

Spending Reduction Plan Proposal

for the 2025-26 School Year

Presented to the School Board: February 6, 2025 Prepared by: Dr. Kelly Aramaki, Superintendent

Introduction from the Superintendent

Dear Bellevue School District Community,

At the February 6, 2025 Regular School Board Meeting, I presented this \$20 million spending reduction plan proposal for the 2025-2026 school year. Even though many of you likely saw some of these cuts coming, I know it must have been painful to see them in black and white, particularly if your job is impacted or the services that your child has depended on are on the list. In the end, this deep reduction in spending was bound to impact practically everything and everyone.

As we navigate this challenging time, I want to share a simple but important value that I hold: people — our students, teachers, staff, and families — are at the heart of every decision made. Although budget conversations never feel this way, which I understand completely, these decisions are not just about dollars and cents. Stabilizing our district's finances comes from a deep care about people's livelihoods, students' experiences, and the future of our district. My promise to you is that these decisions will not be made lightly, and they will not be made without consideration of their human impact.

I recognize the anxiety and uncertainty that these cuts may bring over the next couple of months. My commitment to you is that we will continue this process with transparency and compassion. We will seek input and feedback, explore every option, and make decisions that preserve the excellence that defines the Bellevue School District.

I invite you to be part of the conversation because this district is **our beloved community** — and together, we will navigate this challenge with the same spirit of resilience and collaboration that makes Bellevue exceptional.

In service of our community,

Dr. Cnamale

Dr. Kelly Aramaki Superintendent, Bellevue School District

Executive Summary

Like many districts across the state, The Bellevue School District is grappling with a **substantial budget deficit** caused in large part by rising costs, increased student needs, and inadequate state funding. In addition, since the COVID pandemic, in part due to rising costs and student needs but also due to insufficient financial oversight, we have been spending almost \$10 million more each year than we receive in revenue, leading to the depletion of our cash reserves below the 5% required by board policy. This has led to us being placed on the financial warning list by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). If we don't make drastic changes immediately to cut spending and replenish our fund balance, we are at risk of being placed in "<u>binding conditions</u>"—financial and operational corrective actions with accountability imposed by OSPI to ensure we restore financial stability.

Over the past three years, it's important to note that we did make significant cuts. We were one of the only districts in the state to have **consolidated schools** to address declining enrollment. We cut administration at the central office and reduced our operations staffing. And yet, even with those cuts, our spending outpaced our revenue.

To right-size our spending and reestablish financial stability, we are forced to make **\$20 million in spending reductions** for the 2025-26 school year. This is more than the anticipated \$16 million in spending cuts we were expecting, primarily because we were only able to cut approximately \$6 million from this year's budget as opposed to our goal of \$10 million. \$20 million in cuts equates to approximately 150-170 staff members—a 7% reduction in staff overall.

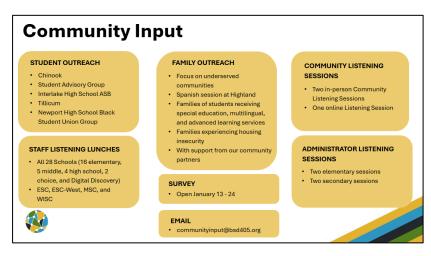
This **spending reduction plan proposal** was created with input from the community and guided by guiding principles and parameters set forth by the School Board. The superintendent formally proposed this spending reduction plan to the School Board on February 6, 2025, at a regular School Board meeting. The community will be able to give feedback on this proposal through a survey and a special School Board meeting scheduled for March 6, 2025, where we will hold an extended time for public testimony. The superintendent will make any final adjustments to the proposal by Monday, March 10, 2025, and then on March 13, 2025, the School Board will vote on the revised proposal.

Community Input

There are two key opportunities for the community to provide input and feedback into the plan. In January, community input sessions were held for school staff, district staff, students, families and

community members. This happened prior to the creation of the proposal and followed our Equity Driven Decision Making process outlined in <u>Procedure 0130P</u>. We held over 50 community listening sessions in total as well as administered a community-wide survey.

Once the proposal is presented to the school board, the community will again have a month to provide feedback on the proposal through survey as well as an opportunity to



give public testimony to the School Board at a special School Board meeting on March 6, 2025. To take the survey, please click <u>here</u>. The survey will be open until 11:59PM on February 28, 2025.

