

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year. I hope that all of you have been able to take time off from your busy, hectic lives to step back and be thankful for what you have. I am thankful for having a wonderful wife, two great children, one dog and two cats. , I believe that we all need to step back and take a break and give thanks for what we have.

While many of you were shopping, tree trimming, and enjoying the snow, and not the ice, the Board has been immersed in working on the budget. The budget session is in full swing, and over the last few weeks the Board with support from the SAU administration has held a series of budget listening meetings. The purpose of these meetings was for us to hear from all of you your thoughts, concerns and priorities for the 2010-2011 budget. Meetings have been held in Peterborough, Antrim, Dublin, and we cosponsored a meeting in Bennington with the Greenfield and Bennington representatives. What we have been hearing from all of you is to continue to be fiscally responsible while maintaining the educational integrity of our District. We also have heard that you need to be better informed about, the what and the why behind our proposed program changes and not just the dollar cost associated with the recommendation. We also have been asked that if trade-off decisions are necessary to not trade off teachers in the classroom, but look for other ways to save money. Finally, you have asked us to provide you with the estimated tax impact of our proposed budget on a per thousand dollar basis.

A month ago, the Superintendent provided the Board with two different budget development models for us to consider. The first is called a level services model, which can be thought of as a no-growth model. What that means is that new programs that have been piloted would not be adopted for the next school year. All programs would stay the same and nothing new could be implemented. The currently piloted math programs in the elementary schools would not be able to be implemented. We would still need to meet all contractual obligations, and other fixed would be budgeted for, i.e. fuel transportation etc. It is important to note that this still would lead to bottom line increases in the 2010-2011 budget as compared to the 2009-2010 budget. The default budget is \$41,104,256, which is a 1.1% increase of \$441913.

The other model known as the growth or path improvement model would allow for the movement of pilot programs to adopted programs. This would include math in the middle school, full adoption of the district wide technology program, and adoption of a new K-4 language arts program. There is also an early language arts reading program being piloted in the elementary schools. We would also be able to continue to fund the literacy coaches who have been responsible for making great strides assisting staff across the district with development and implementation of new and more effective reading instructional strategies. These are just some of the programs we need to continue to support

At the last Educational committee meeting, of which I am a member, our committee overwhelming supported the path improvement model. It is our belief which I fully support, that we must continue to support and thus fund programs that directly impact our students and staff which are included in the District strategic plan for 2010-2015. The

plan has a well articulated, year by year approach to curriculum assessment, re-design, pilot, re-assess, and implantation plan. We recommended to the full Board that we support this important plan which serves as the blueprint for how we need to budget and support the needs of the District and thus allow our Administration to execute their strategic plan.

On Saturday December, 12th, the Board was presented with the version 1 of the proposed budget. The budget, which has been built on the three tenets of educational responsibility, fiscal responsibility, and social responsibility, as well as the program continuation model, came in at \$41,779,546, for a 2.75% increase. This budget included increases for technology, new programs moving from pilot to implementation phase, as well as ongoing support for our newer educational programs. There also were increases in health insurance and NH retirement contributions. It also reflected reductions in some of our maintenance lines for waste disposal, snow plowing etc. Another area of savings was in our property and workman's compensation liabilities. There was also a proposal to reduce full time equivalent teacher positions (FTE) and, also FTE para-professional positions, which was based on the shifting and declining enrollment across the district. One para-professional would be impacted at FES due to the shift in enrollment. The Board has evaluated these recommendations and has requested shifts in where the reductions are going to be made. There will be reductions in debt service of almost \$500,000 as well.

The Board following lengthy discussion and debate directed the SAU to make changes to their proposals. First, we requested another look at staff reductions. This has resulted in some staff reductions not occurring in PES and AES as well as preservation of proposed cuts in art, health and foreign languages. However, there will still be reductions across the District. The Board has been assured that through extended learning opportunities, i.e. virtual high school, students would be able to enroll in classes that are affected by reductions in the High School. Most of the other reductions are the results of enrollment shifts and efficiencies made within and even across buildings. The Board has also reduced the technology request for additional smart boards at SMS, moved the funds from the Capital Trust Fund to pay for roof replacement at Pierce instead of allocated funds from the operating budget.

As of our last Board meeting on December 16th our second version of the operating budget has seen a further reduction of \$205099. For a net increase of 2.24% vs last years budget. Did you know that one way the District saved money this past year was to hold a district "yard sale" that afforded staff from one building to be able to take unused resources from other buildings at no cost to the district. This is only one example of working creatively and cooperatively to manage tight budgets. There will be another meeting scheduled during the first week or two of January and I hope to see many of you there so we can discuss the budget in more depth.

I wanted to provide you with some insight into not only what we are thinking about, but how our programs are being piloted and tested and what it would mean to our children if we do not provide sufficient funding to implement, measure and assess our pilots. I also

would encourage you to ask for a copy of our Strategic plan so you can see how things are broken down and what the future of your children's education can and should look like in the future. Stay tuned for a more thorough and details article on the budget as well as any bond proposals that we will bring to our voters. One last request, as you read this article, read articles in the Ledger-Transcript, or talk about the budget with each other, remember that we need to look at the value that a program has on the education of the children as well as the impact on your taxes. The impact of your vote could well mean making trade-off decisions that can have a direct impact our stated goal to make ConVal a high performing district. I only ask that you find the time to ask me the tough questions so when you make a chose to vote for the budget, you do so with a more complete picture of how we are education the children and not just focus on the dollars spent or increases proposed. I look forward to hearing from many of you soon

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