



# THE SUMMIT

ELEVATING EDUCATION AT BLAINE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## SCHOOL BOARD NEWS - Reduction in Force



BCSD Trustees: Blanca Romero, Amber Perkes, Vice Chair Dan Turner, Leah Scarnegi, and Chair Lara Stone

### A difficult but necessary decision

#### *From the Board Chair*

Over the last few weeks, many in our community have asked a hard and deeply human question: How did we get here? How did Blaine County School District—known for its commitment to students, educators, and opportunity—reach a point where reductions in force (RIF) for three positions became necessary?

In a nutshell, enrollment is down, retirements are down, and revenues are relatively flat while costs continue to rise.

We invite you to read on to understand the full picture—what led us here, what we did to try to avoid it, and how we move forward together as a community.

First, I want to acknowledge the people impacted. These decisions affect valued staff members who have contributed meaningfully to our students and district for many years. These are colleagues, mentors, and trusted adults in our schools. I know this is difficult, and all of the trustees feel the weight of it deeply.

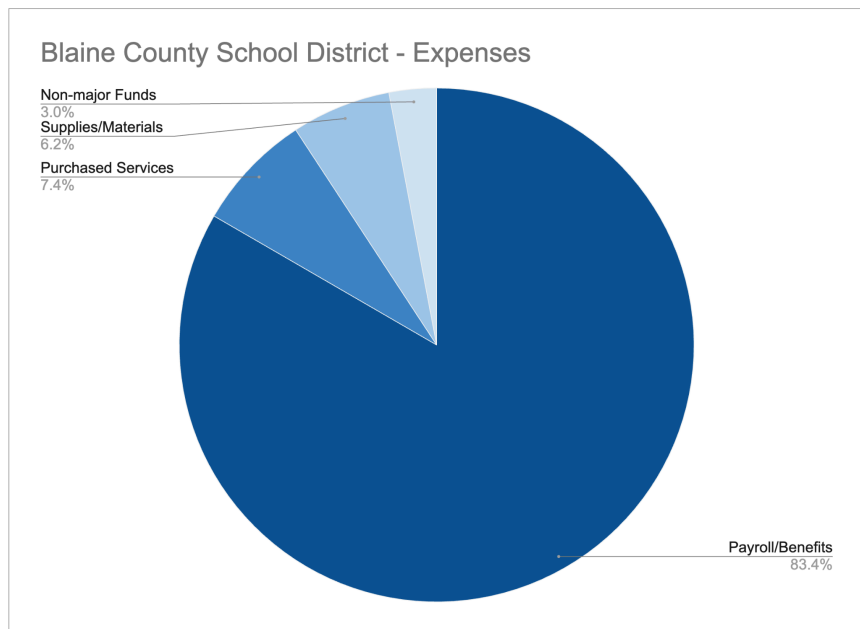


This outcome is not the result of inaction. For more than six years, the board and district have carefully reviewed the budget—reducing expenses, eliminating over 60 positions through attrition (including projected reductions for 2026–27), changing health insurance providers, renegotiating contracted services, passing plant facilities and supplemental levies, strengthening instruction through PLCs so fewer students need additional help, and increasing investment income—all while prioritizing student achievement. Throughout this process, we have made difficult decisions year after year with the specific goal of avoiding a reduction in force for as long as possible.

This year, however, several factors converged. Declining birth rates are reducing enrollment in schools across the country, including in Blaine County, which reduces funding. One significant and unexpected challenge was a sharp drop in retirements. In recent years, we have averaged 20–25 retirement notices annually, which has allowed us to reduce staffing through natural attrition. This year, we received only seven by the February 1 deadline. That made it more difficult to avoid a RIF.

At the same time, we continue to operate within real financial constraints.

School funding relies on a combination of state allocations and locally approved levies. [Idaho is 51st in the nation in per-student K-12 funding](#). While our community has consistently stepped up, there are limits to how much we can ask of taxpayers, and a failed levy could require an immediate reduction in force on a



much bigger scale. Meanwhile, the cost of operations, payroll, and benefits continues to rise. Salaries and benefits comprise almost 85% of the budget.