From the January listening sessions and survey, as expected, there were a range of perspectives and ideas about the ways in which we could or should reduce spending. The following are five common themes that we heard across groups that helped to shape the spending reduction plan and the accompanying restoration priorities.

- Buffer those with greatest needs to the extent possible. Across groups, there was a desire to protect investments for the schools (ex. Title 1 funded) and students who need the most support.
- Preserve student engagement and learning. With a few exceptions, there was widespread support to maintain the 7-period day at high school and middle school because of the electives it allows students to take that tap into their interests and passions. We also heard from many the importance of extracurricular activities, clubs, athletics, music and the arts; these things not only allow students to build on their passions, but also provide students with community, friendship, and support positive mental, social, emotional, and physical health.
- Prioritize student-facing supports. Knowing that cuts of this magnitude will undoubtedly impact staff given that staff constitute 85% of our spending, many people across groups expressed interest in protecting "student-facing" staff as much possible—those who work directly with students.
- Get lean and efficient starting with central office. In lean financial times, there is always the opportunity to reflect on the organizational structure and find ways to become as efficient as possible while not compromising too much on our mission. This was a theme from across the community.
- Improve transparency and communication. Finally, all groups including our students felt we could improve in providing transparent, clear and regular communication regarding our budget, our

spending challenges, how school districts are funded in general, and how we're going to navigate our way to financial stability.

To review in more detail what we heard and learned from our community, including the nuances of what different groups shared, click <u>here</u> to see a summary presentation that the superintendent gave to the school board during a study session on January 23, 2025.

Key Considerations

The following key considerations helped to shape this spending reduction plan proposal:

- Preventing Binding Conditions & Rebuilding the Fund Balance Restoring fiscal stability is in the best interest of the school district. It's the superintendent's responsibility as well as that of the School Board. Although painful, this spending reduction plan must put us on the path to restoring our fund balance to 5-6% of our budget per board policy and prevent us from going into binding conditions.
- Themes and Tensions from Community Input Sessions Before drafting any spending reductions, it was critical that we gave the community opportunities to share their input. There were a number of themes across groups as mentioned above. There were also tensions between recommendations (ex. some recommended considering additional school consolidation, while others felt that should be a last resort). In the end, we took all input into consideration as we built out the plan. It's important to note that the recommendations in many cases will seem to go against community input; that's due to the fact that \$20 million in cuts requires us to cut even the things we want to keep. In those cases, community input shaped how deep the cuts were in particular categories as well as our restoration priorities.
- Budget Parameters from the School Board The School Board sets <u>budget parameters and</u> <u>priorities</u> for the Superintendent to follow when developing the budget for the upcoming year. These parameters include things such as: keep cuts away from students as much as possible and align spending to the strategic plan.
- 2024-29 Strategic Plan This past year, we went through an extensive strategic planning process involving many different community members, including our students. To ensure we didn't cut things central to our mission, we looked to our <u>strategic plan</u> to guide not just what we would cut but also what we would build anew.
- Equity-Driven Decision-Making Board Policy 0130 dictates that, in our efforts to deliver on a world class education for each and every student, we follow a decision-making process that identifies those in greatest need and provide supports to meet those needs as best as possible.
- Opportunity to Reorganize for Student and Staff Success Finally, as we go through these challenging times, we are using this opportunity to reorganize and rebuild so that we can more efficiently serve our students, staff, and families.

Spending Reduction Plan

Overview

The spending reduction plan is broken into three categories: Central Office, ESSER-Funded (explained below), and School-Based. The chart below provides an overview of the total proposed reductions within the three categories. The range provides an estimate of the number of positions to be reduced and the accompanying range of estimate of savings, recognizing individual salaries and benefits vary within and across groups. Following this overview are more specific breakdowns of reductions by category with detailed explanations.

