

School Committee News

The school committee applauds DISHS principal Todd West and the high school teachers who were invited last week to present to the 3rd Annual New England Secondary School Consortium High School Redesign in Action conference. Principal West's presentation on our high school's recent successes, "Using Data, PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) and Teacher Leadership to Drive School Improvement," was extremely well received, and is as important to families with students in pre-school through grade 8 as for those already in high school.

We are midway through this year's public budget workshops, with two left on the schedule, March 29 and April 12. The workshops give the public and the committee time to study, question, and respond to the student learning priorities as identified by the administrators in their budget draft.

Late last year, the school committee reached consensus on directing the administrators to draft a "flat," or 0 increase, budget for the 2012-13 school year. We took this direction on the basis of the significant investments our community has made over the last 10 years and continues to make in our schools, during which time the number of students has dropped from more than 500 to the current 351. Over these years, improvement in student learning results did not keep pace with the increasing level of investment our community was willing and able to make in the schools. This has caused us to understand first hand that creating a high quality education for our students is not simply a result of more staff and larger budgets, but requires more strategic approaches.

The administrators have done a great job, bringing to the board and the public, as requested, a budget with 0 increase. Thanks to an increase in our state subsidy (an increase caused by the elimination of the \$110,581 penalty placed on our district two years ago for not consolidating), this budget, if accepted as is, would result in a decrease of approximately \$165,248 in the total amount the towns would have to raise in taxes.

Because there are built-in increases to each year's budget—cost of living increases such as heating oil, electricity, school lunch, health care, as well as the central office budget determined in the fall of each year—a "flat" budget always means changes to existing programs. The administrators choose which changes will be most beneficial to continually improving student learning as they create their budgets.

Change can be difficult to accept, yet in education it is particularly important. Some of the proposed changes under discussion include the creation of multi-age classrooms, re-allocation of teaching resources, funding technology replacement, and evaluation of co-curricular activities.

We hope you will join in these discussions as we move toward a final budget over the next month. The budget workshops on March 29 and April 12 are from 5 to 7 pm in the elementary school library.