

WITH POLL: Chelsea schools to close Pierce Lake Elementary, cut teachers to reduce deficit

By ERICA HOBBS (/USERS/PROFILE/?UID=153)

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Facing a \$2.8 million budget deficit, the Chelsea Board of Education (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/district/district.php?sectionid=1>) is making sweeping cuts for the 2010-11 school year to balance the budget.

Those cuts include closing Pierce Lake Elementary School, (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=5>) cutting 10 teaching positions, instituting pay to participate and using fund equity.

Superintendent **David Killips** said Pierce Lake school, which currently houses grades three and four, has the fewest number of classrooms, making it easier for the larger schools to take them on.

Chelsea School District Deficit Reduction Plan

With the closing, South Meadows School (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=6>) will hold grades three through five and Beach Middle School (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=2>) will hold grades six through eight. South Meadows currently holds grades five and six, while Beach contains grades seven and eight. The closing is expected to save the district \$400,000.

"Even though it's one of our newest elementaries, the utilities run almost twice as much there compared to the other buildings," Killips said. "We have better technology and better savings in older buildings because we've had upgrades take place."

The board's deficit reduction plan would also cut about 10 full-time teachers, a move that is expected to raise class sizes and save the district \$550,000. Killips said the increase would be slight, raising most rooms by only a couple students and keeping student numbers in the mid-to-upper 20s per classroom.

"They're slightly larger class sizes, but we think we're still going to have very manageable class sizes," he said.

The reduction plan also introduces pay-to-participate, which would charge students a fee to participate in extra-curricular activities. Killips said a policy committee is working on the details of the plan, which could either impose one flat rate to participate in any activity or charge each program individually. Killips said he didn't yet have an estimate on how much students would be expected to pay, but said the number would be "reasonable."

Other changes include imposing wage and insurance concessions on non-unionized employees and negotiating with the teachers union and transportation union for possible savings.

"A good portion of (savings) is working toward wage and insurance concessions," Killips said. "We are going to need the employees help to get through this."

Chelsea parents and teachers had mixed reactions to the cuts.

Regina Maynard, vice president of the North Creek Parent Teacher Organization (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=4>) (<http://chelsea.k12.mi.us/education/club/clubinfo.php?sectiondetailid=7147&PHPSESSID=aab5da1a8a3558efa4e92a9>), has a child at North Creek Elementary School and another at South Meadows School. She said she's concerned closing Pierce Lake will make the other schools too crowded.

"The classrooms are already so tiny with the students in (South Meadows) now, I don't see how

they can make room to make bigger classes,” she said.

Elise Merkel, who teaches special education at Pierce Lake, said she’s concerned the students won’t get enough attention with larger class sizes.

“When it comes to early elementary, a few more kids in a class room makes a huge difference,” she said. “It makes a huge difference in the teaching environment and how much time a teacher can spend with the kids.”

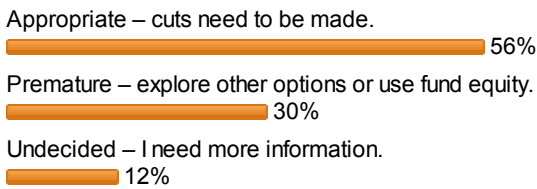
Merkel said she thinks the cuts are premature, and the district should have used its fund equity to balance its budget. Though Killips said the reductions are based off public input, both Merkel and Maynard said budget meetings weren’t well-publicized, and they felt decisions were made without the opinions of parents and teachers.

“I haven’t had the feeling that they really wanted us to be a part of it,” Maynard said. “I think there’s different options out there that could be explored, but I don’t feel like they have been.”

Dana Emmert, who has four children in the district’s pre-school and elementary schools, said she supports the district’s decisions.

“I trust that the school board has, is and will make decisions with our children’s best interest as the top goal,” she said. “Pierce’s closing will not have a significant impact on our children, in my opinion, because we have such amazing teachers and staff that will continue to be amazing no matter what building they are in.”

Do you think the Chelsea school district’s cuts are appropriate or premature?
(<http://www.twiigs.com/poll/News/50488>)



Closed
Total Votes: 196

(<http://www.twiigs.com/>)

Erica Hobbs is a reporter for AnnArbor.com. Reach her at 734-623-2537 or via e-mail at ericahobbs@annarbor.com (<mailto:ericahobbs@annarbor.com>).

Tags: Chelsea (/tag/Chelsea/), Chelsea school district (/tag/Chelsea school district/), school funding (/tag/school funding/),

- **Close Pierce Lake:** \$400,000
- **Increase class size:** \$550,000
- **Pay to participate:** \$100,000
- **Relocate WSEC programs:** \$40,000
- **Transportation adjustments:** \$130,000
- **Contract administration:** \$40,000
- **Wage/insurance concessions:** \$750,000
- **Music adjustment:** \$30,000
- **Tech. assistant - Contracted:** \$70,000
- **Maintenance position reduction:** \$70,000
- **Decrease in general fund to athletics:** \$60,000
- **Modify specials :** \$70,000
- **Use of fund equity:** \$505,000
- **TOTAL DEFICIT:** \$2,815,000



Superintendent
David Killips

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