

(2-27-19 District Administrator's Corner article)

As we approach an April 2 operational referendum, I have been asked about how the River Valley School District is working to contain the costs associated with educating our students. Personnel costs account for approximately 80% of school district budgets across the State of Wisconsin. In the River Valley School District, approximately 79% of our expenditures are related to staffing our schools, being that we are an organization that provides a service—teaching and learning.

As we have observed declines in enrollment over the last 15 years, the River Valley School District made the fiscal and educational decision to close two elementary buildings at the end of the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years, respectively. This allowed us to decrease our operational (personnel) and facilities costs and provide the students we serve with the opportunity to be educated together while maintaining relatively small class sizes. The personnel cost savings associated with closing two elementary buildings allowed us to maintain our educational offerings and delay the need to go to operational referendum, which was projected in 2010 to be necessary by 2015.

At the end of the past two school years, we made a series of staff reductions. At the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year, we reduced five regular education elementary teaching positions, one special education teaching position, one secretarial position, two instructional assistant positions, one food service position, and a half-time administrative position. Adding these numbers up, we eliminated 10.5 positions at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

At the end of the 2017-2018 school year, we reduced three regular education elementary teaching positions, four instructional assistant positions, one secretarial position, and one food service position. This equates to another nine positions across our school district. Therefore, over the last two school years, we have reduced 19.5 positions within the River Valley School District and made corresponding changes that provide not only financial savings but also maintain instructional offerings to the students we serve.

It should be noted that we have added a part time instructional assistant position to serve students with significant special education needs during the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, we have reduced a total of 19 positions over the last three school years.

Even with these cost (personnel) reductions, we continue to maintain class sizes of approximately 15 students at the River Valley Early Learning Center (serving students in 4K and 5K) and an approximate average class sizes of 22 at River Valley Elementary School (serving students in 1st through 4th grade). We have made decisions in order to be fiscally and educationally responsible and continue to operate within our budget projections.

Once again, this referendum is for operational costs to allow the River Valley School District to continue to provide: class sizes that support student learning; strong academic programming; a wide array of elective programming; and exceptional co-curricular activities, including the arts and athletics. It is not about building new schools. It is about maintaining the opportunities we provide to our students. I encourage individuals to visit the River Valley School District website referendum page at www.bit.ly/RVSDReferendum for more information about the upcoming referendum.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Wermuth, District Administrator
River Valley School District