Reduction Area	# Positions	Reduction Amount
Central Office	40-49	\$5,375,000 - \$6,670,000
ESSER-Funded	25-31.5	\$3,245,000 - \$4,288,500
School-Based	70-98	\$10,040,000 - \$14,320,000
TOTAL	135-178.5	\$18,976,000 - \$25,278,500

NOTE: The number of positions and reduction amounts are approximate

Central Office Reductions

Central Office Reductions	# Positions	Reduction Amount
Cabinet, Director Level Positions	5-8	\$1,350,000 - \$2,160,000
Central Office Furloughs, Contract Holdbacks	N/A	\$1,050,000
Central Office Staff (certificated, classified)	25-30	\$1,875,000 - \$2,250,000
Operations Staff	10-11	\$1,100,000 - \$1,210,000
TOTAL	40-49	\$5,375,000 - \$6,670,000

NOTE: The number of positions and reduction amounts are approximate

Details of Central Office Reductions

• Cabinet, Director Level Positions – We are planning a reorganization of central office leadership to more effectively and efficiently serve our schools. This includes the superintendent's cabinet and other director-level leaders. Several executive director and director-level leadership positions have been eliminated in recent years; however, we are planning to reduce by an additional 5-8 positions by consolidating responsibilities.

- Central Office Furloughs and Contract Holdbacks These are examples of austerity measures that include withholding benefits included in contracts, such as professional development funds, vacation buy-back, and stipends. Several groups joined the Superintendent and Cabinet in taking a furlough this year, 1-5 days of leave without pay, in order to help us maintain a positive fund balance. This plan proposes a continuation of these cost-saving measures and perhaps additional central office austerity measures for the 2025-26 school year until we achieve fiscal stability.
- Central Office Staff As part of a reorganization to more efficiently serve and support schools, we will reduce 25-30 staff that include both certificated and classified staff. By doing this, we are going re-envision and elevate teacher leadership at the school level in order to advance key initiatives and goals in our district aligned to the strategic plan.
- Operations Staff Over the past few years, we have trimmed staff in our operations departments. This coming year, we plan to reduce by an addition 10-11 operations staff.

ESSER Funded Reductions	# Positions	Reduction Amount
Co-Teachers at Title 1 Schools (maintain Title grant funded positions)	1-3	\$158,000 - \$474,000
Mental Health Assistance Team (MHAT)	15-19.5	\$2,025,000 - \$2,632,500
Family Engagement (maintain at highest need schools)	3-5	\$180,000 - \$300,000
Summit Program	4	\$632,000
Tutoring	N/A	\$250,000
Total	23-31.5	\$3,245,000 - \$4,288,500

ESSER Funded Reductions

NOTE: The number of positions and reduction amounts are approximate

Details of ESSER Funded Reductions

During and following the pandemic, school districts received federal funding known as the <u>Elementary</u> and <u>Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund</u>. Bellevue School District received approximately \$22 million in emergency funds over a 3-year period. These funds allowed districts to provide additional academic support to address learning loss and to provide social-emotional support to address increased student needs. Bellevue School District implemented a robust recovery plan, including academic tutoring, family engagement, graduation success, co-teachers at Title I elementary schools, and a large investment in mental health specialists. When ESSER funding ended, we did not fully eliminate these programs. The additional expense coupled with a loss of enrollment contributed to the depletion of our fund balance (savings). This proposal will reduce spending in areas previously funded with the ESSER allocation. Once the budget has stabilized, we can determine if these investments can be reinstated, or if new resources should be identified.

- Co-Teachers at Elementary Title 1 Schools Co-teachers were added to each Title I elementary school to support educators and students. These positions have been reduced over the past two years, though some schools utilized Title I grant funding to continue utilizing co-teachers. Grant-funded co-teacher positions will likely continue, while 1-3 general fund funded co-teacher positions would be reduced.
- The Mental Health Assistance Team (MHAT) One of our most innovative investments, MHAT counselors make up approximately 19.5 FTE, with 2 MHAT counselors at each comprehensive high school. MHAT counselors have provided our students with critical mental health counseling, particularly as the mental health needs skyrocketed post pandemic and the available mental health supports in the community were over-taxed. The plan will reduce direct mental health counseling, shift remaining MHAT counselors into a mental health coordination role, and increase partnerships with community agencies to support students. We would maintain Care Solace, as a resource to help counselors connect families and students with mental health providers in the community (with or without insurance). Note: The plan does not eliminate or reduce school counselors.
- Family Engagement Specialists Family engagement specialists provided much-needed support to families during and after the pandemic. These specialists continue to be a valuable resource to families. The plan would reduce the engagement specialists at non-Title I schools while maintaining specialists at Title I schools. Additionally, 1-3 specialists may be allocated centrally to serve non-Title I schools, as needed.
- Summit Program The Summit Program was established as an in-school extension of the Rise program, serving secondary students with various needs across the district. While extremely beneficial to students who take advantage of it, the program has dwindled in enrollment and isn't sustainable given our budget challenges. The plan will eliminate the Summit program and concentrate efforts at Rise.
- Tutoring Tutoring is a research-based intervention to catch students up academically. We are proposing to reduce tutoring investments from \$500,000 to \$250,000.

