

abuck@ojaiusd.org

Two board members last month questioned the superintendent's bizarre numbers regarding PERS/STRS projected increases.

However, ensuing discussion failed to explain the gaps. PERS contributions are going up 2.46% but Morse's slide projected a 19.68% increase in PERS costs to OUSD.

At 1:56:00 of last month's video, Chandler tells Morse that the "reason being" for Morse's numbers in the slide not resembling state percentage increases "is staffing changes."

Morse responds, "Yeah, so our staffing changes, and so regardless of what the state percentage is, what I'm showing you right now is our actual numbers we have in Escape based upon what we anticipate paying."

The NEARLY 20% INCREASE in PERS costs cannot possibly be explained by shifts in staffing positions combined with the 2.46% rate increase.

Morse also attributed her calculated 6.3% STRS cost increase being higher than the state's 2.95% rate increase to "staffing changes."

The public should watch the Oct. 12 board video starting at 1:54:40 and decide whether my questions were well answered. Nobody I know thinks so.

Morse's statement that her numbers come directly from her finance software means nothing. Accounting software cannot compensate for inputting flawed data .

None of you in September questioned Morse's number of STRS rising \$505,400--nearly 1/4 OF OUSD'S ENTIRE STRS LIABILITY--and not plausible without hiring dozens more certificated workers.

But increasing staffing amid a 20-year enrollment decline would betray pre-existing workers, who have had viable COLAs for only 4 or 5 of the past 20 years. It would also be irresponsible. Still, none of you took issue with that explanation.

The County's October 17 letter to you details administrative mismanagement and destructive priorities and FCMAT is also investigating the district's budgeting practices.

My aim here is to highlight ongoing skepticism regarding District data -- and the soft administration explanations. The county's April qualification of the budget was a major red flag, yet board members have not clarified for the community the roots of obvious financial irregularities. Board members have a duty to comprehend questions like mine--and the weakness of answers given. But recent Board meetings have lacked clarity.

Disturbing numbers and the larger financial emergency should have put the board on high alert, even before last April. People watching recent board meetings and following the story of the county's qualification in April--and the even more disturbing October 17 letter--must be appalled at the weak responses to questions I have raised. Why is the Board seeing an emergency just now, almost 6 months after the county's April qualification? The school board's job is to check and balance all stakeholders'

claims, not simply to rubber-stamp the superintendent's reports.

Darris Lange

I was told teachers are working 50 hours a week. In addition, administrative staff works 60 or more hours per week on general business and the new one-time funding initiatives. A recipe for burnout.

One-time funds require weighted FTEs.

A weighted Full-Time Employee is accomplished by tracking the % of time worked to achieve a goal of a funding source.

For example, the MMS principal is paid with benefits, 200,000 per year. The Principal coordinates Learning Loss Mitigation(ELOG) 35% of the time, BARR 15%, and General day-to-day 50%. ELOG would Cover 35% of the salary, BARR 15%, and Unrestricted 50%. or 70,000, 30,000, and 100,000, respectively.

As a taxpayer and parent, I expect teachers to receive supplemental income for work outside the 40-hour week contract. For administration staff, a portion of their salaries should be picked up by one-time funds, and administration fees added for accounting. Additional support staff too. Same for construction projects, was OJAIUSD construction staff FTEs adjusted to the time worked on one-time funding buckets? (HVAC)

Has the ELO-G, ESSER 1,2,3, BARR, or GEER, GATE been billed accordingly? Are there SACS codes created for each of the one-time funds for tracking?

SACs budgetary range 5000 has money allocated for the contracted accounting firm to produce and balance the OjaiUSD budget. Should these services also be weighted?

Is accounting pulling funds out of the general funds and not the appropriate bucket of "One Time Funds"?

The FCMAT can be asked these questions and help develop a strategy to recapture wasted funds and FTEs. Weighted FTEs are a standard operating procedure, and this board should insist on monthly budget updates for tracking and transparency.

If accounting and tracking are all in order, and Ojai is still in the negative. This situation will only force the hand of the state to deal with a failing education system and a statewide literacy rate of 35%. Ojai Residents should reach out to your local representative today to push for higher base grant allocations from the state and more local tax dollars. Who is running for Mayor?

Steve Weed

Good evening,

It's hard to comment without seeming to be biased in some way. I reviewed the county's letter and on the one hand, it might be nice to have another pair of eyes on the financial challenges. In the last decade, OUSD has terminated accounting employees twice for misappropriations. The last time I checked, OUSD was using a contractor to oversee the department. For those of you who remember, OUSD had a variance that allowed OUSD a reserve of 0% 14 years ago courtesy of Dr. Bangser. So perhaps all is not lost.

Now in a time when inflation is causing contract negotiations, it puts the core budget components in a bind. Our facilities are in much better shape than 10 years ago.

However teachers are still buying their own supplies out of love for their work. None of you will object to their needs but for a variety of reasons, the district lost sight of the financial basis. Here's hoping OUSD makes it to a brighter day

Stephanie Washburn

Hello and thank you for your work and taking time with my comment. I am hoping to send my child to a district public school next year but I'm very concerned by the consistently poor test scores. I understand the real limits of standardized tests but they tell us something. What is being done to address an ongoing failure to meet these basic learning outcomes? Why is there so little change year over year and how will that be remedied?