

SCHOOL BOARD REPORT

Plainfield Elementary School (PES) continues to be one of the best, small schools in New Hampshire. With a dedicated staff, an involved community, and 219 of the best kids in the Granite State, PES is brimming with activity and learning.

We have an especially full agenda at this year's School District Meeting including:

- A budget that attempts to balance declining enrollment, our community's commitment to quality education, and taxes;
- Two building projects designed to radically improve learning and collaboration within our school;
- A new proposal to implement full-day Kindergarten in the 2015/16 school year;
- Reports & recommendations from the 'Cornish Collaboration' & 'AREA Agreement Study' Committees formed at last School District Meeting;
- A warrant to allow the construction of a ground mounted solar array on School grounds;
- A request to place \$50,000 in the District's Special Education & Tuition Reserve Fund

The Budget

This year's budget process started in October with the development of the following 6 principles to guide the decisions and debate of the Board:

- Develop a fiscally responsible budget that supports the quality education that PES currently provides, including differentiation in instruction for all student ability levels.
- Be innovative in matching staff to enrollment and student need, providing staff development where necessary and appropriate.
- Continue the practice of returning to the taxpayers an amount equal to any tuition surplus created in the budget.
- Support the continuing evolution of our curriculum and instructional program.
- Continue to maintain our school building to ensure a sound, healthy and safe learning environment for our students and staff.
- Take advantage of ad-hoc funding opportunities, including grants or other shared funding. Whenever possible, funds from these sources will be used to reduce the community tax burden

Using these principles as a guide (and after hundreds of hours of hard work by the Administration & staff, seven budget-focused school board meetings, five draft budgets, meetings with the finance committee, and a public budget hearing) the School Board approved an expense budget of \$5,909,329 -- a 2.87% decrease (-\$174,470) over the current school year.

Significant changes in the proposed 2015/16 budget include:

- \$102,669 decrease in regular education teacher salaries (reduction of .2FTE in Guidance, .2FTE in music, & 1FTE in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); addition of .3 FTE reading specialist)
- \$19,210 increase in regular education assistant salaries (addition of 1 FTE Educational Assistant)

- \$124,693 decrease in special education salaries (the reduction of 1 FTE SPED Teacher and 4 FTE in SPED Educational Assistants)
- \$16,900 increase in SPED contracted services
- \$22,300 decrease in SPED expenses at the High School
- \$15,907 increase in SAU salaries (.2 FTE increase of SPED Director)
- \$20,609 decrease in contracted services for Building Operations
- \$39,100 increase in the building maintenance line item to enhance building security and support a trial of a new classroom floor treatment

Besides staffing changes in music, guidance, ESOL, and reading that reflect current student enrollment, program requirements, and student need, the biggest change in the 2015/16 budget is found in Special Education.

At last year's School District Meeting, the Board disclosed that it had hired the Southeastern Regional Education Service Center (SERESC) to perform an independent review of the cost effectiveness and efficiency of Special Education (SPED) programming at PES. SERESC's report found the SPED program at PES to be strong and competent. It also identified SPED staffing as an area of review for the administration and board (Full report can be read on the PES SAU Website).

As a result of the SERESC report, the administration undertook a comprehensive review of our SPED delivery model as well as the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) of every SPED student at PES. Based on this 'ground up' review, the following staffing changes were made by the administration in the 2015/16 budgets:

- An increase in the SPED Director position from .4FTE to .6FTE;
- A reduction of 4 SPED educational assistant positions
- A reduction of 1 SPED case manager positions (SPED Teacher)
- The addition of 1 Regular Ed educational assistant (to offset Regular Ed support previously provided by the SPED team).

While these changes are significant, the Board and administration are confident the SPED needs of our children will be met effectively.

While expenses have fallen, so have revenues. State support for PES has dropped with our reduction in enrollment. Additionally, the surplus we traditionally carry from year-to-year is projected to be smaller due to an influx of new high school students that require tuition to Lebanon High School. Even after the School Board authorized a withdrawal of \$50,000 from the Special Education & Tuition Trust fund to soften the blow, revenues are projected to drop \$140,453 next fiscal year (excluding approved warrants from last District Meeting).

That said, on the final ledger (once all current year fund transfers are normalized), reductions in the expense budget exceeded the decreases in revenue. As a result, the proposed 2015/16 budget will require \$24,017 less from Plainfield Tax Payers than last year.

The Warrant Articles

This year's School District Meeting is also heavy on important warrant articles from the School Board and School District Meeting Committees.

- Article III: Learning Commons (\$61,700)
 Authorizes the renovation of the library and computer room into a single 'Learning Commons' that combines traditional media, technology and small group workspaces into a new instructional space.

Benefit: Creates workspaces that allows children to learn and work in a 21st century environment; Organizes and quiets the environment so that this area becomes the school's center for instructional research and student centered learning.
- Article IV: Common Lunch (\$44,300)
 Authorizes the purchase of tables, chairs, serving equipment, and renovation of the food service area to allow school lunch to be served in the Gym rather than each individual classroom.

Benefit: More efficient lunch process increases time for instruction in core curriculum; reduction of food in classroom provides cleaner, healthier classrooms; opportunity for cross grade interactions; teachers are freed from required, daily lunch 'duty' and given more opportunity for collaboration.
- Article V: Full Day Kindergarten
 Authorizes the implementation of full-day kindergarten based on current class size policies and practices (no expected incremental cost on 2015/16 to implement).

Benefit: Educational value and impact of full day kindergarten without the cost and complexity of last year's approach.
- Article VI: AREA Agreement Review Committee
 Vote on whether to continue the withdrawal process from the AREA agreement with Lebanon & Grantham in order to offer high school choice for our students. ***Please read committee findings in your Town Report.***
- Article VII: Cornish Collaboration Committee
 Vote to provide School Board with authorization to provide SAU services to Cornish. ***Please read committee findings in your Town Report.***
- Article VIII: Solar Panel Authorization
 Vote to provide School Board with authorization to install a ground mounted solar array on School property. ***Please read committee findings in your Town Report.***
- Article IX: SPED & Tuition Reserve Fund (\$50,000)
 Replenish SPED & Tuition Reserve Fund of monies withdrawn in FY 2014/15 to offset mid-year increases in students' tuition to Lebanon High School.

Benefit: Ensure the District has some insurance for a major tuition or SPED cost shock.

If all expense related warrant articles passed (Budget, Learning Commons, Lunch Service Area, and SPED/Tuition Reserve), the total approved expenditures would be \$6,065,329 - -\$58,470 less than all expense related warrant articles passed last year. Due to a

decrease in expected revenue, Plainfield Taxpayers would have to provide an additional \$131,983.

The School Board and the community continue to owe a debt of gratitude to the Facilities Committee. The energy retrofits and grants managed and earned by this committee continue to save the taxpayers money and provide an outstanding learning environment for our children. Additionally, Plainfield School is powered and empowered by the community –their generous financial support and the hundreds (if no thousands) of volunteer hours they give. Last, and clearly not least, our staff is exemplary. The impact of declining enrollment has resulted in organizational challenges at every grade level. Our staff members, as always, have focused on our students, making sure that they continue to receive an outstanding educational experience.

As we finished the development of this report, we received and accepted the resignation of Gregory Vogt as Superintendent of Plainfield Elementary School, effective June 30, 2015. Please join the School Board in thanking Greg for his 4 years of service to our students and community and in wishing him the very best.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Forman

Board Chair