

DeForest Area School District, 2011-12 Budget Development

Frequently Asked Questions

Please note that all comments will be reviewed by the board of education and district staff. As common themes emerge, questions and answers will be added to this “FAQ” document.

Q: How will the District go about making budget decisions?

A: Staff are developing a budget that will address the reduced revenue for 2011-12 and 2012-13. The board of education is updated on a regular basis and will provide direction to administrators and staff for implementation. Budget information and updates will be posted on the [DASD website](#) and [DASD News Blog](#), making it available to internal and external stakeholders of the District. There will be opportunities throughout June for people to offer their thoughts and ideas, as well as share additional considerations and implications the District should be aware of in the implementation of budget reduction/revenue generating areas. Final budget decisions and the impact of these decisions may not be finalized until later this summer as it is yet unknown what the legislature will ultimately allocate for public school funding. The final 2011-12 revenue limit established in the state budget, which determines the local budget bottom line, will affect and somewhat determine local decisions.

Q: Will teachers pay more for their share of the Wisconsin Retirement System?

A: The Governor’s Budget Repair Bill, which is still being held up in court proceedings, calls for all certified teachers, support staff and administrators to contribute the employee share (5.8% of a person’s gross salary) to the Wisconsin Retirement System. Previously, the district contributed both the employee and employer share. This measure was originally proposed to go into place on July 1, 2011, but is pending resolution in the court system or may be subject to future legislative action which could change the date of implementation.

Q: Will we need to lay off staff?

A: The board has directed staff to work toward preparing a budget for the 2011-12 school year that will not require any layoffs among existing employees. Given the reality of a \$1.7 million dollar reduction in revenue, it would be impossible to balance the budget without seeking ways to reduce the number of employees in the system. However, rather than layoffs, the District will leave some vacancies created by retirement or resignation unfilled. In addition, declining student enrollment provides the district the option of redistributing current employees. In the end, no one will be laid off for the 2011-12 school year. It is too early to know if the board will be able to sustain the no-layoff priority after next year.

Q: Will class sizes go up?

A: No. The district-wide elementary, middle and high school class sizes are not anticipated to go up. At the middle and high school, staffing is established using a general class size of 25 per section. Actual size varies depending on student interest and class registration. At elementary, our overall class size is projected to be 21.9. This is consistent with the class size range we have been able to maintain since 1994. The range in elementary will be 19 to a few classes of 26 in upper elementary classes at both Windsor and Yahara, our largest elementary schools. The District has had 26 students in elementary sections previously with good achievement success.

Q: Will there be combined grades at the elementary school?

A: DeForest Area School District, along with most districts, has had split-grade elementary classrooms over the years because of uneven numbers of students within a grade level and school. For 2011-12, DASD will be shifting the focus of this type of arrangement to a more instructionally sound model called multi-age. Research suggests that multi-age classrooms are beneficial to students, as they help them develop:

- healthy self-esteem
- positive self-concepts
- less anti-social behavior
- better attitudes toward school

Students will also have the opportunity to ‘loop’ with a teacher (have the same teacher for two years in a row) and to develop leadership skills during the second year as they help acclimate the new, younger students.

This model uses the same academic standards as other classrooms. The curriculum is designed to closely match instruction with students’ readiness levels. While this model has been around for well over a hundred years and has its roots in multi-aged one room schoolhouses from the 1800s and early 1900s, we will also be taking advantage of recent developments in technology to make it easier to manage this type of personalized learning environment.

Features of modern multi-age classrooms include:

- designing activities that move students through the curriculum at their own rate
- use of cooperative learning
- flexible grouping
- integrated, thematic units of study

Parent meetings will be offered in June to explain the concept in more detail.

Q: Will programs be cut?

A: Programs will not be cut solely due to budget reductions. Some program delivery will be modified if certain functions can be carried out with fewer people than before. For example, if the District leaves a guidance counselor position unfilled, the system will reallocate the existing nine counselors to cover the school buildings and deliver services as closely as possible to previous levels. German language will be phased out at the middle school by the end of 2011-12. This is primarily due to a significant lack of student interest in the language. Presently, the District has to place students in the course involuntarily. Students would still be able to pursue German language at the high school. In a similar way, French language will be phased out at the High School at the end of 2011-12. This again is due to a significant decline in student interest in the courses.

