

Freeport RIF

Freeport School District 145 announced a layoff of staff in an effort to solve a more than \$11 million budget deficit.

This process – called a reduction in force or a RIF– was announced to staff at the beginning of this month.

The budget deficit is coming from rising costs for building maintenance and to provide health insurance to staff. Additionally, less money is coming in from the state and federal governments to help off-set these costs. At this time, the school board is unwilling to raise property taxes to increase revenue.

According to FSD145, all positions are being reviewed and nothing is off the table.

A statement from the district office said...We did not wait for things to get worse before acting. At the start of this school year, every department, including the Superintendent's office, was asked to reduce its budget by 20% in the first round, followed by an additional 22% reduction shortly after. Those were not easy cuts, but they were necessary ones.

Freeport Education Association President Kelly Everding gave a speech to the board at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 3rd. Everding called on the board for transparency in this process. She also demanded the board review all positions for elimination and not just classroom, custodial or transportation staff.

Kelly Everding: "The fact that we are even having this conversation, the fact that the financial stewardship of this district has led us to a place where reducing the number of staff directly serving students every day is considered a necessary evil is a critical failure. "

The district says staff will hear at the end of the month about if they will be laid off before it goes to the board for approval in early April.

Pickleball courts renovations and lights

Krape Park will get more than half a million dollars in upgrades by the end of next year, thanks to a new grant.

The park will add a scenic nature overlook, an ADA-accessible fishing pier, two new playgrounds, a rock-climbing boulder, disc golf equipment, and new lighting for the pickleball courts.

Work begins this summer and will be completed by December 2027.

Pickleball players at the high school are looking forward to the new lights.

Sydney Rackow: “If there were lights, I’d probably just play all night until my mom made me come home, or until everyone else left.”

Steven and Kam Meet the Governor

Two Freeport journalism students, Steven Van and Kamryn Bradbury, interviewed Governor JB Pritzker in January this year.

The two drove to Lena and were eager to practice their interviewing skills with the governor.

Bradbury asked a question about the Rockford Teacher’s Union potentially going on a strike, and Van asked a question about increasing economic developments in Stephenson and Jo Daviess Counties

The two saw it as a good opportunity to experience a professional setting of journalism and to also experience a rare opportunity to meet with the governor of Illinois.

Gov. Pritzker was in town visiting Kolb in Lena, Illinois to announce that 50 new jobs were coming to the area because the cheese manufacturing factory will be expanding.

Academic Interventions - ACT

Select juniors got the opportunity to prepare for the ACT with Tried and True, a test prep company, provided by Upward Bound.

These selected students were close to being proficient on the pre-ACT– so principal Sarah Hasken hopes the extra practice will help students become college-ready on the actual test.

Students spent one week working on test-taking strategies related to the subjects on the ACT. Students practiced reading, English, math, and science.

FHS students will take the ACT on April 9.

Academic Interventions - Grades

The high school is also working to improve its graduation rate by providing targeted support to students who are struggling with their grades.

This semester, FHS hired an English interventionist to help students with reading and writing. Meanwhile, the math teachers pull students out of advisory to work on math assignments and related skills.

These interventions helped the high school get its freshman-on track levels to the highest levels ever. This is the rate of how many freshmen are on track to graduate within four years.

Journalism MN Field Trip

Journalism students are heading to their first national conference this year in Minneapolis.

Selected students in the Media Production pathway will go on to an overnight trip conference to learn more about journalism.

Media production teachers Jena Kleindl and Haley Kurtz want students to have the opportunity to learn from industry professionals and other school's programs.

They hope the conference will help students in the media pathway further their media and communication skills.

Dylan Colberg Star Farmer

Freeport FFA President, Dylan Colberg, was recognized as this area's Star Farmer and Beef Entrepreneurship Proficiency Award winner. Now– he's forging ahead to compete at the state level.

Colberg earned these recognitions through his outstanding scholastic achievements, his active participation in FFA, management of his beef cattle, and record-keeping skills.

Colberg will represent Freeport FFA of Section 1 FFA, and has the chance to earn the highest award in his Supervised Agricultural Experience area.

