

Ashland School District

The Negative Impact of a 9.9 billion State School Fund

As many know, school districts around the state have been struggling to regain ground lost during the pandemic. In addition, some school districts are also struggling to build back from further challenges. The Ashland School District is one of those. In 2018-19, Oregon's Open Enrollment law ended, and our small rural district entered a period of declining enrollment. The decline increased sharply with the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and was further exacerbated by the Almeda fire that affected 50 of our families and 12 of our staff that lost homes. While the greatest devastation impacted our neighboring district, Phoenix-Talent, we all felt the impact on our communities, our families, our available housing, and our workforce.

The Ashland School District has experienced a higher decrease in enrollment than the rest of the Oregon school districts and there is little hope for reaching pre-pandemic levels anytime soon. With the loss of Open Enrollment and the loss of affordable housing in the area, a recent demographic report shows us continuing to decline over the next five year period.

The district is a small rural one, situated in a college and tourist community, but the reality is that nearly half of our students qualify for free and reduced lunches. We simply cannot afford to absorb more cuts when more assistance is needed.

A reduction in the school fund from 10.3 billion to 9.9 billion would be another devastating blow for small rural districts like Ashland School District.

- From 2020 – 2022, ESSER provided significant support for student safety and mental health needs and backfilled the general fund deficit caused by a rapid decline in enrollment from a pre-pandemic level of roughly 2850 to the current level of 2530. We will exhaust our ESSER dollars during the current fiscal year.
- **A \$9.9 Billion SSF could mean a decrease to the district's fund balance of \$2.07 million (5.375% of Total Revenue) at the end of the 2023-2025 biennium, and possibly a greater decrease depending on the need to subsidize our nutrition services program and the rate of attrition of ESSER funded staff in the current year.** The School Board policy establishes an 8% fund balance to ensure the district's continuity and the ability to meet the district's obligations.

Districts like ours are continually dealing with unfunded mandates that require us to do more with less and like all professionals dedicated to education, we often do, but this proposed cut is so deep that we simply will not be able to provide the services at the level our children need and deserve. Budgets reflect values. We must value the wellbeing of our students so that they have an opportunity to be productive members of our communities.

Please reconsider passing a budget that would have such a harmful impact to districts, particularly small rural districts like the Ashland School District and prioritize the lives of our students.