School-Based Reductions*	# Positions	Reduction Amount
Assistant Principals	12-16	\$2,640,000 - \$3,520,000
Elementary and Secondary Certificated Staff	30-40	\$4,740,000 – \$6,320,000
Non-Classroom Certificated Staff	10-20	\$1,580,000 - \$3,160,000
Classified Staff	18-22	\$1,080,000 - \$1,320,000
TOTAL	70-98	\$10,040,000 - 14,320,000

School-Based Reductions

NOTE: The number of positions and reduction amounts are approximate *Minimize reductions at Title I schools

Details of School-Based Reductions

- Elementary Assistant Principals Starting in 2013, assistant principals were gradually added to every elementary school to implement a system of positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS). They also work in partnership with the principal to support and evaluate educators and staff, support students and families, and oversee student activities. The state only funds about 1.2 administrators in a school of 400 students. This plan proposes eliminating the assistant principal role at elementary schools, with the exception of Title I elementaries and schools with more than 700 students where part or full-time assistant principals will be maintained.
- Elementary and Secondary Certificated Classroom Staff Maintaining smaller class size was a key theme across the community listening sessions. And yet, the only way to reach our \$20 million savings is to more conservatively staff classrooms at elementary, middle, and high school. By maximizing class sizes at the contractual levels, we can save significant dollars while not eliminating whole programs or services. This plan includes cutting approximately 10-15 elementary teachers and 20-25 secondary teachers. This averages about .5 to 1.0 teacher per elementary and about 2 teachers per secondary. The class size average in elementary could increase by an estimated 1.05 students per class, moving from an average class size of 22.55 this year to an approximate average of 23.60 next year. For secondary schools, this would limit our ability to run classes that are too small. The plan will continue to prioritize Title I schools by maintaining a lower average class size.
- Non-Classroom Certificated Staff Schools have numerous certificated positions that aren't classroom teaching positions. This includes positions such as: PBIS specialists, deans, facilitators, ITCLs, and special education educators. This proposal would more efficiently staff those positions, consolidating support among fewer staff, and result in a reduction of approximately 10 to 20 positions.
- Classified Staff Each school will reduce their classified staffing allocation by 1.0. This could be one secretary or general school assistant (GSA), for example.

Share Your Feedback

With all of these spending reductions, we will be back on track as a district to restore fiscal stability. Over the next month, students, staff, and families will have opportunities to give feedback on this plan. Here are three different ways to provide feedback:

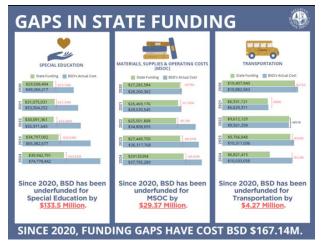
- Complete this <u>survey</u> by Friday, February 28
- Send an email to communityinput@bsd405.org
- Attend the <u>Special School Board Meeting on Thursday, March 6 for public comment</u> and <u>sign up</u> to speak.

If any changes are made to the proposal based on community feedback, I will submit those changes to the School Board by March 10, and I will communicate those changes to the community. Then, at the March 13, 2025 Regular Board Meeting, our School Board will vote on the final proposal.

The 2025 Legislative Session & Our Restoration Priorities

Overview

As we are working as a system to right size our spending and restore our fund balance, the School Board and I are simultaneously working hard to advocate for additional revenue from the legislature during the 2025 legislative session. Along with all 295 school districts in Washington State, we are advocating for ample funding for what is considered the Big 3 funding priorities: (1) special education, (2) materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC), and (3) transportation. This graphic depicts the funding shortfalls in all three areas. In addition, towards the goal of



equitable funding, we are working with districts across the state to revamp local levy allowable collections and Local Effort Assistance (LEA). An increase in what we can collect in the local levy which is approved by Bellevue voters would significantly support Bellevue School District. An accompanying increase in Local Effort Assistant (LEA) funding would then support districts that also need additional funding but don't have the same tax base as Bellevue.

