

## Community Forum

### Additional Questions and Answers

#### **Is there a budget deadline of April 30<sup>th</sup> from NYS?**

As of April 13<sup>th</sup>, the NYS legislators still have not set a state budget. This is posing a problem to all school districts as we are uncertain of our revenue. We have been told to “plan for the worst.” Therefore, in building our 2010-11 budget, we estimated the state revenue to be \$17,963,337. It should be noted that we were recently notified that the Governor was withholding our quarterly state aid payment of \$3.3M. The delayed payment should be received in June.

#### **In reviewing the contingent budget, why is the tax rate higher than the proposed budget?**

As previously noted, the recommended budget for 2010-11 is \$66.4M with a 3.88% tax rate increase. Should the budget fail and the choice of the community is to go on contingency, the tax rate increase would be 4.60%. A contingency scenario does not utilize fund balance to supplement the budget. It is fiscally prudent to access those funds in the subsequent year when the District is “recovering” from contingency and state aid is decreased. The Governor’s proposal has indicated the percentage increase from budget to budget is -.39%. That would translate to removing an additional \$1.7M from the expenditure side.

#### **In the latest draft, what is maintained, cut and added? How do we get more details?**

To get a comprehensive look, please look at the PowerPoint presentation that is posted on the website. To date, April 13<sup>th</sup>, the staffing has yet to be finalized due to no definitive aid to the district.

The PowerPoint presentation will also reflect the reductions, as well as the answers, posted on a prior Q & A. A line item budget will be presented and posted on the website for the April 21<sup>st</sup> Board of Education meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. in the Choral Room at the High School.

#### **MTA Tax – What’s up?**

We have been informed that we should receive reimbursement for the MTA Tax (\$125,000) on June 1. Be mindful that the tax will continue next year at a yet to be determined amount. Therefore, we will accept the money upon receipt and be prepared to pay again next year.

**There is a reinstatement of a Fine and Performing Arts supervisor. Is this position a chairperson or director?**

Four years ago the position of supervisor for Fine and Performing Arts was moved from a coordinator's position to a district-wide director's position. This was done in consultation with the president of the teachers' union and approved by NYSUT as the role and responsibilities of the position were in alignment with an administrative job. Last year with the budget preparations, the administrative unit agreed to have that position teach two classes as a coordinator with restoration to director in 2010. By doing so, the District was able to see a savings. To meet our obligation, we are restoring the position. The elimination of the Assistant Superintendent's position for 2010 – 11 will enable us to restore the salary at no additional cost in the budget.

**What is the follow-up for the bus schedule from the prior forum?**

In carefully reviewing the bus scheduling with the Assistant Superintendent for Business and our transportation company, Suffolk Transportation, we were able to collapse several bus runs due to enrollment. Also, we examined the out-of-district routes and were able to share more rides. Similarly, we examined all late busses. The bus runs from the High School and Middle School are included in our fees; however, in monitoring usage, the 6:00 p.m. late bus has only a handful of athletes, so that one was removed from the schedule. The savings will be \$140,000.

**How will we inform the public (non-student homes) of the budget and how can people help get the message out?**

The District has already been working on the budget flyer which is mailed to all homes within the Islip School District's boundaries. All information about the budget is also available on the website. We are able to inform parents/guardians of the date of the budget vote through our Connect-Ed system. The budget is also being shared at community meetings such as Community Council, Community Appreciation Night, Chamber of Commerce, etc. Individual community members can share any information that they would like with neighbors. It is important to note that NYS regulations prohibit school districts from telling residents how to vote – we can only give information and remind everyone of voting dates and regulations.

**What is balanced literacy and what is the cost?**

A balanced literacy approach focuses on two essential areas: Reading and writing. This approach engages children in a variety of authentic reading and writing experiences. It benefits students in many ways: Students develop a broad range of reading and writing abilities; both focused instruction and independent work are valued so there is a better change to meet the needs of a diverse group of students; students learn basic information and skills, but they also develop strategies that will help them apply their knowledge in a variety of reading and writing contexts; there is an emphasis on comprehension, which is the goal of all reading. In order to provide students with independent reading materials,

leveled readers of fiction and non-fiction texts are needed to provide the learner with appropriate materials to remediate, practice or enrich word study and comprehension skills. Over the past few years, the elementary buildings have begun to purchase leveled readers for bookrooms that provide a classroom teacher with these necessary readers. The budget has allocated \$59,000 to be distributed to the three schools. In 2009-10 two highly regarded consultants in the area of balanced literacy worked with our wonderful staff to provide embedded professional development. The consultants are being paid through grant money with no cost to the taxpayer and will continue their services next year, as well. As educators we understand that all children should be reading at grade level by grade three. Balanced literacy and RtI go hand in hand in helping reach that goal.

