



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

State budget shortfall drives district cuts

Goose Creek CISD, like every school district in Texas, is preparing for significant cuts in state public education funding.



Dr. Toby York
Superintendent

However, Goose Creek CISD's plans as of late April do not include layoffs, pay cuts, furloughs, or school closures.

Instead, the district will rely on a number of factors including the growth of the student population, staff resignations, cuts in administrative department budgets, and more to make up a shortfall that could range from \$9 million to \$25 million, or stated another way, a 5 to 15 percent cut from the Goose Creek CISD's current \$170 million budget.

The Texas House adopted its proposed budget that included about \$7.8 billion in cuts to public education over the next two years. The Senate version is expected to be more generous.

Actual state spending will be determined after the two bills are reconciled for final adoption.

"They chose to do nothing"

Most of the shortfall was created when the state overhauled the business tax structure and the school finance system in 2006. The new tax structure does not generate enough money to offset state-mandated decreases in school property tax rates, creating a \$10 billion budget hole in every budget cycle until the Legislature fixes it.

"In 2006, the Texas Legislature reduced the revenue school districts received from property taxes by 33 percent. At that time, they committed to schools and to local taxpayers that they would replace that amount through a business margins tax and other means," said Ken Martin, Goose Creek CISD Board president.

"It was clear in the 2007 legislative session that the legislature's actions would not raise the amount of money needed to make up the difference in revenue. They chose to do nothing," Martin said.

"In 2009, the shortfall was even larger. Again they chose to do nothing to meet their commitment. Now it is 2011 and the education shortfall is \$8 billion. The legislature needs to make good on the commitment they made to schools and local taxpayers. Waiting until 2013 only means that the problem will be that much worse and that much harder to solve. It will not magically go away by itself," Martin said.

Protecting students & employees

Goose Creek CISD, the 57th largest school district in Texas, serves more than 21,000 students at its 26 campuses and employs nearly 3,000 folks, making Goose Creek CISD one of the largest employers in the greater Baytown area.

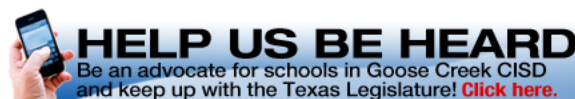
Goose Creek CISD Superintendent Dr. Toby York said the school district has benefitted from a strategy of keeping the budget lean.

Last year, the Goose Creek CISD budget was actually lower than the year before. That is expected to be the case again this year.

One example of fiscal discipline is the \$220 million bond issue approved in 2005. This project, the largest in district history, was completed under budget despite the skyrocketing costs of building materials. In fact, interest from that bond has been used to pay bond debt and keep taxes low.



Photo by Jody Horton
Educators protest proposed cuts to public education in Austin.



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However, through attrition, some positions may be eliminated. Also, a few teachers funded through federal grants that have expired will not return next year.

So far, 128 employees — including some teachers — have resigned or retired this year.

"We are looking at shifting the existing personnel around to fill the gaps," Dr. York said. "We feel this strategy will aid in protecting the livelihood of our current employees."

Saving teachers' jobs is important in light of Goose Creek CISD's academic successes having reached new heights in recent years.

Goose Creek CISD is a "Recognized" district for the second year in a row. In addition, nine Goose Creek CISD schools have earned exemplary status — the most in district history. Of the district's 13 other schools, 12 were recognized.

used to pay bond debt and keep taxes low.

For the record, the school district projected that when the 2005 bonds were all sold, that residents should expect a maximum debt service tax rate of 35 cents. To date, Goose Creek CISD has stayed under that mark.

"GCCISD has worked very hard to be careful with taxpayers' money. Because of this and the amount of funding we receive from the state, we are in better financial shape than most districts in the state. Regardless of what the state does this year, we will continue to focus on providing the best educational opportunities we can for all of our 21,000 students," said Dr. York.

In response to expected massive cuts in state funding, Goose Creek CISD administration has found several ways the district can cut back without touching classroom personnel or services to students.

"Our main concern going in was personnel; were we going to lay off staff" Dr. York said. "Our early projections are that I believe we can protect our employees."

As far as full-time employees, the numbers for Goose Creek CISD have not changed much in recent years.

The total number of full-time employees at Goose Creek CISD has dropped from 2,903 in 2007 to 2,863 currently — even at a time when student enrollment was growing.

Bottom line: Cutting costs

The district's growth will also help. Goose Creek CISD expects to add another 300 or more students next year, and each will add more funding from the state.

To make up the rest of the expected shortfall, the district has devised ways to cut costs with the least effect on instruction.

Here is the plan — so far — to cut costs:

- 15 percent reduction in department budgets for next school year for expected savings of \$3.4 million.
- 15 percent reduction in per pupil allotments for campus budgets for expected savings of \$300,000.
- Eliminate block scheduling at junior schools for savings of approximately \$2 million to \$2.5 million.
- Further implementation of energy management plan with an expected savings of \$400,000.
- May adjust school start times to reduce transportation costs saving approximately \$482,000.

Furthermore, Goose Creek CISD has campus-staffing guidelines and, in prior years, the district has been able to have additional positions above and beyond these guidelines. Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, the district will enforce these guidelines, and as such some class sizes in the secondary schools could increase.

York believes the proposed budget reductions combined with the district's healthy fund balance of \$50 million would buy at least another year without drastic cuts.

"I feel this plan, with some additional reductions, will get us through one year," he said. "It's up to the Legislature now."

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Physical Address:
Goose Creek Consolidated
Independent School District
4544 Interstate 10 East
Baytown, Texas 77521
281.420.4800

Mailing Address:
Goose Creek Consolidated
Independent School District
P.O. Box 30
Baytown, Texas 77522
281.420.4800

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