

Agenda Statement: Consideration and Adoption of a Reduction in Force (RIF) Plan for the 2025-2026 School Year

Background:

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District is facing a significant fiscal challenge due to a combination of declining student enrollment and rising non-personnel costs. Over the past three years, enrollment has steadily declined, and projections indicate this trend will continue into the 2025-2026 school year. At the same time, the District anticipates an increase in operating expenses unrelated to staffing.

As a result of these financial pressures, the District is projecting an estimated budget deficit of approximately \$5.8 million for FY 2026 unless corrective action is taken. In response to this forecasted shortfall, the Board has engaged with administration, staff, union representatives, and the community to explore cost-saving options. While steps such as natural attrition and unpaid leave offerings are being pursued, these measures alone are insufficient to close the anticipated deficit.

Purpose:

In accordance with Alaska Statute AS 14.20.177, Board Policy 4117.3, and the KEA Negotiated Agreement, the Board is considering the adoption of a formal Reduction in Force (RIF) Plan. This plan would authorize the elimination of certain certificated positions, including both tenured and non-tenured roles, if necessary, to responsibly manage District finances while preserving essential academic programs.

Plan Overview:

- Non-tenured teachers without a Professional Alaska Teaching Certificate will be non-retained in reverse order of seniority.
- Additional non-tenured and tenured positions may be reduced based on program needs and teacher qualifications.
- Teachers will be notified of layoff decisions in accordance with legal and contractual requirements, including the May 15 statutory deadline for tenured staff.
- Laid-off teachers will retain recall rights for up to three years and maintain tenure and sick leave status.
- The District will prioritize retention of qualified teachers and maintain all academic programs not directly impacted by the reduction.

Recommendation:

Administration recommends the Board adopt the proposed RIF Plan as presented, in alignment with state law and the KEA agreement. Adoption of the plan does not constitute immediate layoffs but provides the necessary framework and authority to implement reductions if required by the final adopted FY 2026 budget.

Requested Board Action:

Motion to adopt the Reduction in Force (RIF) Plan for the 2025-2026 school year, as outlined in the resolution, and authorize administration to proceed with implementation in accordance with Alaska Statute AS 14.20.177, Board Policy 4117.3, and the KEA Negotiated Agreement.

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District

Reduction in Force Plan

WHEREAS, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District has seen enrollment decline for the past 3 years and projects that student enrollment will decline again for the 2025-26 school year; and

WHEREAS, the District anticipates its non-personnel costs will also increase for the 2025-26 school year;

WHEREAS, the District projects an anticipated estimated budget deficit of \$5,800,000.00 for the 2025-26 school year unless corrective measures are taken;

WHEREAS, the Board has notified the Ketchikan Education Association of the need for a reduction in force;

WHEREAS, the Board has heard public comment and administrative recommendations regarding the most educationally responsible means to respond to this budget crisis;

WHEREAS, Board Policy 4117.3 and the Negotiated Agreement between the Ketchikan Education Association and the Ketchikan Gateway School District (“the KEA Negotiated Agreement”) allow the Board to enact a reduction in force when it becomes necessary;

WHEREAS, State Statute AS 14.20.177 permits a school board to adopt a reduction in force plan if the board finds that the district is experiencing declining student enrollment and a reduction in force will likely be necessary to responsibly manage the district's finances; and

WHEREAS, the administration and the Board have considered a wide variety of cost cutting options and the Board has determined that even after natural attrition and offering unpaid leave, a reduction in the District's teaching positions is necessary as one means of addressing the District's anticipated budget deficit;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that:

1. The Board hereby adopts this reduction in force plan, consistent with AS 14.20.177 and the KEA Negotiated Agreement, which eliminates certificated positions, potentially including tenured positions, but allows the District to maintain its academic programs.

2. If the Board finds that a reduction in force is necessary based upon the fiscal considerations detailed above, the reduction in force of certified teaching positions will be conducted in accordance with Alaska statutes and the KEA Negotiated Agreement.

