

Budget FAQ's 2/4/08

1. EXPLAIN ZERO-BASED BUDGETING AND WHY IT WAS CHOSEN AS THE METHOD THIS YEAR?

This method is a different way of developing a budget. A zero-based financial approach applies the process of building each budgeted line item up from zero. This intensive review occurs without recognition of staffing or programmatic decisions of the past. Each proposal must be accompanied by accepted and prioritized rationale. The purpose of starting with a zero base is to ensure that we critically reviewed the rationale for all proposed expenditures. Another benefit is that only the most critical needs will be put forward. It is important to note that a key tenet is that all decisions will be centered on providing our children with the best education possible. All cost saving efforts are framed around a promise to support and maintain an effective pre-K to 12 educational program.

2. WHAT WERE THE BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS FOR FY 09? No salary increases for any employees covered by CVEA collective bargaining agreement. Other staff contract increases are between 2.5% and 5% with potential merit bonuses for administrative staff based on performance evaluation. District contribution for the health plan for non-bargaining unit employees is based on 95% of a new HMO with \$15 co-pay and \$500 deductible plus \$250 health reimbursement account. The transportation contract is scheduled to increase by 3.5%. Also elementary class size targets of 20+/- are being evaluated and have driven staffing consolidation. We are also working on a CIP/Strategic Plan Model.

3. WHAT ARE THE NEW PROGRAM PROPOSALS? Combined multi-age classes directed toward class sizes less than 10. Based on enrollment projections, FES will be combining grades K/1. Pre-K to 8 Campus Program at GBS and AES. New pre-school SpEd program for students on the Autism spectrum. Maintenance administration.

4. ARTS ENRICHMENT IS BEING ELIMINATED FROM THE BUDGET: The SAU strongly endorses arts enrichment and endorses a program that affords our children a rewarding and enriching program. The Board voted to restore full funding for the Arts Enrichment Program. The Board directed the Administration to work in collaboration with the program facilitator to determine the most effective funding allocation.

5. WORLD LANGUAGES ARE BEING ELIMINATED AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS: No. Our budget reflects a reduction in World Language positions as the two middle schools will now be sharing two teachers: 1 French and 1 Spanish. The reductions will provide the opportunity for the SAU to hire two certified health teachers. Health is a Department of Education mandated subject that is currently not offered in our middle school program. Our middle school World Language program will continue in the format of the previous exploratory model.

6. WHY IS THERE AN INCREASE ON LINE 351 SAU MANAGEMENT SERVICES WHEN POSITIONS ARE BEING ELIMINATED/CONSOLIDATED IN OTHER AREAS OF THE DISTRICT? During the Superintendent's review of the budget, it was determined that there were some services and line items that directly supported the SAU, but were budgeted under different lines, objects and schools. In an effort to place all direct costs of running the SAU in one area, some budget items were moved from one object to another. Specifically, under Purchased Services, 300 objects, 5 positions have been moved to the SAU line. Four are Special Education (Director, Assistant Director, and two Administrative assistant positions) that were previously budgeted in the SpEd salary line (Function 1200, Object 110), and one is the Administrative Assistant/Receptionist position at the SAU that was previously budgeted under Function 1100, object 110. The increase in the SAU line was offset by the corresponding decrease in other lines.

7. WHY ARE WE CREATING A CAMPUS AT GBS/AES? In analyzing various parts of the district, it was noted that the population of GBS has steadily declined over the last several years and is expected to continue to decline. It is also noted that the combined enrollment at GBS and AES is comparable to SMS. Based on this equivalency analysis, a detailed evaluation of staffing and structure was completed for SMS, AES and GBS. Assumptions have been made that the staffing and structure needed to run a population of SMS would be the same for a population of students at a combined AES/GBS. So a proposal was generated to create a campus in Antrim that would include both GBS and AES. The net result of this plan would be to consolidate staff in certain areas. One nurse and one PE position are scheduled to be reduced. Additionally, there will be only one Principal and one Assistant Principal. Please note: your 1st graders will NOT be going to GBS for classes and your 7th graders will NOT be attending classes at AES.

8. WILL GBS STUDENTS BE ATTENDING CLASSES IN AES AND VICE-A-VERSA? No, the campus plan will only affect staffing. Students will notice few changes. Cross grade learning will occur only in planned, structured curriculum driven opportunities.

9. HOW WILL YOU DETERMINE WHICH NURSING POSITION WILL BE ELIMINATED AT AES AND GBS? Any reduction in staff will take into account the workload, type of work, specific student concerns as well as tenure of all affected individuals.

10. ARE YOU GOING TO CLOSE ANY SCHOOLS NOW OR IN THE NEAR FUTURE? At this time there are NO plans to close any schools. The Articles of Agreement as they are written today, call for a school in every Town. The Board does not support the warrant article giving the Board authority to close schools.

11. DESCRIBE OTHER BUDGET REDUCTION AREAS. The District is not continuing the contract for maintenance management that we had with Aramark Corporation. We will hire our own management team. Another change will be a reduction of Out-of-District placements in Special Education. And, the new budgeting process has resulted in a much higher scrutiny by Principals of the need for supplies based on student populations.

12. WHY DO SOME OF THE SCHOOLS HAVE FAIRLY SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THEIR BUDGET WHEN OVERALL THE DISTRICT IS TAKING A ZERO-BASED APPROACH. Each school administrator was challenged with the task of using the new zero-based budgeting approach and submitting their budget based on needs to the Superintendent. Following submission, there were lengthy discussions between the Principals and the Superintendent until a final proposal was complete. As seen in the actual budgets, each school has differing needs. Some of the increases are due to staff moving with students from level to level, i.e. a paraprofessional moving with a student from elementary to middle school, or specific maintenance needs that must be addressed. Specific information for each school can be found in the full version of the budget under the section for that specific school.

13. WHY ARE SOME SCHOOLS LOSING STAFF WHILE OTHERS ARE INCREASING THEIR BUDGETS? Staffing decisions have been made based on student enrollment as well as a critical assessment of the various programs, services, and needs of each school. Multiple factors were used and final recommendations were made following discussions with school administrators, staff and the School Board. School budgets can also vary greatly due to differences in the seniority level of the staff in each school.

14. WHY AREN'T THE TEACHER'S SALARIES INCLUDED IN THE BUDGET? While expected lane changes are in the budget, the potential contract figures for a new contract are placed in a separate warrant article as required by law. If approved by the voters, subsequent salaries will be included in subsequent proposed budgets. The separate article for teacher salaries and benefits as proposed within the Fact Finder's Report has not been approved by the Board.

15. HOW DO THE SALARIES AND BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS AFFECT THE BUDGET? The continuous rise in the cost of benefits now contributes nearly fifty cents for every dollar spent in salary. Any negotiated increase will reflect not only salary but also associated benefit costs in the FY'09 budget totals.

16. WHY WAS THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR HIRED WHEN WE ARE CUTTING OTHER STAFF POSITIONS? The School Board determined a need to hire a Human Resources Director over a year ago in response to various needs and issues that have arisen over the last few years. The increasing complexity of running and supporting an organization with over 500 employees necessitated this action. Due to the hiring of a new Superintendent, the decision was made to wait to hire until after the new Superintendent was in place. The expense for this position had already been placed in the budget.

17. HOW DO YOU CALCULATE ADM AND HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CALCULATE IT IN THE FUTURE? Currently town shares of the school budget are calculated based 50% on equalized property values and 50% on ADM, less adequacy grants from the State, with both the property values and ADM measured two years earlier. The proposal on the Warrant would substitute the October 1 enrollment numbers of the current year for the ADM.

18. WHAT IS CONVAL'S IDEAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN A CLASS? Currently we do not have a policy governing class size. However, 20-25 students per class have been considered an acceptable size in past years. There is educational research to indicate that classes of this size create a rich and effective environment for learning. Difficulty arises in our smaller elementary schools where class/grade enrollments fluctuate annually.

19. WHAT HAPPENS IN AFFECTED SCHOOLS WITH MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS IF THERE IS AN INCREASE IN STUDENTS AFTER A POSITION IS CUT? Multi-Age classrooms are managed using the same enrollment criteria as all other elementary classrooms. Any spike or significant reduction in student enrollment triggers an administrative response including a reasoned set of proposals for School Board review which may include the addition of a new position.

20. I AM WORRIED THAT IF MY CHILD IS IN A MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM THEY WILL NOT GET A FULL AND ENRICHING GRADE AND AGE APPROPRIATE EDUCATION? The ConVal District has a long history of effective multi-age education in several of its elementary schools. Teachers new to multi-age education will be provided extensive professional development training and ongoing support. Multi-age teachers have a terrific instructional resource in the State Curriculum Frameworks. These comprehensive documents detail the scope and breath of our core subjects, including grade level expectations. All ConVal teachers are required to teach specific standards based course learning objective expectations.

21. WHAT ARE THE ENROLLMENT NUMBERS AND HOW DID YOU GATHER THE INFORMATION, WHAT ASSUMPTIONS HAVE BEEN MADE? Data is collected by NESDEC (New England School Development Council) a recognized organization that provides enrollment estimates to school districts throughout New England. Multiple demographic factors are considered when developing these projections.

22. ARE YOU GOING TO CONSOLIDATE BUS ROUTES? The examination of bus routes is currently underway and we look forward to cost saving changes in routes and sizes of buses. All routes are undergoing a comprehensive review to ensure quality service and efficiency.

23. HOW ARE WE MAKING THE DISTRICT GREENER? The District is pursuing the competitive rating of Energy Star designation for our schools. This designation supports a green approach toward facility maintenance and systems performance. To date, there have been lighting retrofits, remote HVAC control, and recyclable trays for food service, a project in conjunction with CVHS students.

24. WHAT IS THE DEFAULT BUDGET AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME? The default budget is the budget that will be adopted if the current proposed budget is not approved by the voters. This budget is based on the approved budget from last year plus any increases dictated by contracts, i.e. transportation, salaries, etc. The default budget is \$41,992,419. What does that mean to you? If the proposed budget is rejected, the default budget must be adopted and the result will be a need to cut an additional \$419,402 from the proposed budget. An important point regarding all of the proposed cuts, changes and suggestions, they will occur whether the proposed budget passes or not. If you oppose any part of the proposals, rejection of the budget will not result in defeating a given proposal.