

Notes from Budget Listening Sessions
October 2007

Chautauqua Lake Central School administrators met with staff and district residents to hear their ideas and input regarding the development of the 2008-09 school budget. Attendance at three Budget Listening Sessions:

- Oct. 3 Staff Session: 4 faculty, 6 administrators/staff
- Oct. 11 Public Session: 3 district residents, all parents of elementary students; 5 administrators/staff
- Oct. 16 Public Session: 4 district residents, 5 administrators/staff, 1 member of Board of Education

These were not budget presentations, but open-ended opportunities to contribute thoughts to be considered in creating the new budget, to be presented in May 2008. Following are discussion questions and a synopsis of comments received. This information reflects the content of the discussions and is not intended to be a comprehensive account of questions and answers.

Discussion questions:

What are some areas of critical focus for the school district with respect to funding of programs and services for students, as we prepare the 2008-09 budget?

- Especially in the elementary, challenge students “at both ends of the spectrum” – provide “differentiated” instruction.
- Strengthen program for high achievers, especially in the elementary, so there is some parity with “struggling” students who are receiving special instruction due to the requirements of No Child Left Behind.
 - Enrichment program has been cut back and does not serve children in lower grades.
 - Foreign languages are no longer being taught in elementary grades; these classes used to serve all students in several grades, not just a select few.
 - Because of federal and state mandates, special education requires specified services.
- Enrichment highlights:
 - High school has added calculus in response to requests from graduates studying in fields such as engineering, architecture and sciences. This allows our graduates to be more competitive with students from other high schools.
 - All students need English to write well.
 - Sciences: many students go into health science fields, and having advanced sciences in high school gives them an edge.
- Concern that students are going to leave the area.
 - Described “Tough Choices or Tough Times” presentation by The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (National Center on Education and the Economy: <http://www.skillscommission.org/executive.htm>) recently summarized for the Board of Education.
 - Must prepare students for a global economy.

- CLCS prepares students for vocations that don't require college, not just college-bound.
 - In high school students may take ½ day academics at CLCS, ½ day career/technical education at BOCES Hewes Center.
 - This option attracts students of all abilities, achievement levels.

What are some suggested areas for considering cost savings with respect to programs and services in the upcoming budget?

- Concern about cost of lighting the field for athletic contests. Approximately 2% of the total budget is devoted to athletics. Cost of lights is negligible, compared to the preparation/repair on the field for use by multiple teams.
- As the building gets older, the district must consider the replacement schedule for Building & Grounds equipment.
- Once federal and state mandates are satisfied, some estimates indicate that less than 5% of the budget is discretionary. With limited resources, it is a challenge to provide all the programs and services parents and community residents desire.
- Since last year, staff has suggested ideas for cost savings, including:
 - Cooperative bidding with neighboring schools; using the BOCES bid more than ever.
 - Black line masters instead of workbooks.
 - Staff reductions in foreign languages and high school special education.
 - Each high school science teacher is certified in two areas; we try to hire new teachers with dual certification.
 - Piloting textbooks in one or two classrooms before purchasing a new series.
- Option of contracting for transportation services is considered periodically. For the Board of Education it is also a philosophical issue; board doesn't want to relinquish control.
- Cuts in instructional staff: Currently, compared to last year, we have one fewer section in elementary and one fewer foreign language teacher. We added a math remediation teacher in the elementary to meet state standards. Using current class size calculations, in the future the district may need to consider reducing one additional section in elementary.
- To prepare young people for the global marketplace, there is pressure to provide quality programs to meet state and federal requirements. Some parents are also requesting enrichment classes to allow students to move beyond the mastery level, especially in the elementary grades. Must be mindful of expenses and competing expectations.

What messages would you encourage we share with our community with respect to the budget and its relationship to programs and services to students?

- State requirements determine staffing levels, to a large extent, even if/when enrollments decline.
- The district is part of a consortium evaluating possible shared services. Shared services is as much about preserving programs for students as it is reducing costs.
- When high-needs students move into the district, it can impact the budget.
- Declining enrollment is a challenge for all schools in the area. This is a regional issue.

- Must remain fiscally responsible, but it is difficult to balance this with instructional needs as enrollment declines.
- The district must meet state and federal standards required for the School Report Card. Some residents are more concerned with the basics, not enrichment. Parents who want extras may pay for them; this is a niche for a select few.

As we continue to try to engage in a long-range budget process, what ideas do you have for an advanced and future-oriented budgeting model?

- The new NYS “Foundation Formula” is helpful in projecting state aid, but reports are that approximately 20% of NYS revenues come from investments, and Wall Street has not been doing well this year. It remains to be seen how this may affect the Foundation Formula.
- However, state aid is not the biggest part of the budget.

What thoughts do you have about the district moving forward with a potential Energy Project addressing wind and/or solar energy?

- Interested in what is happening with the possible green energy project. School board is still studying the possibilities, which include solar and/or wind components and modifying some air makeup units.
- Good idea to look into it.
- The existing geothermal system works well, saving money on natural gas, but electrical costs are significant.
- Electricity costs associated with building operations make an alternative energy project attractive.
- This may be one the district’s few chances to save money without impacting programs for students.

As technology continues to advance at a rapid pace, what ideas do you have for use of technology in our school system?

- Technology is changing rapidly. We will ask the new technology coordinator to help us with new ideas, vision for use of technology.
- The district uses a replacement schedule for computers and other technology.
- Staff needs training to keep up with new technology, to make the existing technology work well, and to use it effectively in the classroom. Even with in-service training, technology is moving faster than some staff can keep up.
- The current technology plan allows staff members to attend high-end training sessions, then come back and develop lessons to teach their colleagues at CLCS.
- The school board has decided to connect with the broadband network and may soon make Distance Learning available to students.
- Distance Learning might open up enrichment opportunities.
- Distance Learning addresses the issue of travel time to/from neighboring schools; may also lead to opportunities for higher-end classes.

Additional comments:

- Would like to see a learning environment where kids can't wait to get to school!
- Emphasize scholarship and academic challenges. Would like recognition assemblies reinstated in elementary. Need to provide more information on how academic achievements are recognized at the elementary level.
- Request that "keyboarding" be taught as a separate skill in the elementary school.
- Some families are making arrangements for extra opportunities, enrichment tutors, etc., but these choices are not equally available to all.
- Would like to pursue the possibility of a school foundation to receive tax-deductible gifts from individuals who wish to donate. Such a foundation might fund items not included in the regular operating budget.
- Would like the district to expand its relationship with Chautauqua Institution for the benefit of the children.
- At CLCS No Child Left Behind legislation has presented both benefits and challenges to the program.
- The ASSET Consortium of CLCS and three other neighboring districts will soon receive the results of the study of possible shared services.
- The concept of a regional high school is prohibited under current NYS Education Law; individuals must speak with their legislators if they feel the economy of scale of a regional high school would be beneficial to the district. District officials have good communication with legislators, and there are plans for some local school representatives to discuss with Chancellor Bennett the possibility of piloting a regional high school.
- Negotiations are ongoing for the teachers' contract; the school board and administration are not prepared to discuss the details.
- Concerns expressed that with declining enrollment portions of the building would not be used. Currently nearly the entire building is in use. The district has been creative in finding revenue (e.g., leasing) for unused spaces. Perhaps the district should look at shutting down/closing portions of the facility.