



STATE EDUCATION CUTS RESULT IN MORE THAN A FLESH WOUND FOR SALEM SCHOOLS

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The Salem school division is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year with a February gala, too bad someone forgot to tell Governor Tim Kaine that drastic budget cuts weren't supposed to be part of the celebration.

Kaine's not so appetizing budget reductions, that are geared to help offset a \$2.9 billion dollar shortfall in the Commonwealth, would cost Salem's schools \$1.8 million in lower State revenue in the 2009-2010 school year if approved by the General Assembly

"A reduction of this magnitude cannot be achieved without an impact on children," says Salem School Superintendent Alan Seibert. "My only solace is that we have terrific people who can help minimize the impact."

Like most school divisions, the bulk of Salem's annual budget money goes to cover salaries and benefits for its valued employees. The priority in the coming months will be to take care of these individuals and their positions since these teachers and administrators are the very people who will help insulate Salem's students from the negative effects of the reductions.

"Every effort will be made to close the budget gap through attrition and non-personnel budget reductions," says Seibert. "But considering that it will likely require two or more years to reduce enough positions through attrition, we will need to make especially painful cuts in other areas to protect the positions of those who currently serve our students."

To put the magnitude of these cuts for the 2010 fiscal year in the proper perspective consider that Salem's state funding for next year will be comparable to the 2006-2007 school year, in effect setting the entire division back three years in terms of state dollars.

"These cuts are so severe that there's no way they can be absorbed without reducing personnel costs to some degree in the final analysis," says Michael Crew, Salem School's Director of Business Services. "The magnitude will be felt in every school system in the Commonwealth whether the system is a high performing system like Salem or not. Difficult decisions will have to be made to weather this year's budget preparation."

Despite recent media reports, support staff members are not being singled out and placed in the crosshairs unfairly. In Salem, these individuals remain essential and certainly not extra.

“We know that our high standards of teaching and learning require their support,” says Seibert. “We know that every task and responsibility not fulfilled by one person would only shift the burden to everyone else.”

Salem would lose more than a million dollars from the State in the area of Basic Aid, the largest individual State revenue line item for school divisions. This money is used for basic instructional positions plus other personnel and support costs. The Governor’s proposed budget cuts Basic Aid in Salem by nearly 10%.

“It is especially frustrating that the considerable economic downturn and the resulting impact on our school division are largely beyond our control, but how we choose to respond is within our control,” says Seibert. “The budget choices required will be difficult and will require creativity in our planning and resolve in our decision-making.”

The Salem School Board formally adopted Legislative Positions in November 2008 that specifically oppose permanent reductions like those proposed by Gov. Kaine.

“We understand that the Commonwealth is in a period of economic uncertainty, but we will encourage the General Assembly to consider alternatives, so that when the economy does recover Virginia’s children will not continue to bear the burden,” says Seibert.

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