s Benefit Board. The District has set a cap on the employer contribution for insurance as a way to control health insurance premium increases. Premiums above the cap are paid by the employees.
- The Board was asked to build the District’s budget based on core subjects being a top priority.
The Board addressed prior year budget processes and how the Board utilizes graduation requirements to prioritize need.
- A community member suggested that we not eliminate any more staff and explore through the community alternative funding options.
- Could the District limit the number of students on IEPs (Individual Education Plans) to the 11 percent cap that is funded by the state?
The District explained the process regarding the identification of students on IEPs, as well as the state and federal special education requirements that the District must follow. (For example, maintenance of effort – this means that the District must spend at least \$1 more in each consecutive year.)

- Could the District consolidate services at the elementary level?
When possible, services across the District are consolidated. The District will continue to explore all possibilities.
- Could the District consolidate schools in order to reduce transportation costs?
The Board addressed the issue of space with our current elementary school configuration and the cost to return Hawthorne to a functioning elementary building. (This would cost the District approximately \$700,000 to \$800,000.)
- What would it save to eliminate sports at the middle school level? Could we develop an alternative method to support all athletics for the District? Could high school sports be turned over to the local booster club?
The District currently budgets \$76,215 for middle school athletics. A community member suggested that athletes work for local businesses and those businesses then donate to the District athletic program.
- One community member suggested that we maintain a focus towards a high-quality high school, which is essential to our community.
- What are some District programs that could be cut?
Any program that does not directly relate to the graduation requirements set by the state.
- What does funding look like beyond 2011–2012?
The District addressed the uncertainty of state school funding, which is why it is so critical to be looking at sustainable reductions.
- Could the District make reductions to the food service program?
The District food service program is not accounted for in the General Fund and is a self-sustaining program.
- Could the District become a charter school in order to limit state/federal mandates and reduce costs?
At this point, it is not an option for a district the size of ours to become a charter district. We currently have one school, Nixyaawii, which is a charter school.
- There was a suggestion from the community that the District look at its current professional development practices and see if there is a way to reduce costs by providing training in-house with current staff.
- What is the bargaining status of the District's employee groups?
The certified (teachers) and administrative employee groups are in year one of a three-year contract. The classified employees are negotiating a new three-year contract this spring.
- It was suggested by a community member that the District should not layoff any staff members, eliminate programs, cut days or implement a four-day school week. The community member suggested that each employee instead reduce their salaries by 15-20 percent.
- What is the average student:teacher ratio?
*1:26 - Elementary
1:30 - Middle School
1:28 - High School*
- Does the District still have paid educational assistants?

Yes, the District still employs educational assistants. This has been greatly reduced by prior year budget reductions, which is difficult due to the fact that there is a higher population of students who need assistance.

- Is the District seeing any enrollment growth at any level?
The District is seeing a small bubble at the middle school level and in several grades at the elementary level. Even with these small bubbles, the District continues to see a decline in overall enrollment. The Board addressed the need to bring more businesses and families to Pendleton, and that our community is challenged for housing.
- Is there any movement at the state level to consolidate small rural school districts?
There are currently no bills proposed for this legislative session that address school district consolidation.
- Larry Glaze, Superintendent of the La Grande School District, shared with the community his district's financial situation and the shared challenges that Pendleton and La Grande face.
- How much would the District save by implementing a cost of living freeze? (step increases excluded)
Approximately \$230,000.
- Has the District looked into partnering with BMCC?
The District is currently working with BMCC to provide some college credit courses on the PHS campus.
- It was suggested by one community member that those employed need to give a little so that everyone can stay employed.
- Has anyone approached the city council to see if there is a revenue stream through the city that the District could use to pay for athletics or other District programs?
There was a discussion regarding the financial shortfall throughout the community. The City is currently facing a shortfall of approximately \$600,000 and would not have any additional revenue that could be used to supplement the District's revenue. Pete Wells, city attorney, suggested that the City may have the capacity to go to voters for a local option tax, which could be used for recreational activities.
- Are there creative ways that local businesses and/or non-profit organizations could be assisting in the classroom or with the purchase of supplies/equipment?
The District is open to any assistance that local businesses/organizations may be able to provide.
- What is the full time equivalent (FTE) of athletic coaches?
Approximately 3.75 FTE teaching positions is equal to the total paid athletic coaches for middle and high school sports.
- Could local businesses sponsor individual athletes in order to fund the athletic program?
The District is open to any alternative method that supports District programs
- Has the District looked into transportation efficiencies?
The District works closely with Mid-Columbia Bus Company, which provides District transportation, to run the most cost-effective and efficient routes to each building in the District.
- Is it true that the District is cutting the district agriculture program at the high school?

The elimination of the District agriculture program is a rumor; no decisions have been made regarding the elimination of any District programs.

- Can the District eliminate programs and then pay community members stipends to teach? Do those who teach non-core subjects have to be licensed teachers?
The District is required to have licensed staff delivering instruction and must meet highly qualified requirements of NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).
- It was suggested that all athletic coaches volunteer their time to the District.
- Who at the state level should community members talk to?
The Board urged the community to contact their local legislators, Senator Dave Nelson and Representative Bob Jenson, to express their concerns over school funding. (Legislative talking points are posted on the District Web site.) On the 2nd and 4th Tuesday, from February through June, beginning at 7 a.m., Senator Nelson and Representative Jenson will host open forums at BMCC in Pioneer Hall.
- One community member suggested that budget reductions should begin with administrative salary concessions.
- Can the District reduce the number of administrators and support staff?
The District is constantly addressing staffing at all levels.
- It was suggested that the District downsize secretarial staff at the high school and District office.
- Can the District charge students for a portion of their transportation costs to and from school? (Implement a ticket system to offset costs.)
The District is reimbursed by the state for 70 percent of all reimbursable transportation. We cannot charge students for this service.
- If the District implements cut days, the community asked that the District look at in-service days, conference days or paid holidays instead of student contact days.
- It was suggested that the District eliminate funding for the Outdoor School Program.
- Would spending money to update our school buildings to be more energy efficient save the District money?
Having more energy-efficient schools is an issue the District is currently working on. The District just recently applied for and received a federal stimulus grant to improve efficiencies at Lincoln Elementary School. While these upgrades produce cost savings to the District, it may take years to begin realizing those savings.
- Could bus transportation to and from school for those within walking distance be reduced or eliminated?
According to ORS 327.043, a school district is required to provide transportation for elementary students who reside more than 1 mile from school and for secondary students who reside more than 1.5 miles from school.