

### **31. Advertiser Editorial: Montgomery schools face another tough year [MA, 2/17/10]**

The possibility that 400 Montgomery Public School System employees could get the ax next year should be of grave concern to all Montgomerians, but especially parents of the county's 32,000 school children. Most troubling to parents is that as many as 168 teacher positions could be lost for the 2010-2011 school year. Please note that this is a worst-case scenario, depending upon what happens with the state education budget and with local property tax and sales tax revenues. But even if the worst case doesn't occur, it's almost certainly going to be a tight budget year for Montgomery public schools.

- Another troubling financial likelihood: The school system could begin the coming fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1, with essentially nothing in its reserve fund, according to a system spokesman.
- Superintendent Barbara Thompson told board members last week that the layoffs could affect support staff, secretaries and custodians, as well as teachers.
- Thompson said, "We provided the board with an overview of our concerns that we have with the budget for next year so that there are no surprises."
- But there will be surprises, simply because all budgets are based on predictions of expected revenues. And revenue prediction is at best an inexact science.
- The problem of predicting revenues is made worse by the fact that school systems have to inform by the end of this school year those teachers whose contracts won't be renewed for the coming school year.
- Local school officials are looking at one of two budget scenarios that the state Department of Education has provided for next school year, according to Ron Glover, the system's assistant superintendent for finance.
- One scenario is based on Gov. Bob Riley's recommended education budget for fiscal year 2011. The other assumes that the school system will be funded at the same level as this year's prorated budget, which takes into account a 7.5 percent budget cut
- Under Riley's proposed budget, Montgomery schools would retain all of its teacher funding from the state, and perhaps gain a few teacher units because of increased enrollment.
- But in the second scenario, the school system would open fiscal year 2011 with funding based on this year's prorated budget, which anticipates a reduction of \$11.4 million in operating expenses.
- Under this scenario, Montgomery schools would qualify for funding for only 1,690 teaching units. Lost teacher units also would mean the loss of support personnel for those teacher units, Glover told the Montgomery Advertiser.
- On top of the state funding, the local system expects to lose about \$4 million in local property taxes and another \$1.5 million in local sales taxes. Both revenue flows have been hit hard by the economy.
- The concerns over funding for next year are being repeated around the state in a hundred or more local school systems facing similar dire economic straits. That makes it incredibly important that Congress moves quickly to decide how much stimulus funding it will provide to the states, which will have a huge impact on the size of the state education budget.
- Then the Alabama Legislature also should move swiftly to adopt an education budget, which will have the same sort of impact on how many teachers local school systems, including Montgomery, can hire for next year.

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