**One parent noted that in 2005 her student was told that things in the classroom could not be done because of the contingency budget.**

The president of the Board of Education commented that it is important to maintain a level of professionalism. The superintendent would address issues like this should we be on contingent.

#### **What are the staff cuts?**

As of April 13<sup>th</sup> the staff cuts could include 14 instructional staff and 9 non-instructional staff (teaching assistants, custodial, clerical and one district office staff member). Instructional staff reductions are attributed to lower enrollment at the middle school (estimated 74 students) and the increase of class size in the elementary schools. The numbers will be less than the contractual limit, which is 26 in grades K-3 and 27 in grades 4-8. There will be additional 1-3 students in each class depending on the grade level. Look on the website under In the News, Budget 2010-11, Budget Workshop Session 3, to see a chart that displays all recommended class sizes.

#### **Why did we note that in a prior Q & A that the staff reductions would have a “minor” effect on instruction?**

Although we understand that staff reductions needed to be made to meet the financial challenges in preparing this budget, no one in central office was happy to make the recommendation. The addition of 1-3 students in a class still keeps the numbers reasonable. Islip teachers do a wonderful job in the classrooms, and it is believed that they will continue to do so. The numbers are still less than when the District was on contingent and even then, the students received an excellent education. When times are better and enrollment stable, positions may be restored.

#### **Is there a retirement incentive?**

Last year a retirement incentive was offered to the teachers and clerical staff. Almost a dozen employees took advantage of the offering. This year we were unable to develop an incentive that could be mutually agreed upon.

**It doesn't appear that the cuts were equitable. Why so heavy in class size? Why were the "sacred cows" (athletics, co-curricular, etc.) not touched?**

Reductions were made in all areas across the expense lines, including maintenance/repairs, furniture, BOCES spending, debt service and transportation. About 75% of our budget is in salaries, and yet are reductions were about 66%.

In regard to "extra" activities – about one third of our students are in a musical performing group and art. About one third of our High School students are in after-school athletic programs. All clubs at the Middle School and High School were maintained. Keeping our students engaged in after-school activities encourages them to be in safe environment. Also, research indicates that students who are involved in activities such as these perform better in school, have higher attendance rates, and continue on to college careers.

**Are all electives being maintained?**

The schedule at the High School is being created based on student selection. Upon reviewing the students loaded into each class, decisions to reduce a section may be made based on low enrollment. Some students may not be able to take certain choices based on their own individual schedules. It is important to note that more staff is needed in technology to accommodate the number of students asking for digital photography. Subsequently, fewer students are asking for art electives, so there is a reduction in that area.

**Are administrators considered "non instructive"?**

As previously mentioned, there is the elimination of the part time Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services. The reduction in that salary is being used to offset the reinstatement of the Director of Fine and Performing Arts and data support.

**Where are we in the process of implementing RtI?**

Mr. O'Brien and Mrs. Semel put together a district-wide committee with administrators and staff to develop a District policy for Response to Intervention, which was approved by the Board of Education on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Assessment materials such as Fountas and Pinnell Running Records Kits have been purchased through grant money to assist with the collection of data. All grade 2 teachers have been trained, and others will be during a Superintendent Conference Day. Our new AWARD reading/technology program also provides teachers with data on reading in all areas. Elementary buildings are collecting data based on screenings that are conducted in the classrooms. RtI scaffolds intervention in a three-tiered model. The collection of data, coupled with instructional strategies, guides the intervention through the three phases. This is well on its way. We are also including a behavioral component in the model, as well.

**What is our AIS (Academic Intervention Services) process and how do we adapt it for the needs of the students?**

AIS is a service that is correlated to RtI. Currently all students who fall below the proficiency level (Level 3) on NYS assessments in grades 3-8 are eligible for reading/math support. Certified reading teachers who have a variety of instructional strategies and programs work with students on their specific needs. Needs are assessed through examining data and also classroom curriculum based measures (CMBs). As the year progresses, students who may require assistance can be brought to IST, where a team of educators reviews performance and student work and brainstorms instructional strategies that may be more effective. This is tied into RtI because the level of surface is increased if strategies are not effective. Mrs. Semel, Executive Director of Curriculum K-12, oversees the implementation and assists the administration and staff. Over the past few years, the District has purchased programs and trained AIS personnel in Foundations, Wilson, Break Through to Literacy, AWARD, guided reading, Read 180, Fast Forward, Plato and more to build our arsenal of materials.