Health insurance costs, if we continue to offer the same plan and benefits, are expected to increase by 20% this year.

Deferring a RIF would not avoid it—it would only make it more disruptive when it occurs. Acting now—while painful—helps protect the long-term financial stability of the district as we manage through the current financial headwinds. It allows us to continue prioritizing student achievement in a more sustainable way.

I want to take personal responsibility for one part of this process. The board's RIF policy was written in 2014 and to my knowledge had never been used. We were in the process of updating it to reflect board and district values, particularly around student outcomes, staff evaluations, and financial sustainability. On the advice of legal counsel, we delayed changes to avoid the appearance of targeting specific individuals. While that caution was appropriate, in retrospect I did not initiate updating the policy soon enough. As board chair and chairman of the policy committee, I take responsibility for that timing.

I understand that people may disagree with these decisions. Reasonable people can look at the same situation and wish for a different outcome. What I can assure you is that these decisions were made thoughtfully, deliberately, and with a clear focus on the long-term health of the district and the success of our students.

We are committed to continuing this conversation openly and transparently.

To our staff: Thank you for the care, expertise, and dedication you bring to students every day. BCSD students receive an outstanding education because of your diligence, compassion, and unwavering commitment to helping every student succeed. We are deeply grateful for the difference you make in our schools.

To our community: Your support for our schools matters now more than ever.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why was a RIF necessary now?**

After years of actively managing costs and reducing staffing through attrition, the district was unable to reduce costs enough to address the projected funding shortfall. Acting now helps prevent deeper, more disruptive cuts later and protects the long-term stability of the district.

### **Did the district try to avoid this?**

Yes. For over six years, we have carefully managed the budget—reducing expenses, eliminating positions through attrition, renegotiating contracts, changing health insurance providers, implementing PLCs, passing levies, and increasing investment income—all while prioritizing student outcomes. These actions delayed this outcome significantly, but could not ultimately prevent it.

### **Why was this year different?**

A key factor was the unusually low number of retirements. In prior years, 20–25 retirements allowed us to reduce staffing through attrition. This year, we received only seven, limiting our ability to make reductions without direct layoffs.

### **Why not just pass another levy?**

Supplemental levies require voter approval, and there are limits to how much can reasonably and responsibly be requested. A failed levy could trigger more significant and immediate reductions. Levies also cannot fully keep pace with rising costs on their own.

### **What factors contributed to the financial situation?**

- Rising staffing and operational costs
- Idaho has the lowest per-student K–12 funding in the nation
- Very limited revenue options
- Declining enrollment
- Fewer retirements than expected, reducing attrition opportunities



## How were decisions about positions made?

Decisions were made using the current RIF policy and careful review. While the policy did not fully reflect updated school board priorities, the district carefully followed the policy to ensure unbiased decisions.

## Why wasn't the RIF policy updated sooner?

I delayed updates based on legal guidance to avoid the appearance of targeting individuals. In hindsight, I should have prioritized that work earlier.

## How will this impact students?

We are focused on minimizing impacts in classrooms and maintaining strong student outcomes. These decisions were made to ensure the district can continue serving students effectively over time.

## What happens next?

We will continue to monitor finances closely, prioritize student learning, and engage with the community about future funding and planning decisions.

## What You Can Do

**Stay informed.** Understanding [how school funding works](#) in Idaho—and its limitations—helps ground these conversations.

**Stay engaged.** Attend board meetings, ask questions, and share your perspective by submitting a [written public comment](#) to the board.

**Advocate for priorities.** If you believe preserving jobs should be a top priority, share your views with the school board, the superintendent, and (for certified staff) the Blaine County Education Association.

**Participate in future funding decisions.** When levies come before voters, your voice matters.

**Support our schools.** Community involvement—through volunteering, partnerships, or advocacy—makes a real difference.

