

Fleetwood Area School District Report  
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Workshop Scheduled on Next Year's School District Budget

Last month, the Board of School Directors announced that it would hold a special budget workshop for the public on Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. The meeting will be held in the high school auditorium.

The purpose of the workshop is to inform parents, residents, and staff about the challenges facing the school district as it prepares the budget for the 2011-2012 school year and to receive comments and suggestions on the budget. These budgetary challenges include declining revenues and increased expenses that may require increased property taxes and cuts in existing school programs and services.

A brief explanation of the regulations involving school district budgets will help you understand some of the problems encountered by school districts as they develop their budgets. In late fall, the state publishes the Act 1 Index. This index is based on a number of economic factors and determines how much school districts may raise property taxes for the following school year. In addition, each winter the state identifies other factors that contribute to increased costs for school districts. These factors usually include specific mandates and construction costs that may increase a school district's budget. If one or more of these factors apply to a given school district, the district may apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for an exception to the index and, if approved, may raise property taxes above the index.

The timeline for developing school district budgets requires the development of two budgets. The first budget, called a preliminary budget, must be developed in January. This budget must then be made available to the public prior to approval in mid February. This budget must include whether the district intends to raise property taxes above the index and apply for allowable exceptions. If the amount of tax increase required exceeds the index and the exception allowance, the district is then required to submit the budget for approval by voters via a referendum on the May primary ballot. A second and final budget must be completed in May with final approval in June following a thirty day public review.

The first challenge facing school districts is that their preliminary budgets must be completed without knowing how much funding they will receive. This year, the Governor will present his proposed state budget to the state legislature in March. The unofficial information that we have received is that funding for public school districts will decrease, with estimates ranging anywhere from four to twenty percent. Federal funding is also uncertain. For the past two years, federal stimulus funding has helped states fund public education. Another round of stimulus funding is not anticipated. Education Jobs Funding was distributed to the states to help save jobs in education although this money has yet to be distributed to school districts in Pennsylvania. Local tax revenue is also uncertain as a number of larger businesses have applied for tax reassessments due to the declining value of property.

A second challenge is the increasing costs of state and federal mandates. These mandates include funding for charter schools based on the amount it costs to educate a child in the public school regardless of the cost of the Charter School. This is particularly an issue when school districts must pay cyber charter schools a rate that has nothing to do with their actual costs of providing a computer and a teacher to remotely monitor and grade student work. Other mandates include state and federal reporting requirements that necessitated the hiring of an additional staff member this year, increasing professional development requirements for teachers related to state and federal standards and the highly qualified provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, transportation, retirement, and special education.

Recognizing the impact of the recession on our residents and on our funding, the district began making efforts to reduce its expenditures over a year ago. For example, rather than hiring additional classroom teachers needed for this year at the elementary level, four support teachers were reassigned to the classroom. We have also drastically reduced the funds available for major replacement or updating of our curricular materials and our budget for technology. We also eliminated two aide positions this year.

As we continue to experience the effects of this recession, the district is considering further budget reductions in the 2011-2012 school year. Possible reductions include combining two or three bus runs or switching from our current three tired busing schedule to a two tired busing schedule by combining the middle and high school bus runs. Other possible reductions include eliminating teaching positions through attrition, reduction of the supply budget by 50%, implementation of an activity fee for all after school activities not related to the curriculum, elimination of sports that have a high cost and low student participation rates, and elimination of the driver education classes. Other reductions may also be considered depending on the amount of funding received for the 2011-2012 school year.

The Board of School Directors encourages parents, residents, and staff to attend the budget workshop on January 11<sup>th</sup> to obtain additional information and to provide comments and suggestions on ways to address these budgetary problems.

*Upcoming Events in the Fleetwood Area School District*

*January 17 – No school for students, teacher in-service*

*The Board of School Directors will meet on January 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.*

