



Date: January 29, 2010

To: The Citizens of the Town of Brookfield

From: Brookfield Board of Education

Subject: Request that the Boards of Selectman and Finance support the BOE budget proposal for 2010-2011 as presented, and allow the citizens of Brookfield to vote on the BOE budget request in whole.

The Brookfield Board of Education's budget proposal for FY 2010-2011 is the result of months of hard work by many people, including administrators, teachers, residents, students, and Board members working together as a team. The thoughts, comments, ideas, and priorities of all these people, as well as members of the Boards of Selectman and Finance were taken into consideration while crafting this budget.

The Budget Process

The budget process, which has become a year round project, is made up of a great many parts, with some notable items.

- The administration and Board seeks input from many sources, including budget roundtables which we encourage the public to attend.
- A "Q & A" option on the district website which allows residents to ask questions or offer opinions to the Board.
- Budget presentations made by the Board and Superintendent to various local groups, clubs, and "Fireside Chats" in residents' homes allowing them a more informal setting to ask questions and offer feedback.
- Televised productions by the administration, airing on Channel 17, that address different parts of what makes up the budget.
- For the first time, the budget will presented to an audience of high school students, allowing them to learn how their schools work and giving them the opportunity to voice their opinions.
- The Board continues to work on improving the transparency and communication of the budget, making it available online at many different levels from a one page summary to the full 900+ line item budget, with many levels in between.
- The administration has again used a computerized budget process which is integrated with the Districts financial system, and uses a Line Item Justification (Zero Based) budget approach.
- And of course, all residents are invited to comment at regular Board meetings.

BOE Budget Request

Our request is for an Operating Budget of \$35,919,114, an increase in funding of 5.62% over the 2009-2010, and for a Capital Budget, which is part of a Town-wide capital improvement plan, of \$400,215.

Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 170, section 10-220 states that "*Each local or regional board of education shall maintain good public elementary and secondary schools... provide such other educational activities as in its judgment will best serve the interests of the school district... shall provide an appropriate learning environment for its students which includes (1) adequate instructional books, supplies, materials, equipment, staffing, facilities and technology, (2) equitable allocation of resources among its schools, (3) proper maintenance of facilities, and (4) a safe school setting*". These are responsibilities which the staff, administration, and the Board of Education take very seriously. It is our belief that it is not only the responsibility of the Board to maintain the quality of education in Brookfield, but also to continue to improve it, in a fiscally responsible manner. We believe this budget accomplishes these goals.

Budget Drivers

While every year presents budget challenges, the state of the economy in 2009 created even greater hurdles and resulted in a budget for the 2009-2010 school year which decreased spending by .26%, or \$88,107. As challenging as the 09-10 budget was, the task facing the administration and Board of Education during the creation of the 2010-2011 budget was even more daunting.

- Health insurance costs for both the Board of Education and the Town are projected to increase 18.6%, but by going out to bid a 13% increase is expected, or approximately \$569,957 in *additional* cost.
- Contributions to the Town pension fund are increasing \$75,825, more than 50% over the previous year.
- The cost of heating oil, electricity, and diesel fuel for our buses is projected to increase approximately \$124,099.
- A \$318,467 increase in Special Education costs are expected due to an increase in expenses for special needs students, as well as an expected 25% reduction in the Special Education Excess Cost grant.
- Overall, salaries are scheduled to increase by \$863,312 or 3.88%. The Board of education, with the input of the Board of Finance, has been very successful in negotiating more favorable contracts with our bargaining units. These changes have resulted in plan redesign, increased employee premium share contributions, and reduced annual salary increases.
- While three of the districts bargaining units, as well as the unaffiliated employees including central office administrators, voluntarily took a “freeze in place” of salaries to help the district during the difficult 09-10 budget year, all three bargaining units contract will be renegotiated this spring.

Budget Goals

Even with these and many more challenges that we face, the Board of Education and school administration remain committed to providing the Brookfield community with superior schools and a superior educational experience for its students. To that end, the Board and administration approached the budget process for 2010 – 2011 with the following goals:

- Provide our students with a high quality educational program
- Maintain and improve student achievement
- Enhance student academic opportunities, while asking all staff to do more
- Maintain student opportunities in athletic and co-curricular activities
- Recognize the difficult economic times we are in, and continue to control costs and increase efficiencies

The Board has made these goals a priority for the 2010-2011 budget year because it recognizes the need to provide a classroom environment in all its schools that better supports student learning, personalize instruction to address each students needs while providing additional support to struggling students, and to develop a stronger reading and literacy program in all schools.

