

ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT #5

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September 24, 2024

Dear Ashland School District Family,

I hope the start of the school year has been positive for you, and that you've made the most of every opportunity to create meaningful connections with your students, families, and colleagues. During my visits to our schools and open houses, I've been hearing wonderful feedback about the positive energy our staff and families are experiencing this year. Thank you all for helping make this a great year for our students!

As you know, when I joined this incredible district, I understood that one of the challenges we'd face together is addressing our budget. As we finalized our financial reports from last year, it became clear that our situation is more serious than initially expected, leaving us with a beginning fund balance of approximately -\$558,000. I understand that this may feel overwhelming, and it's not the kind of news anyone wants to hear. However, I want to reassure you that the leadership team and I are fully committed to tackling this issue head-on, with the shared goal of creating long-term financial stability for our district.

Over the past week, we've initiated a detailed budget analysis process that includes:

- A line-by-line review of expenditures to identify areas of overspending
- A thorough evaluation of school and departmental expenses
- A review of our systems to find efficiency and cost-saving opportunities

I understand that any discussion around the budget may cause concern, but as promised, I will always communicate openly with you, whether the news is positive or challenging. Now more than ever, we need to work together. Over the next month, I will continue reviewing our spending patterns, and plan to share my findings and next steps in November.

In the meantime, it's clear that the Ashland School District cannot continue to operate with an increasing deficit. Our goal is to end the school year with a 4% reserve—about \$1.5 million—which will get us closer to the 8% cushion we need to prevent future financial strain. To help us reach this goal, the leadership team has implemented a temporary district-wide spending freeze. This includes a pause on new hiring and non-essential expenditures. Please rest assured that no school will go without necessary supplies, and critical operations will continue as usual. This is simply a time to carefully consider needs versus wants.

We've already made some progress toward improving our financial health through measures implemented this summer and fall, such as:

- Strengthening internal controls to reduce purchasing card expenditures
- Implementing a district-wide pause on overtime
- Enhancing HR processes for greater efficiency
- Maximizing the use of grants for personnel



While there is still much work to be done, I truly believe that with collective effort, we can overcome this challenge and build a sustainable budget that supports our schools for the long term. Our students and staff deserve to work in an environment that is financially stable, without the constant strain of budget shortfalls.

In that spirit, I'm asking each and every one of you to consider how you might contribute to our financial health by being mindful of your spending decisions. Small actions can have a big impact. Here are some examples of ideas to consider:

1. Encourage students to write down math problems in their notebooks rather than photocopying worksheets.
2. Reevaluate field trips to determine if they are essential, or explore ways to share costs.
3. Get creative with classroom supplies—sharing resources or finding alternative materials can go a long way.

I understand this news may be difficult to process, and I know there may be questions or concerns that we haven't yet addressed. Please don't hesitate to bring your questions to your supervisors so that we can work through them together. This isn't the kind of message any of us wanted to hear at the start of the school year, and it's certainly not the one I wanted to deliver as your new superintendent. However, I am confident that if we stand together, we will not only get through this, but we will come out stronger and more unified.

After spending time with so many of you over the past month, I have no doubt that we have the resilience, creativity, and dedication to overcome these financial challenges. Together, we will build a brighter future for the Ashland School District—because we are one.

With appreciation and optimism,

Joseph Hattrick, EdD
Superintendent