



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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Superintendent of Schools Paul B. Ash

Creating a budget to educate 6,200 students, ranging in age from 3 to 21, from pre-K to beyond high school, in 9 school buildings, is a complex task. The budget process requires the input and collaboration of many people and is developed over many months with much deliberation. Early last October, I met with my staff to discuss the budget guidelines voted by the School Committee and started working on the FY 08 budget. We reviewed current programs and looked for ways to save money and create efficiencies that would continue to offer our students high-quality opportunities for learning. This article provides an overview of the process we followed. In future articles, I will discuss the details of the proposed budgets, including the main increases over last year.

Our vision is to have highly efficient and effective schools. This means spending every taxpayer dollar thoughtfully to advance our core purposes of instilling academic excellence, fostering caring and respectful relationships, and continuously improving our school system.

The School Committee directed us to create three budget documents: 1) a “same-service” budget that replicates the services and programs we currently offer, 2) a “supplemental” budget that shows the costs of providing additional essential services, and 3) an “at-risk list” of items that will be cut to reduce the budget to equal the funds available without an override. I presented the first two budgets (same-service and supplemental) at the School Committee meeting on January 16. Because we did not have FY 08 budget forecasts from the town on January 16, we are still working on the “at-risk list,” which will be presented at a subsequent School Committee meeting.

The same-service budget means no new programs are recommended; current class size averages are maintained; special education legal requirements are met; contractual requirements such as utilities, union contracts, and transportation costs are funded; and a necessary 3% increase in instructional expense budgets is provided. The FY08 same-service budget is \$70,022,605, which is an increase of \$6,608,105, or 10.42% over the current FY07 budget. It's a large increase, but is required in order to keep the same level of service. Almost one-third of the increase is required to pay the tuition and transportation costs for special education out-of-district students, or is needed to fund programs to educate these students in Lexington. I will discuss the details of the special education program in a future article.

The supplemental budget is our response to the School Committee's charge to provide a list of budget alternatives that restore some essential services cut because of the lost override vote. This is not a very restorative budget. The supplemental budget totals \$1,237,353 and is in addition to the same-service budget. This increment is far less than the \$3,166,116 worth of services requested in questions 1 and 2 that did not pass in the 2006 override.

Lexington continues to face funding challenges. This year, we do not expect any revenue increases from the federal and state governments. We do not anticipate an increase in state Chapter 70 funding for education — aid provided by the state to cities and towns. Massachusetts ranks 43rd out of 50 states in its support for local education. We do not expect any increase in federal special education funding this year either. In 1975, Congress passed the Individual with Disabilities Education Act that specified the federal government would pay 40% of special education costs. Unfortunately, Congress never fully funded the law. Currently, the federal government provides less than 20% of the costs that cities and towns incur. This low level of federal and state support makes the local property tax the main source of funding for educating our children. In a town with a small commercial base, such as Lexington, the residents bear the brunt of educational cost increases.

The same-service and supplemental budgets together represent what I believe is the minimum amount we need to educate our students in FY08 so they may develop fully and meet the demands of today's world. I recognize that the same-service budget alone represents a large increase over this year's school budget. The next step is for the School Committee to study the entire budget, and with my staff continue to look for cost-saving measures. We will also continue to lobby the state and federal governments to provide more money to cover the costs of programs they require, but do not adequately fund.

We need to prepare Lexington's students for life in the 21st century. In a global economy, the demands placed on students today are far greater than they were even a generation ago. The challenge for us is to provide our students with a solid and competitive education so they can take their places in this quickly changing world. I believe that Lexington wants its students prepared, and I have put forward a carefully crafted, fiscally prudent budget to meet that goal.