

# School supporters speak in defense of programs at budget hearing

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Parents, grandparents and students filled McKay High School's auditorium, clogged the stairwell, stood in doorways and overflowed into the cafeteria Tuesday, all in an effort to save their favorite programs in the face of a \$55 million shortfall.

More than 40 people signed up to testify at the Salem-Keizer School District Budget Committee hearing, including dozens who spoke in favor of saving the swim program — the only sport targeted for possible elimination next year.

South Salem High School swim team member Stephanie Gates urged the district not to close Olinger Pool, part of the proposed cuts, because it would be too expensive to reopen.

"This is not something we can afford to throw away," she said.

Her teammate Barrett Nutsch offered a more personal reason.

"Swimming," he said, "saved my life."

Nutsch said he weighed more than 200 pounds before he started swimming for South Salem High a few years ago. Now he's down to 160 pounds because of swimming, he said.

Other students testified about the power of music.

"I can't explain the power of having a voice that truly expresses who I am," said McKay choir student Zachary Jackson.

McKay student Samantha Martinez listed the ways music teaches science, math, history and human expression as well as its ability to move others, including the special-education students she works with.



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A Salem-Keizer School District Budget Committee hearing Tuesday draws a packed house at McKay High School.

## Possible cuts to Salem-Keizer schools in 2011-12

- Cut as many as 400 teachers.
- Cut as many as 230 support staffers.
- Eliminate six elementary assistant principals and possibly three to 13 other administrators.
- Close Fruitland Elementary, Bethel Elementary and Lake Labish Elementary next autumn and Rosedale Elementary and Hazel Green Elementary in 2012.
- Negotiate compensation concessions with employee unions; the district hopes to gain \$13 million to \$15 million in concessions.
- Increase elementary and middle school class sizes by two students.
- Reduce middle school and high school athletics and possibly raise fees and eliminate swim teams.
- Freeze purchases of technology and continue to freeze textbook purchases.
- Cut 5 percent to 10 percent in supplies.

"The way their eyes light up when they make music is indescribable."

Several parents made their case to keep Salem-Keizer's five small schools open, which the district proposed closing during the next two years.

Bethel Elementary parent Adam Kuenzi offered solutions including combining the small schools and making them schools of choice to boost enrollment.

"For us it's not about the big fancy gyms," he said, "It's about the quality of education, and it's about community."

Eduardo Angulo, the chairman of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, urged the district to continue its efforts to close the achievement gap between English Language Learners and their peers.

"We must all work together to close the gap, where every child feels supported," he said.

One of the loudest rounds of applause came when grandparent and Stand for Children member Jan Nelson made a general plea for more funding for education in Oregon.

"How long are we going to keep fighting over pieces of the pie," she said, "and put more food on the table?"

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#### **Budget meetings**

April 26: Superintendent Sandy Husk presents the school district's proposed budget to the committee at 6 p.m. at a location to be determined.

May 3, 4 and possibly May 9, 11: Budget hearings at a location to be determined.