

Superintendent's Message May 2011

The Board of Education, administrators and staff have worked diligently to present a budget for the 2011-2012 school year that provides for the needs of our students and is fiscally responsible. We have sustained severe cuts in state and federal funding while the cost of goods and services continues to rise. Despite these funding cuts, we have developed a budget that carries a 2.49% increase and a tax levy increase of 4.86%, without any major cuts in our programs. Moreover, we have started to restore financial stability to the district and implemented a project to begin to address our infrastructure needs at no cost to the taxpayers. This will be accomplished through an energy performance contract. Approximately \$11 million of work will be addressed and paid for through the savings in energy costs; again, at no cost to the taxpayers.

These accomplishments by the Board of Education are extraordinary. As we all know, the district made many reductions in staff last year at this time that impacted programs during the current school year. As we began the budget preparation process back in October, we endeavored to maintain our programs for the upcoming school year and at the same time keep the expenditure and tax levy increases as minimal as possible. As I have mentioned in numerous budget presentations, "We have already cut to the bone, now we would be going into the marrow."

So, how was this accomplished? First, the Board of Education wisely opted to apply the \$2.8 million in Federal Jobs Aid funding to the proposed budget as opposed to using these funds this year. We received confirmation of this funding only a few months ago. Second, at this juncture, 32 teachers are retiring. While we will miss their expertise and experience, replacements will receive less pay, reducing salary costs by more than \$1 million. Third, we have improved the overall financial position of the district so that we can offset the tax levy more than we have been able to in recent years. Our financial position has improved largely due to numerous cost reduction measures. Some of these measures include more effective management of overtime costs, utilizing Requests for Proposals to substantially reduce our premium costs for insurances and other services, disconnecting unused phone lines, refinancing debt at a lower interest rate and improved inventory control, just to name a few. We have also formed an Inter-District Task Force with the Arlington School District to pursue the sharing of services to further reduce costs and hopefully qualify for grant funding from the state that was approved by the legislature for school districts demonstrating such cost reductions.

The budget is educationally sound with no major program reductions. I do feel the need to clarify the fact that we have reduced one period of general music in grades 4-6. Please know

that our students in these grades will still receive one period of general music and two periods of chorus in a cycle. That is as much or more than many school districts across the state. This will enable our teachers to have more classroom time for subjects such as science and social studies. Please note that all music at the high schools, junior high schools and grades K-3 remain the same, including all instrumental music programs-NO REDUCTIONS. We have restored the late bus at the high schools and partially at the junior high schools; included funds for field trips and day care transportation. All interscholastic athletics and extra classroom activities are also included. We are also replacing mathematics textbooks at the elementary level and implementing a major technology initiative that will facilitate increasing the use of technology in the classroom.

Of course, there is always the concern of a contingency budget. If that were the case, we would be required to reduce our budget by another \$1.1 million. A major portion of interscholastic athletics and extra- curricular activities would be impacted, along with other mandated reductions in student supplies and equipment. The difference to the average homeowner would be approximately *\$26.00 per year or about \$2.00 per month.*

Before May 17th, I will have presented the budget at just about every school in the district. It is important that all of the information is provided to our residents so that an informed decision can be made on May 17, 2011, 7:30 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. If you do not know where to vote, please visit the district's website for that information or call 845 298-5000 ext. 145 or 124.

Thank you!