3. The following procedures will be followed pursuant to AS 14.20.177 and the KEA Negotiated Agreement. The District will provide notice of non-retention to all non-tenured teachers that do not hold a Professional Alaska teaching certificate in reverse order of seniority. The District will provide notice of non-retention to all non-tenured teachers (including non-tenured teachers who teach at the District's charter schools) in

reverse order of seniority. The District may lay off tenured teachers who, because of the elimination of specific programs or regular education positions, are not qualified to teach in any District positions. If the District still needs to reduce the number of teaching positions, the District will provide layoff notice to tenured teachers in reverse order of seniority. The District may retain non-tenured teachers and place on layoff status a tenured teacher if there is no tenured teacher in the District who is qualified to replace the non-tenured teacher.

4. The Board reviews the Administration's proposed budget in April. The Board then considers input from community members, parents, certified and classified staff and their unions, principals, and the District Administration. After receiving further information regarding funding from the State of Alaska, the Borough, the federal government, and any other sources, the Board will adopt a budget. As the Board works to finalize the District's FY 25 budget, it will make a decision regarding implementation of the reduction in force Plan.

5. If the Board implements a reduction in force, the District will provide the Ketchikan Education Association a list that ranks all teachers by seniority with their certification and endorsements and another list that indicates those teachers that are identified for layoff.

6. Pursuant to the Negotiated Agreement, Seniority is defined as uninterrupted years, months and days of teaching service in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District. Approved leave, with or without pay, shall not be considered as interruption in years of service.

7. For purposes of this Plan, state law provides that a tenured teacher is considered qualified for a position if the position is in

- a. grades K-8 and the teacher has an elementary endorsement;
- b. an established middle school and the teacher has
 - (i) an elementary endorsement;
 - (ii) a middle school endorsement; or
 - (iii) a secondary certificate with a subject area endorsement in the area of assignment in which the teacher filling the position will spend at least 40 percent of the teacher's time or the teacher has, within the five years immediately preceding the last date on which the teacher performed teaching services in the district before being laid off, received an evaluation stating that the teacher's performance in the subject or subjects meets the district performance standards; or
- (c) grades 9-12 and the teacher has an endorsement for each subject area in which the teacher filling the position will spend at least 40 percent of the teacher's time or the teacher has, within the five years immediately preceding the last date on which the teacher performed teaching services in the district before being laid off, received an evaluation stating that the teacher's performance in the subject or subjects meets the district performance standards.

8. The District shall recall teaching staff affected by this reduction in force if and when, in the course of the next three years, the Board determines that changed financial circumstances make it economically and educationally responsible to reinstate one or more teaching positions. Teachers who wish to be considered for recall shall notify the District in March of each year to continue on layoff status for the following school year. The notice must contain the teacher's phone number, mailing address and email address. The District shall offer the position to teachers in inverse order of the layoff procedure described in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the negotiated agreement. If the teacher does not accept the offer of a teaching position within 30 calendar days of receipt of the offer, the teacher will no longer be considered on layoff status and is no longer entitled to hiring preference unless the teacher declines the offer because the teacher is contractually obligated to provide professional services to another private or public educational program.

9. Teachers on leave at the time of lay-off shall be treated as if they were presently teaching.

10. A tenured teacher who has received notification of lay-off may elect to take unpaid leave for up to one year. Teachers who elect to take unpaid leave in lieu of lay-off shall be considered for recall following the expiration of such leave in accord with these procedures, provided written notice of interest in and availability is provided to the District by March 15 annually.

11. Continuing access to benefits shall be available to any laid-off teachers to the extent provided by COBRA.

12. A laid-off tenured teacher shall be granted priority status by seniority on the District's substitute teacher list unless the teacher does not complete the necessary substitute forms.

13. Layoff status does not constitute a break in service for retaining tenure rights and accrued sick leave.

14. The District shall maintain all other academic programs not affected by the plan.

15. The District will provide layoff notices to any tenured teachers prior to the May 15th deadline set forth in AS 14.20.140.