

## Parent Notification 1/22/19

Last week our board of directors approved a resolution opting our school district out of our local Educational Service District (ESD) services. For most people, this action probably won't mean much, so I thought it would be a good idea to send an email to parents and informing you what this means and how it will affect you in case you do hear about it on social media, the newspaper, or just in conversation with others.

Ultimately, for most parents and students, you will not notice a a difference in how we do business.

The ESD is an educational entity that envelopes a region of school districts. In the state of Oregon there are 19 such ESD's, one of which is Harney ESD. ESD's collect taxes and are designed to enhance the services we provide our students. In many cases, districts are too small to hire for specialized services for students or staff, so coming together as a consortium of districts has the potential of sharing staff and services.

As we have studied over the past several months the services we receive from our ESD versus the cost of taking care of these services ourselves, we have determined that our best option is to opt out of the ESD, cut out the middle man, and provide these services ourselves without the help of the ESD. What this means is that our district will receive approximately \$500-600K to provide services for our students and staff.

Some people have been worried that because we're opting out of the ESD, jobs will be lost. I can't speak to exactly what cuts the ESD may need to make, but I can say that if we end up hiring new positions to take care of services that the ESD previously supplied, we will be considering employing these employees, especially if they have already been working with our students. It not only makes logical sense, it is the law that we do this. Student needs are not going to change and services will still need to be provided.

The local service plan that is developed by all the schools in the ESD includes services such as professional development, technology, specialized Special Education services, subscriptions to software services, policies, etc. Please know that we are NOT going to drop any services that the local service plan provides us. If anything, we may end up adding some enhanced services through the money we gain by opting out. This move will benefit our district, not hurt it.

There are multiple reasons for my recommendation to the board to opt out of the ESD Local Service Plan including improved services for students and staff, potentially more services for students and staff, more control of the services we receive, improved use of public funds, and more flexibility.

I'm a strong believer that we need to optimize public dollars and be good stewards of the funds we receive to provide services. In many cases with the ESD, we are contracting through the ESD who then contracts with other entities, even other ESD's.

We've reached out to the providers of contracted services and you shouldn't notice a change. None of the quotes I've received indicate that our costs will go up by opting out. We'll still be using Synergy (our student records management system), and we'll still be working with the Synergy folks at the High Desert ESD for support, and many of the other providers of contract services we currently use.

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This year we switched over technology services and were able to hire our own technology employees to take care of most of our technology needs. We continued to contract some technology services this year with the ESD, but starting next year we plan to run it completely on our own. Our technology department continues to not only make our current technology work for us, but they also look to the future and are excited about continually improving it. I believe that our opt out will help us continue to fund and supply high quality tech services to our students and staff.

I anticipate for staff that we are going to be able to have more reliable and consistent professional development. We are hoping to add in a more regular and reliable mentor program for new staff members and use our funds for the professional development that teachers request and need. Again, I think we gain quite a bit of flexibility by opting out and taking full control of the funds.

Some may say that we lose out on 10% of the funds because the ESD can take a 10% indirect cost. The ESD already takes this 10% out of our local service plan as an indirect cost, so we're no worse for the wear.

One thing that I do understand is that by opting out, this goes against what we have traditionally done and what we have been used to doing for years. It's different. I understand this, but I strongly believe that in our case, what is best for our students and our staff is to opt out and use the funds to provide high quality services to our students and staff. It's change for sure, but the positive reasons for opting out far outweighed the reasons to continue to do the same thing we've been doing with our ESD. It was time for a change and I believe that the change will be for the better.

We are not the only school district in the state to opt out of an ESD. Others have done the same thing whenever they have felt that they could provide equal to better services. At some point in the future, if it makes sense to join forces again with the ESD, we can do so.

Ultimately, I wanted to put everyone's mind at ease that we will continue to offer the same or enhanced student and staff services by opting out of the ESD. If the ESD ends up cutting some of their employees, these may include people who we may be able to hire into our district to provide the services we need anyway.

What I would like to do is ask that if you have questions, please send them to me and I will start an FAQ page on our website as others may have similar questions. Some people are nervous about this change and I'd like to alleviate their concerns with the right information.

Thank you for your understanding as we make this change next year.

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