Q: Will Morrisonville Elementary School be closed?

A: No, not for 2011-12. The Board has decided to engage in an in-depth study of options that may help Morrisonville operate more efficiently in the future. The study will include an analysis of ideas such as creating a charter school, changing the attendance boundary for the school to include more students, moving Morrisonville students elsewhere to create a school-within-a-school concept; mothballing, or closing the school. This approach is based partly on the fact that the school provides four full-sized classrooms for the District and we are poised to grow at the elementary level where we have limited additional classroom space available. Teachers, administrators and parents will be involved in the study process.

Q: Have staff recently received increases in compensation? Will they get raises next year?

A: Yes, all employees received increased compensation in the 2010-11 school year within the budget. Teachers and non-represented employees, including administrators, will be frozen at their current pay rate for 2011-2012.

The Board of Education has established guiding principles that shape the District’s practices for employee compensation.

- External market comparability (external equity, competitiveness)
- Internal coherence and parity (fairness, internal equity)
- Overall value added to the system (e.g. performance; qualifications)

Considering those principles and the resources available to the District, the Board has determined a bench mark compensation rate to be at the average wage level within our employment market. The market is set by Dane County. The Board has worked to achieve this benchmark goal within the operating budget for several years. Both support staff and instructional staff are currently compensated at a level consistent with the market average wage level. The District has strived to maintain that level despite a number of years in an environment of declining revenues. It took several years to be able to manage the operating budget sufficiently to make this adjustment for the District administrative and other non-represented employees. Recently these employees were the last group to be adjusted to an average wage level. Adjustments were established in June 2010 for the 2010-11 school year and ranged from slight to significant depending upon how far out of alignment the current salary was with the average wage level in the market. All compensation increases were approved after a change in health insurance brought about a savings to the District of \$280,000. In response to the Governor's budget proposal, which was submitted in February 2011, the Board and teachers union agreed on a salary freeze for the 2011-12 school year. The school board also determined that administrator and other non-represented staff pay will be frozen for the 2011-12 school year.

Q: Have retirements helped the district with the budget issue?

A: Yes. Because the Board sought to avoid layoffs of existing employees, the ability to leave some positions vacant supported the District's efforts to reduce spending by \$1.7 million over the next two years. The district's budget is largely built around employee compensation. Therefore, it would be impossible to operate the district with \$1.7 million less in revenue unless we employed fewer people. Retirement combined with natural attrition gave the District an improved opportunity to assess which positions can be left vacant without significant loss in efficiency and effectiveness for students.

Q: Why is the District starting a 4K program when budgets are so tight?

Over the last several years, incoming kindergarten students to our District have exhibited significantly increasing needs in school readiness. In addition, over the last three years, new students entering our schools have been at the federal government's poverty level of income in 50% of the cases. This statistic correlates with children experiencing learning challenges when they enter school. Considerable research has demonstrated that early intervention with children has huge benefits for future learning and achievement. 4K programming will be a step toward addressing that early learning.

In addition, 4K programming will result in the District increasing overall enrollment which helps to determine the annual revenue limit for the District and the amount of state aid to schools. The current state funding process would mean the 4K program would begin to help the District's revenue and aid due to our increased enrollment numbers. The revenue generated from the enrollment in 4K will offset all costs of the program by the third year. In addition, the District has recently been notified that we will receive approximately \$90,000 in 2012-13 to offset start-up costs.

(added 6-9-11)

Q: Where can I find information about the DASD budget?

Current year budget information can be found on the DASD website: (www.deforestschoools.org) > About our District (www.deforest.k12.wi.us/aboutourdistrct.html). Budget information for prior years is available on the Business & Auxiliary Services web page at www.deforest.k12.wi.us/businessauxiliaryserviceshome.html.

A projected budget for 2011-12 will not be developed until mid-July, pending additional information from the state regarding public school aid for 2011-12.

(added 6-9-11)

Q: What is policy governance?

Information about policy governance is available on the DASD website:

www.deforest.k12.wi.us/policygovernance or visit www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm.