



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

January 22, 2009

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In December, I recommended to the School Committee a level service budget for FY 10. In the present economic context of known and unknown revenue cuts, the Committee and I now feel that we should reduce that budget so that it will no longer reflect a \$1.8 million gap between costs and estimated revenue.

Last Tuesday evening, I recommended to the School Committee a list of budget cuts that totaled 1.85 million dollars (2.8% of the total budget proposed FY 2010 school budget). When preparing the list, the principals, central office administrators, and I examined every expenditure so that we could reduce the school budget in ways that we believe would not adversely impact classroom education, or at least would have a limited impact on the quality of education.

Reducing the school budget is not new to this administration. In 2006, the Lexington Public Schools began a vigorous energy conservation program that has reduced the net electricity consumption by \$250,000 (14%) over a three-year period. Last year, we returned over \$1 million dollars to the town by improving five in-district special education programs. These program enhancements allowed us to decrease the special education tuition and transportation budgets by reducing the number of students in out-of-district special education schools from 111 to 100. This year, as evening custodians have retired or resigned, we replaced their services with an outside cleaning contractor in some school/town buildings and will now save over \$80,000 per year.

While we are proud of our past accomplishments, the challenge we now face is how to thoughtfully and responsibly reduce the FY 10 school budget by \$1.85 million dollars, based on our educational values. While no educator easily accepts budget cuts, given current economic conditions, the principals and I recognize and understand that we must continue to find new ways to reduce costs that will not seriously impact learning, if possible. That being said, all that the Lexington Public Schools is able to accomplish for our students is dependent on the capable teachers and staff that make up our system and so, of course, any cuts to personnel will be felt by all.

The list of budget cuts I presented to the School Committee this past Tuesday included on-going improvements to districtwide special education programs. Based on our experience last year, we expect these changes will reduce more expensive future out-of-district tuition and transportation costs. I also recommended reducing the amount of funds for wage increases, reducing the cost of new teachers by hiring the teachers with an average of 5 years experience instead of 6, eliminating 10 Instructional Assistants positions (not including 1-to-1 assistants), cutting 4.9 teaching positions

systemwide, and eliminating \$500,000 in health care benefits for certain employees. For the full list of budget cuts, please go to <http://lps.lexingtonma.org>.

By State law, all public employees who work 20 hours or more per week are entitled to receive health insurance benefits, at an average cost of \$11,500 per eligible employee. We will save the town \$500,000 in health insurance costs by 1) reducing the number of employees who work 20 hours or more per week, and 2) combining 14 half-time teaching positions with health insurance benefits into 7 full-time positions with health insurance benefits. These actions decrease the number of employees entitled to participate in town sponsored plans.

Specifically, the plan would be to reduce 28 Instructional Assistant positions (without reducing the number of hours that IAs will be present) and 11 K-5 School Support Personnel at 20 or more hours per week to less than 20 hours per week. By reducing the number of work hours per week to less than 20, the town will no longer be required to pay health insurance costs.

Fortunately, the State now offers health insurance to all Massachusetts residents who meet income qualifications at a significantly reduced rate or for free. Two years ago, we could not have contemplated this change since it would have meant our lower paid workers would not have had access to health insurance at a reasonable rate.

The recommended plan to reduce health benefit costs is unusual and may not have been tried in other school districts in Massachusetts; however, the plan was implemented successfully in Blind Brook-Rye, in Westchester County, New York. By attrition, we hope to reduce the plan's impact on our valuable employees, and continue to hire high quality people for the positions, now less than 20 hours. Since hiring Instructional Assistants at less than 20 hours per week is not new to the Lexington Public Schools, we believe that we will still be able to hire/retain quality people who want these positions with fewer hours.

When deciding which reductions to recommend to the School Committee, the principals and I looked for ways to make the required reductions, while also trying to protect quality classroom instruction and keep valued employees. A school system is, after all, a system dependent on people who are in the service of our children. Making any change that impacts hiring and retention must be and will be carefully monitored.

The principals and I have now shared our best thinking with the School Committee on how to make budget cuts while protecting quality classroom instruction and keeping valued employees. Now it is your turn. Please share your thoughts with the School Committee by sending an email to school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us, or speaking at one of the two public hearings scheduled on Saturday, January 31, at 9 a.m. at the Clarke Middle School, or Tuesday, February 3, at 7:30 p.m., in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.