Idaho Falls schools lose all federal impact funds

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Idaho Falls School District 91, under Reagan's cutback program, expect no federal impact funds the coming year, putting a further financial squeeze on patrons and students.

Jerry Jacobson, superintendent, and Ted Schow, director of business and operations of the school district, Friday gave this gloomy prospect in view of what is happening in Washington.

A couple a months ago, for example, Sen. Steve Symms gleefully announced in a news release that $300 million would be restored to the 1982 budget for impact aid to local schools.

At that time, Symms announced he and Sen. John Tower, R-Texas, had successfully urged the additional funding before giving final approval to the budget reconcilation for 1981-82.

That sounded well on the face of it, but further digging indicates Idaho schools will get little of these funds. It will be Texas — where there are many military installations — that will get a handsome slice of the pot.

Jacobson and Schow explained this money is earmarked for what is known in educational circles as "Super Category A," which is restricted for students who reside on a federal installation, such as an military base. Inasmuch as there is only the Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho and Indian reservations, they will be the only school districts to get the federal impact money.

Idaho Falls school district and all the other eastern Idaho school districts which have people working at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory or for the federal government in other capacity, such as Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, and various other agencies, are classified in Category B. These are for students whose parents work for the federal government but do not reside on the federal installation but in taxpaying school districts.

"We don't expect any federal impact funds this year but only that which is due from the past year," said Jacobson.

He explained District 91 was earmarked for $225,000 im impact funding for fiscal 1981 but actually received only $185,000. Jacobson said the remaining $40,000 due is all that is expected the coming year.

"It isn't much, but every little bit will help," said Jacobson.

This is not to say the Idaho Falls district will not receive any federal funding.

Schow estimated about $400,000 is expected from what is known title grants, and he names these as Title VI-B, Title IV-B, Title IV-C and migrant education.

Some of these were slightly cut, such as 5.5 percent in Title VI-B grant, which is about $15,000.

"Fortunately," said Schow, "a plan for block grants was defeated. This would have called for one lump sum on an 80 percent basis and then divided among the school districts in Idaho. It would have been disastrous."

Jacobson said he had hoped at first that some money would have been given for Category B but subsequent information now reveals definitely this will not be the case.

"The federal impact school funding is the best kind because it has no strings attached," said Jacobson.

Jacobson said Idaho Falls School District has received annually as much as $500,000 in past years on impact funding, but in most recent years it has totaled about $400,000. Last year it was drastically sliced to $185,000.

Hugh Owens, Blackfoot School District 55 business agent, said the Blackfoot district expects to receive between $400,000 and $500,000 because of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, about 60 percent of the between $700,000 and $800,000 it has received in past years.

He reported Mountain Home will get the biggest portion, with some federal impact funding to go to Pocatello and Lapwai where there also are Indian reservations.

Symms has reported that Idaho loses enormous amount of funds because of federal land ownership.

In Blackfoot, for example, School District 55 is comprised or more than 309,000 acres, but 224,000 acres, more than two-thirds, is federally owned.

"The loss of revenue from property taxes alone approaches $1 million," Symms said in referring to the Blackfoot district at the time he announced the restoration of the federal impact funds.

He went on to say "impact aid funding is necessary for local school districts in the West where so much of the land is owned by the federal government. If the federal government paid taxes to states and localities we wouldn't have to be concerned with aid, but some kind of compensation is necessary."

Yet, in spite of these words, Idaho school districts get little federal impact funding.