

Snohomish School District GEARING UP FOR BUDGET CUTS

Superintendent's assistant says cuts will come last in classroom

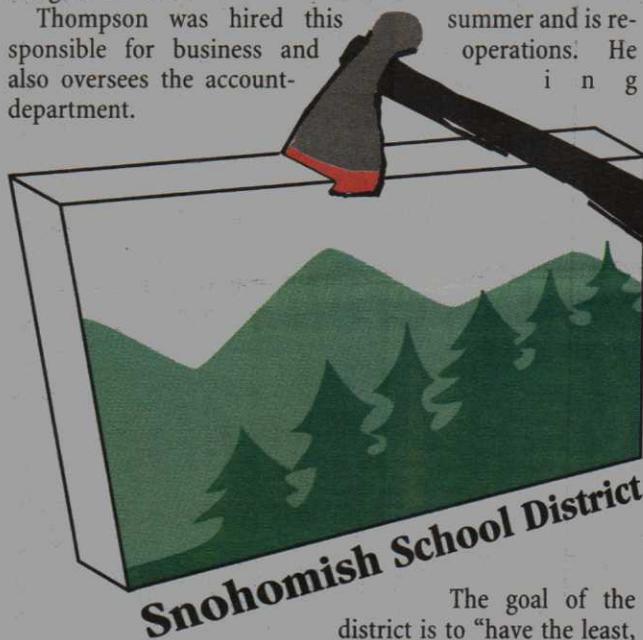
By Jana Alexander

Snohomish School District is "looking at everything" in its budget after last week's finding that Snohomish Schools' deficit for this year is \$1.5 million.

Cuts to the budget were discussed Dec. 2 and will be revisited Dec. 9, at a public hearing during the school board's regular session.

Jack Thompson, Assistant to the Superintendent for Business and Operations at Snohomish School District, presented the proposed cuts, in a report entitled "Proposed Budget Reductions Conceptual Outline" Dec. 2. The report gave a general overview of measures the district has taken to find areas in the budget to cut. He also discussed causes of the budget shortfall.

Thompson was hired this summer and is responsible for business and operations. He also oversees the accounting department.



The goal of the district is to "have the least, if any, impact on teaching and learning. ...We're really trying to identify what are essential needs and what are extras," said Betty Robertson, Assistant to the Superintendent, who is in charge of human relations.

Thompson presented a list of sub-budgets within the overall district budget that already has been scrutinized. Sub-budgets included Superintendent's office; school board; assessment, instruction and curriculum; human resources; public relations; operations and special services.

Board member Kathryn Deierling said no lay offs are decided upon at this time, and that talk of lay offs is at this point only a rumor.

But Thompson did say the district will "look at everything."

The budget must be trimmed by one-third by Dec. 31. Consequences of not turning over a revised budget to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction by Dec. 31 could result in a withholding of state funding, Thompson said.

"We're not going to go there," Thompson said.

Causes of the budget shortfall identified in Thompson's presentation were chronic lower enrollment than projected, which resulted in a loss of revenue; program enhancements; enriched staffing; and salary increases beyond state flow.

The district spent more than it received in state monies for certificated and classified staffing, transportation, extracurricular and co-curricular support, and other areas of the budget. But, Thompson said, all school districts spend more than the state provides for education. He said the legislature is currently debating whether the state money provided is enough to cover educational expenses.

Other causes of the deficit include lack of adequate internal spending controls; impact of the double levy failure, and resulting insufficient budget correction for loss of revenue; use of cash reserve to cover expenses; and payment of unexpected expenses, Thompson's report said.

The cash reserve, technically referred to as a fund balance, is the savings account every school district uses to cover unexpected expenses or costs incurred when there is a lack of funding. In Thompson's report, the district was encouraged to gradually rebuild that reserve. That would mean adding \$250,000 to the fund balance this year.

"We haven't said 'no' and lived within our means," Thompson said. "We have to rebuild our cash reserve."

He said in his position at the Snohomish School District, he has earned the nickname of "Dr. No."

On Nov. 24, the board set parameters for Thompson describing what should be trimmed and what should be left alone. Those parameters prioritized classroom instruction as first in importance; transportation should remain safe, but plans are to reduce extra stops and trips; statutory and legal requirements will have to be met; co-curricular and extra-curricular programs will remain as unchanged as possible, but some options in those programs will be reduced.

Thompson spoke in support of extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

"Kids need to have those opportunities. That's why some of them stay in school," Thompson said.

Other plans made by the board to deal with the financial crisis are to apply to state for any waivers that may benefit the district financially; reduce utility costs; and meet with employee groups to explore voluntary reductions.

Thompson said he didn't favor cutting into preventative maintenance because that could jeopardize taxpayer investment in facilities.

Deierling and Thompson both expressed that the district should listen to the public when considering cuts.

"We really need to turn up the volume control" on public input, Deierling said.