

C.R. high schools cut \$60,000 in salaries

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington have been forced to cut \$20,000 apiece for salaries in extracurricular activities for the 2014-2015 school year, as mandated by the Cedar Rapids Community School District.

Each of the six middle schools in Cedar Rapids have been told to cut \$10,000 in salaries for the coming year, making for a total reduction of \$120,000 in what are called "Schedule C" contracts at the middle school and high school levels.

No programs have been cut at the high schools, but some salaries have been reduced and fewer people will be involved as coaches and instructors for the new school year.

Mary Ellen Maske, the deputy superintendent for the school district, said the total budget for Schedule C contracts at the high school level during the 2013-14 school year was approximately \$1.5 million or roughly \$500,000 per school. A cut of \$20,000 per school represents a reduction of approximately 4 percent at each school.

"Nobody likes budget reductions," said Maske. "It was entered into with a great deal of thought and integrity from our athletic directors and they did what they thought was best for the students at their school.

"We hope it doesn't have a large impact," she said. "We were pleased to let them decide."

Maske said approximately \$6 million was cut from the total district budget of \$263.4 million for the 2014-15 school year. She said the school district has been forced to cut the budget for the last five years, due to a variety of factors.

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Chris Deam, the athletic director at Jefferson, said he was able to trim \$20,000 from his budget without losing any coaches or instructors. He said some employees have voluntarily agreed to work for less money and others have agreed to a shared contract, where a salary is split among two people.

"We tried to have as little impact as possible," said Deam. "It was an attempt to keep people around instead of cutting a person and not having that person around kids.

"I talked to a handful of coaches and they'd rather have half a contract rather than not be on it at all. I spread it out amongst a whole lot of different activities."

The athletic directors at Jefferson, Kennedy and Washington oversee the athletic departments and fine arts programs.

Deam appreciates the generosity and dedication of his staff members.

"I'll tell you what: We've had these conversations as athletic directors with the district office," said Deam. "Schedule C contracts are where the district gets the biggest bang for their bucks as far as salaries.

"These people are not in those positions for dollar signs. They are in those positions to have an impact and instruct kids. They don't like it, but they sacrifice."

Paul James, the athletic director at Washington, said a top assistant coach at the high school level in Cedar Rapids makes approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000 per year.

Aaron Stecker, the athletic director at Kennedy, was not able to reduce \$20,000 from his budget without losing some people. "We had to eliminate contracted positions," he said, but declined to identify which activities will be affected.

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He said he looked at participation levels and the number of instructors involved with each activity before deciding which cuts to make. In some cases, a coach will now work with more than one team and in some cases the ratio of students-to-coaches will increase.

Stecker said the top priority was keeping all the programs intact and trying to minimize the impact on students. Stecker said he has offered shared contracts to some individuals, where coaches would work for less compensation.

"We all know it's not a lot of compensation, but it's compensation nonetheless," he said. "That's up to them. They know the possibility is there for them to do it, if they wish. I'm open to that."

Deam said another round of budget cuts in the future could severely affect his school.

"It's not something I think we can stand again without having a major impact," he said. "When I look at Schedule C contracts, it's the best dropout prevention program our schools have. We have people in there who care about kids."