The Bills We Are Tracking (as of February 6, 2025)

The following are the bills we are tracking:

Special Education	Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC)
• Senate Bill <u>5263</u>	• Senate Bill <u>5192</u>
• Senate Bill <u>5307</u>	• House Bill <u>1338</u>
• House Bill <u>1310</u>	
Transportation	Levy/LEA
• Senate Bill <u>5187</u>	• House Bill <u>1356</u>
	• Senate Bill <u>5593</u>

Restoration Priorities

The following are the priorities we heard from the community that we will work to restore if we receive additional funding from the state.

• Restore Our Fund Balance to \$20 million – the first priority whether or not we receive additional funds from the state is to work to restore our fund balance to the 5-6% of our annual budget which equates to approximately \$20 million. This is necessary so that we have enough cash on hand to pay our monthly commitments (salaries, contracts, utility bills, etc.). \$15 million is the bare minimum to not have to worry about possibly having to borrow to pay our bills, so any additional funding that comes from the state would first go toward reaching at least \$15 million

in unrestricted cash on hand. Realistically, it is possible that any additional funds that come from the state from this legislative session will have to go to restoring our fund balance.

The next four items are key community-wide priorities that will guide what we can begin to restore once we reach a minimum fund balance of \$15 million.

- School-Based Staffing Schools, student supports, and staff supports are our first priority for restoration. If we receive additional funds, and we have needs such as high class sizes or case loads or student needs that need additional support, we will first invest in school-based staffing.
- Student Behavior and Mental Health Supports Student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs continue to be high post pandemic. Restoring these supports, such as mental health counselors, PBIS specialists, and assistant principals, will be a key priority if and when additional funds are available.
- Strategic Plan Investments Bellevue is a top-rated school district nationally. We want to
 innovate and refine our supports for our students so that we continue to lead the way in
 delivering on a world-class education. Our strategic plan was developed by and for our
 community and includes priorities such as 'inclusion and accessibility' and 'multilingualism for all'.
 As funding becomes available, we want to continue to invest in our strategic plan so that the
 Bellevue School District continues to thrive and draw students and families.
- Operational Excellence Part of what makes our district world-class are our operations teams, from our nutrition services staff to our custodians to our bus drivers. With additional revenue, we want to restore operational staff so that we can continue to provide the service our staff, students, and families so deeply appreciate.

Alternative Reductions Not Recommended

As we worked to develop a responsible spending reduction plan, we carefully considered multiple areas for potential cuts as suggested in listening sessions. However, after thorough analysis and stakeholder input, we are not recommending the following reductions for the reasons outlined below:

Reduce the 7-period day to 6-period day

Over the years, Washington State has increased its graduation requirements. Previously, the State required 19.5 credits to graduate, but in 2019, this requirement was raised to 24 credits. <u>sbe.wa.gov</u>

With a 6-period day, students have no margin for error; failing a single class could prevent them from accumulating the necessary credits to graduate. Additionally, the increase in required credits for core subjects and college admission standards leaves little room for electives. Many students wish to take courses in world languages and music and shared their concern that a 6-period schedule would severely limit their opportunities to explore other electives.

Eliminate elementary specialists

Elementary specialists play a crucial role in providing instruction in visual art, music, physical education, instrumental music, and library research skills. These classes not only enrich students' educational experiences but also provide essential planning time for elementary classroom teachers. Eliminating these specialist positions would also result in teachers losing the planning time guaranteed by the

collective bargaining agreement while requiring them to take on additional responsibilities for teaching subjects like physical education and the arts.

Sell vacant property

While it might seem like selling the vacant property could alleviate budget concerns, the proceeds from such sales are legally required to be deposited into the District's capital fund, which is a restricted fund and cannot be used to address deficits in the general fund. Moreover, selling property provides only a one-time influx of funds, whereas our goal is to achieve a balanced budget where annual spending aligns with revenue. It's also important to consider that enrollment numbers in the district have historically fluctuated. If we were to sell our vacant property now, and later find the need to build more schools due to increased enrollment, securing large parcels of land in Bellevue would be quite challenging.

