

Big Brother has financial stake in public school systems

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 14 April 2011 14:07 -

DIST. 20 WILL SEE STATE AID LOSS

Superintendent Mike Teahon had it pegged just about right last August. While crafting the budget for Gothenburg Public Schools, he predicted the district would lose about \$600,000 in state aid for 2011-12 when state senators met to trim the state budget.

Preliminary figures, under a bill sponsored by education committee chair Sen. Greg Adams, show the district will lose \$461,236.

During this year and last, the district received \$3,261,642. Under the bill, \$2,800,396 would be provided in 2011-12.

To help deal with a \$142 million shortfall, LE 20 would give school districts \$128 million less in state aid by providing \$62 million in aid in 2012 and \$66 million in 2013.

However the bill could change dramatically before final passage, Teahon said.

Nonetheless, Teahon said District 20 will survive without laying off teachers or cutting programs.

Still, the board will have some budget-tightening decisions to make over the next several months regardless of what happens with the bill.

Under the proposed plan, which is still under debate, Cozad would lose \$75,127 and Lexington would receive \$10,184 less from this year's allocation.

Over the last two years, Teahon noted Nebraska has used federal stimulus money to help bolster state aid to schools.

After 2011-12, that stimulus money ends.

The federal and state government give big bucks to public school districts.

During 2009-10, about \$1.1 million in federal funds was funneled into District 20 through various sources to pay for programs to improve teacher quality and preschool offerings and help disadvantaged youth.

State funding—at \$3.6 million—was in state aid, homestead exemption funds, property tax credits and other apportionments.

Stimulus funding, figured at about \$900,000 over three years for the district, will be gone after 2011-12.

In return, districts like Gothenburg Public Schools must provide certain programs, report student progress and more.

When it comes to the school's philosophy, officials want to retain as much local control as possible, according to superintendent Mike Teahon.

Teahon told a group of Stakeholders on April 6 that the district decides how government mandates fit into the school's comprehensive plan.

THREE-YEAR HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION COSTS

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Special education	\$517,863	\$395,437	\$789,482
IDEA enrollment/poverty	\$170,252	\$206,586	\$46,965
ARRA	none	\$104,289	\$195,668
Total	\$688,115	\$706,412	\$992,145

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“We plan what we do and how it fits into our philosophy of what’s best for kids,” Teahon said. “We are different in that way from a lot of schools.”

In the last of three meetings of Stakeholders for the year, school officials discussed “The Impact of Federal and State Regulations on Gothenburg Public Schools.”

Teahon said at least 250 policies, created by the school board, regulate what the district does.

On the state level, 93 rules and regulations govern public schools that include budgeting and finance, accreditation, teacher certification, special education and transportation.

Federal regulations include:

the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), that emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability.

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