

Communication from the District Board of Education

Dear Glendale-River Hills School District community members,

We are writing to update you regarding the school district budget, as part of our ongoing commitment to transparency and community engagement.

In January, the school board and community learned for the first time that the district is facing unexpected budget challenges and that prior budgets presented in June 2023 and October 2023 did not fully capture the extent of the budget deficit, due to significant errors in accounting and budgeting made by staff that are no longer with the district. The board was also informed that our savings would be insufficient to cover the deficit in the 2023-2024 budget.

In response to the news, the board acted promptly. We hired a new interim business manager, Gus Knitt, and brought on financial consultant Todd Gray – each a former public school business manager and superintendent, and each a highly-regarded expert in their fields. These financial experts are working directly with the administrative team and the board, in addition to several professionals at Baird, to investigate and understand past revenue and spending. Significant errors in accounting and budgeting made by staff that are no longer with the district have increased the complexity of this accounting investigation, but it is progressing as quickly as possible while ensuring proper due diligence is taken.

We are closely monitoring budget work and insisting that information be shared in a timely, transparent manner so our staff and community have opportunities to ask questions, fully understand our situation, and advocate for the best, student-focused path forward.

The work is ongoing, though we understand from our experts that we are getting closer to firm answers about our fiscal status. We will share more details when they are available. For now, we can say the following with certainty:

Parkway Elementary and Glen Hills Middle Schools will remain open. The services and experiences we are providing to our students this school year will not be impacted, and our staffing this school year will not change because of budget concerns. We have financial tools available to ensure that we have the cash flow necessary to meet all financial obligations, including salaries and benefits.

The administrative team and the board have also begun looking for budget efficiencies for the 2024-25 school year and beyond, with the goal to keep reductions away from classrooms and student experience. Our administrative team has committed to place student learning and emotional well-being at the center of their decision-making process as budget recommendations are developed for board approval. As we deliberate about the budget, the board will always keep in mind our primary purpose of delivering the highest quality education to all our students.

The board will continue to work with urgency to improve board policies and oversight, build stronger checks and balances, and ensure that going forward we receive timely, accurate, and complete information about the status of our revenue, spending, and budget.

We know that the current unknowns with our financial situation are unsettling; we share your frustration. However, know that many districts across the state successfully face budget deficits each year due to tax levy limits, underfunding of state mandated student services, loss of tax revenue to voucher schools, and rising costs. Once we develop a clear picture of our deficit, we are confident that we will determine a fiscally responsible, student-focused solution.

We promise we are working quickly to address the situation and will share more details when they are available.

In the meantime, you can attend board meetings in person or on Zoom, visit <https://www.glendale.k12.wi.us/school-board> for more information, or reach out to me at danielle.bailey@gdrh.org or 414.491.1094. The care and support that our community shows our schools does not go unnoticed. The administration and board deeply appreciate the invaluable role the community plays in fostering nurturing educational environments. We thank you for entrusting the board and our staff with stewardship of your school district.

In community,

Danielle Bailey
President
Board of Education
Glendale-River Hills School District