

WRITTEN IN RESPONSE TO THE 2009 BUDGET ADVISORY REPORT

TO: Gene Gaffney/Carol Ann Killian
Co-Chairs Budget Advisory Committee

FROM: Lydia Begley
Superintendent of Schools

RE: Response to BAC Recommendations for 2009

On behalf of the Board of Education, we would first like to thank the Budget Advisory Committee and its co-chairs, Gene Gaffney and Carol Ann Killian for the endless hours and extra effort invested in working in collaboration in development of the budget. The BAC's overwhelming support of the budget and keen attention to the charge of the Board of Education is truly recognized and appreciated.

Below please find the Board's succinct but sincere responses to BAC recommendations contained in that report. As you know, the Board had the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with the BAC at a public meeting on April 22, 2009.

Athletics

1. Given the overwhelming interest at the Middle Level from students excited about participating in interscholastic sports, separate 7th grade teams will be provided. Needless to say, the number and nature of teams funded will be reviewed annually.
2. We will review the possibility of charging for attendance at certain events. The modest revenues derived from doing so are mitigated by the cost of one or more school "ticket-takers" and the need for strict accountability of funds collected.
3. The proposal to collect funds for use of the football field will be pursued should the field be requested by outside groups.

Cultural Arts

The Cultural Arts Program for dance and drama continues to be extremely costly, especially given the limited enrollment. The District, however, will continue to offer opportunities for dance and drama (musical productions, drama instruction, dance teams, etc.) for the many more students who have availed themselves of these programs.

Public Relations

We (per the BAC's recommendations) touched base with all of our neighbors to explore opportunities to "share" their "PR" person. They, however, use a full Communications Service. Our communications firm next year will, in fact, be the same one used by many school districts throughout Long Island, including some local neighbors. We remind the BAC that services needed go very much beyond the expertise of student authors or stipends for English teachers. The writing of articles or PR comprise only a small fraction of the responsibilities that are addressed by a communications service. Such responsibilities, for example, would include: On-going advice/expertise regarding sensitive issues, dealing with media, crisis management, researching of facts and figures for public communication and information, preparation of publications such as What's New in Wantagh, Budget Brochures, assistance with all communication vehicles such as web information, flyers, etc. and the monitoring of grant and revenue opportunities. The amount spent on such service is in fact no more, and in many instances, less than a good number of our county colleagues. It is our intention to keep our community and schools properly supported in the most cost effective manner.

Photographer

This service will be continued next year. The allowance for continued service will be monitored each year to be responsible to the needs and fiscal circumstances at that time.

Budget Presentation

The suggested changes will be factored into the preparations of presentations and printed materials for next year. We have immediately responded to the BAC request to "have more brochures in the buildings and library."

Transportation

There are no plans to increase the mileage for district transportation. Safety concerns were part and parcel, and indeed paramount, in those deliberations. We are, however, presently trying to save significant money via a county transportation consortium that would realize a monetary savings.

Supportive and Special Education

1. We have analyzed special education costs. The increase in special education costs (tuition, consultant fees, etc.) and litigation expenses have been influenced by circumstances outside of our control and independent of a special educator's program that has earned a commendable reputation and regard throughout this county and state. We have taken significant strides to train our people in-house to minimize the need and expense of paying outside individuals or organizations. In addition, our overwhelming success rate in dealing with litigation matters is very

visible evidence of the planning and thought invested in our decisions and protocol in this area.

2. We will monitor closely our RTI services in this area.

Workers' Compensation

1. This is in fact already the practice of the district.
2. Utilizing the mean average.

Capital Fund

The Board is receptive to establishing a Capital Reserve Fund and the use of the expiring debt service would be a viable way of funding such.

General Budget

1. If the budget was defeated, we would have considered modification of the fund balance transfer, but we are delighted that the community strongly supported the budget presented as is.
2. We will work diligently to try to achieve a minimal spread between the contingent budget cap and proposed budget, and in fact, was able to do so this year.
3. Clericals that were cut due to contingency last year were not restored. It should be noted however that the clerical cuts across all levels and departments have been problematic and need to be reviewed as part of next year's budget development.
4. Students will not be asked to bring in their own tissues. This is a hygienic, "safety" issue that we will not leave to the discretion of our youngsters.

Class Size

1. Every effort will be made to stay within the class size guidelines developed initially in 1988 and reviewed again in 1994.
2. The teacher contract is coming up for review and negotiations next year. We do, however, already provide for teachers taking on an extra class for a contractual stipend that is far less than their rate of pay. This has already resulted in cost savings to the district.

Contractual Items

- Benefits

All of these are being reviewed and are (and will be) part of the negotiations process we have already sought and received concessions in some of these areas to include greater employee contributions for health insurance.

Concessions

As per the request of the Superintendent and Board of Education, we asked for concessions of all bargaining units. The Board is currently reviewing these concessions.

Test Scoring

As conceded in the BAC's recommendations for savings on test scoring, there are "contractual recommendations which limit the ability of the Board to implement" such recommendations.

BAC

We will certainly consider a return to 8 rather than 12 meetings and will make every effort to avoid conflicts with PTA meetings and school events.