

Akron Beacon Journal

EDUCATION

Akron school board rejects superintendent's budget cuts proposal



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Key Points

Akron school board members rejected a plan to cut 17 employee positions.

School board members must decide how to cut \$11 million before the school's fiscal year ends June 30.

Akron school board members have rejected part of the [superintendent's plan](#) to keep Akron Public Schools from [facing a financial shortfall](#) next school year.

The move drew a rebuke from the [board's president](#) and has left Superintendent Mary Outley unsure of what steps to take next.

With a 5-2 vote, board members on April 13 defeated three separate resolutions that would have eliminated 17 employee positions and saved the district roughly \$1.66 million. The reductions are part of [Outley's proposal](#) to reduce the district's \$386 million main operating budget by at least \$11 million before next school year.

School board members Rene Molenaur and Karmaya Kelly said they need more information, such as how the administration arrived at its recommendations, before agreeing to eliminate employee positions.

"Reductions in force are always difficult decisions," Molenaur said. "Because of that, it is especially important that the community can be confident (that) when the

board takes action, it is based on a clear evaluation of available options, including the impact on student-facing and nonstudent-facing roles."

Kelly added, "I think we are all aware that this is something that has to be done. I just can't, at this moment, say that I feel confident in making a decision. This is solely based off the fact that we as a board have not received enough information to move forward with this vote."

Members Rev. Gregory Harrison and Nathan Jarosz said they want the board to vote on the entire \$11 million budget cut proposal, not just part 15% of it. Harrison said a board vote on the \$11 million package would ensure that all the cuts would be enacted as presented.

Outley, who first presented her budget cut recommendations [on Feb. 23](#) and a revised list of reductions [on March 9](#), has said the other reductions in her proposal could be handled through administrative changes.

Board member Summer Hall also rejected the three reduction-in-force resolutions on April 13, but she did not provide a reason for doing so during the meeting and did not return a message seeking comment.

Board President Barbara Sykes, who, along with member Phil Montgomery, supported the reduction-in-force resolutions, said she believes the board has received sufficient information. She called on the board members to make their questions known to the superintendent or to provide their own analysis of the budget cuts if they disagree with the administration's analysis.

She said the board must uphold its pledge to the state to cut \$11 million from next school year's budget to avoid being placed on fiscal watch, which is the second level of state oversight for school districts showing [signs of financial trouble](#).

Board members could choose to reconsider the resolutions they defeated. Or they could ask the superintendent for changes to her proposal.

It was not immediately clear what path the board would take. After the meeting, Outley said she was waiting to hear from the board on what her next steps should be.

The board has until June 30 to make the changes before the next school year begins on July 1. Outley previously said she hoped the reductions would be approved as soon as possible to give employees whose jobs would be eliminated the ability to seek other positions within the district.

Outley is seeking to eliminate nearly \$3.4 million through personnel changes, \$4.3 million through operational changes and \$3.3 million through program changes for next school year.

The three resolutions that were defeated by the school board on April 13 would have eliminated:

Six deans of students, who serve as assistant principals at Pfeiffer Elementary and East, Forest Hill, King, Crouse and Resnik community learning centers. Some of the district's remaining 19 deans would be redistributed to cover the affected schools, Outley previously said.

Six intervention specialist paraprofessionals, which are educational assistants who support students with special education needs under the guidance of a classroom teacher. The proposed cuts include two positions each at Ellet and Garfield community learning centers and one each at East and Firestone.

Four learning resource center technicians, who work within the library or media center to support library operations and student learning. Affected schools include Buchtel, East, Ellet and Firestone community learning centers.

An art therapist at Crouse Community Learning Center. Outley previously said the art therapist was hired when the school didn't have an art teacher, but the therapist's position wasn't reduced when an art teacher was hired.

Other recommendations include not filling two special education coordinator positions and four technology support specialist positions, reducing spending on

administrative specialists, restructuring three administrative positions to reduce their salaries and benefits, transferring expenses to federal funding sources, reducing overtime, delaying the payment for new math textbooks and restructuring the treasurer's office.

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