Reduce or eliminate athletics and activities

Athletics and extracurricular activities play a crucial role in student engagement and overall well-being. While they are not part of the core academic curriculum, they provide students with valuable opportunities to develop leadership skills, teamwork, and personal growth. Throughout our engagement process, students overwhelmingly expressed their desire to maintain these programs. Many shared that athletics and activities provide a space for them to excel in areas of personal interest and passion, contributing to their sense of belonging and connection to school. In fact, rather than asking for fewer opportunities, students have consistently advocated for expanding extracurricular options, highlighting the importance of preserving these programs.

Reduce counselors

We received strong feedback from elementary staff and from families at all levels about the necessity of maintaining full-time counselors, particularly given the increasing social-emotional and mental health needs of students. Counselors provide crucial support for both academic and emotional development, ensuring that students receive the guidance they need to thrive. Additionally, with the proposed reduction of Mental Health Assistance Team (MHAT) positions, the role of school counselors will become even more vital in addressing student needs. Cutting these positions would create significant gaps in essential support services, which is why we are not recommending this reduction.

Consolidate schools

We reviewed the possibility of consolidating additional schools but decided that further closures are not advisable at this time. Two years ago, two elementary schools were consolidated as part of the district's budget process, which already addressed some of the financial concerns related to enrollment declines. Since then, efforts to stabilize and increase student enrollment have shown positive results, suggesting that additional consolidation may not be immediately necessary.

Stabilize and Increase Enrollment

- Open Enrollment and Innovative Programming: Open enrollment and innovative programs are attracting students to the district, resulting in increased enrollment. There is a growing demand for language programs and sustained interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. The Digital Discovery program expanded last year to provide access to students throughout the state.
- Communication with Families and Businesses: We are engaging with families and local businesses to promote the excellence of our district. The district has organized community presentations and listening sessions to gather input and share information about its offerings. Additionally, web marketing strategies are reaching a broader audience, ensuring that the community is well-informed about the educational opportunities available within the district.

Legislative Advocacy to Increase School Funding

- Advocacy for Transforming K-12 Funding Mechanisms: We are strongly advocating for the legislature to transform the current funding mechanisms for K-12 education, emphasizing the need to address the declining per-pupil funding and the decreasing percentage of the state budget allocated to K-12 education.
- Engagement with Legislative Representatives: The district maintains a robust legislative advocacy program, working closely with senators and representatives from the 41st and 48th districts, as well as the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Annually, the Board adopts legislative priorities and meets regularly with legislators throughout the year, both during and outside of legislative sessions, to advocate for increased school funding and policy changes that benefit public education.

Decision-Making Timeline

LISTENING AND LEARNING: INPUT PHASE (1/08 – 1/24)		
January 8, 2025	Regional PTSA Meeting: Town Hall at SHS	
January 13-20, 2025	Staff Listening Sessions at Schools	
January 13-20, 2025	Focus Groups: Students and Families (following EDDM)	
January 13-24, 2025	Focus Groups: Administrators, Labor Leaders	
January 13-24, 2025	Design Team Meetings	
January 13-24, 2025	Administer Districtwide Survey	
January 21, 2025	Community Listening Session – Odle Middle School	
January 21, 2025	Community Listening Session – Online	
January 22, 2025	Community Listening Session – WISC Rainier Room	
January 23, 2025	Board Study Session	

SYNTHESIZING AND DRAFTING: PROPOSAL PHASE (1/27 – 2/6)		
January 27, 2025 • Summarize Input and Develop DRAFT Proposal		
February 6, 2025	Board Study Session	
February 6, 2025	Communicate DRAFT Proposal to Staff and Community	

COMMENT PHASE (2/6 – 3/6)		
February 6 – 28	•	Administer Districtwide Survey
March 6	٠	Special Board Meeting for Public Comment

DECISION		
March 10	•	Submit Final Reduction Proposal
March 13	•	Board Meeting: Proposal Submitted for Approval

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: (3/14 – 6/30)		
March 14 – April 15	March 14 – April 15 • Notify impacted Certificated Staff	
April 1 – June 30	•	Notify impacted Classified Staff