He will finish with his final interview at the state-level competition at the end of March.

Hear from Dylan Colberg and his FFA advisor Brittani DeVries about this special award.

Dylan Colberg: "Star Farmer is just the title. You're the best of the best."

Brittani DeVries: "I would say that I am really proud of Dylan, but this is really a win for Dylan and it's really just a testament to how much work he's put into his project."

Keondre Jackson Visit

Keondre Jackson, a current NFL player and a 2020 graduate, visited Freeport to speak with high school students and to donate a jersey to his former high school.

With his return, Jackson held meet and greets with students during their lunch periods, took interviews in Jena Kleindl's Video Production class, and spoke to the entire school in an assembly held in the gym.

Jackson returned to FHS to talk about his journey and to inspire students to never give up on their dreams.

As a former Pretzel, Jackson wanted students to know that no matter who they are or what they want to be, they can be it.

Keondre Jackson: "Don't give up. It's a lot of different teachers, principals, resources that are stressed here that I can say all give me good advice. I can pick and point little things here and there, but something that stuck with me is Dedmond told me, especially the situation I come from, I can't let my situation dictate my future. I can't let that take control of where I want to be. That always stuck with me."

Treyden Diduch Champion

Freeport High School again has a state wrestling champion.

Treyden Diduch placed first in the 2-A 106-pound wrestling division in Champaign last month.

Diduch went nearly undefeated in the regular season before becoming the regional and sectional champion.

Diduch is the first boy's wrestling champion since Markel Baker won in 2022.

1000-point Athletes

Three athletes from FHS scored more than 1,000 points this past winter basketball season at Freeport High School.

Andrew Seward, KZ Morehead, and Aaliyah Martin all achieved this impressive feat this year.

According to their coaches and other players, these three athletes are all talented shooters who consistently scored throughout their high school careers, which led them to reach 1,000 career points.

Girl Soccer F/S Team

The girls' soccer team has its first fresh/soph team in over 15 years.

Nearly 45 girls tried out for the team this year. Coach Matt Janosik said the pretzels have lots of new potential talent to work with.

Matt Janosik: "It's going to help us meet the girls where they're at, so a lot of girls have never played before so we'll do a lot of foundational fundamental things to help build them up, but it also lets us coach some of the girls that have been playing longer in a way that helps them too."

Boys Tennis

The Freeport Boys' Tennis Team has returned for their spring season this year, following a historic back-to-back undefeated NIC-10 conference titles in 2024 and 2025, their first conference titles in 30 years.

Unfortunately, the team has lost more than half of its varsity team, but they still hope to make great success.

However, the team has a wave of close to 20 freshmen, hoping to rebuild their depth for future seasons.

Girls Track Returners

The girls track team is back competing this year with all of their star, state-qualifying runners returning again.

Last year's state-qualifying relay team includes McElroy twins Ta'leiah and Ta'niah, Angela Meighan, and Kanijah Fletcher – who are all warming up and preparing to break new records.

During the indoor season so far – Ta'Leiah has already placed first at an indoor meet and broken a school record.

Showtime Update

Turning now to events going on in the community...

Freeport High School's Varsity Choir and Jazz Band are preparing for the school's 46th annual Showtime performance.

They will leave for tour in a few days to head off to Nashville, Tennessee.

Showtime Director Ryan Jensen says he's looking forward to leading his first Showtime performance.

Ryan Jensen: "Showtime is on track to be a great show and I feel like we are going to have a show that is great in its own respect but honors the tradition of the past 45 years of Showtime. I'm excited to give the students and the varsity choir this opportunity to showcase their talents."

You can watch the performance April 9-12 at 7 p.m. in the Jeanette Lloyd Theatre.

Probation Presentation

The League of Women Voters will host an information talk about the role of probation within the criminal justice system.

The director of the Stephenson County Probation Department, Dr. JoAnn McGee, will lead the presentation on how probation works to prevent future crime and restore a person back into the community.

The program will be on Tuesday, March 24 at 6:30 p.m. in the Freeport Public Library.