Budget Proposals

To meet these goals, the Board of Education has included in its budget proposal for 2010-2011 an additional 5.7 FTE’s above current staffing levels. These positions include:

- 3.0 additional teachers at Huckleberry Hill Elementary. This will reduce the class sizes in the 2nd and 4th grade to within the newly modified Board class size guidelines, allowing for more individualized instruction.
- A .20 remedial math teacher at Huckleberry Hill, increasing the classroom time for the remedial math class by over 6 hours a week which will increase student achievement.
- At Whisconier Middle School, a 5th grade guidance counselor to support the students in the difficult transition from 4th to 5th grade, and help continue to implement and improve developmental guidance programs. Guidance counselors serve as student “case managers” at the secondary level. The counselors manage their students’ academic careers and act as a point person for the teachers, administrators and the parents. All secondary students currently have this central coordinator except for our youngest secondary students whom are also in a transition year – our 5th graders.
- At Whisconier Middle School, a .5 FTE Literacy teacher to create a needed Literacy Lab which will help continue to improve the reading and writing skills of our students.
- And lastly, in continuing in our desire to improve reading and literacy in the district, a 1.0 FTE remedial reading teacher at Brookfield High School, which will enhance the schools literacy lab and increase student achievement.

These added positions will yield measurable results in the form of improved scores on state and district tests, as well as improved performance in math and reading. Also, we will see an increased amount of support for the 5th grade as well as better communication between 5th grade parents and the school.

Budget Efficiencies

A few additional items to note:

- The Board and administration continue to economize and be as efficient as possible. According to a recent article in “The Connecticut Economy” published by the University of Connecticut Department of Economics, Brookfield Public Schools is one of 21 districts out of 119 that “are fully efficient with respect to both outputs and inputs”.
- The district is still utilizing consortium pricing for electricity and office supplies.
- The district continues to renegotiate vendor contracts, including copiers and trash removal at every opportunity.
- The Board has negotiated cost effective, long term contracts with the BEA and BAA, and will work for the same results when in negotiations with three other bargaining units this spring.
- The administration had reduced Special Education transportation costs by \$55,000.
- Creation of in-district programming for high school students with special needs has resulted in reduced out of district placements.
- Our transportation services are going out to bid, which will likely result in newer, more fuel efficient buses with minimal to no increase in cost.
- Instructional hours at all schools are the highest they have been in years.
- For the third year, the Board reluctantly retains the Pay to Participate Program.
- Class sizes, while still on the high side and a major topic of discussion during our budget roundtables, will be addressed with our proposed budget with only two of our K-8 classes above guidelines.

Capital Request

The Board of Educations Capital Request is structured in a manner to maintain the Districts buildings, the Towns most visible assets, to prevent structural deterioration and to focus on efficiency so as to reduce operating expenses. Our goal is to provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

- Roof repair at the high school is being presented in a staged manner to address the most critical areas. This avoids a total roof replacement which would require altering the pitch of the roof.
- Window replacement in the Guidance area of the high school will reduce operating expenses in both heating and air-conditioning seasons.
- Completion of the Energy Conservation Upgrades. This has been an on-going project in conjunction with the CL&P Incentive Program.
- Replacement and maintenance of HVAC equipment at Huckleberry Hill School which will improve air quality and reduce energy consumption.
- Moving the Nurse’s station within Huckleberry Hill Elementary School so that some of our youngest students needs are addressed in a centralized and readily accessible area of the building.
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A more comprehensive list of our capital expense request for 2010-2011, as well as the Boards five year capital expense plan, will be provided.

The Board of Education realizes that there will most likely never be a “good budget year”. While we realize that this year will be as difficult, if not more, than previous years, the time has come for the town of Brookfield to increase its investment in the schools. After years of maintenance or less than maintenance budget increases, we are beginning to see the results in declining, neutral, or only slightly increasing standardized test scores. These test scores are not the product of the current budget, but of the budget that was passed 3-4 years ago. Given the reduction in the schools operating budget for the 2009-2010 school year, it is a great concern of the Board and administration what we will see happen to these scores in the future.

During the budget process last year, the residents made it known during the town meeting that the educational budget proposed by the town needed to be increased. That sentiment was reinforced further when the non-binding advisory question on the ballot told the Town leaders that the budget presented to them was too low on both the Education and Town side. That being said, the Board of Education respectfully requests that the Boards of Finance and Selectman allow the town to vote on our proposed budget in whole. It is our belief that it is up to the town to decide how much, or how little, they want to invest in the Town of Brookfield.

The Board of Education's request for a 5.62% increase in our operating budget will allow the district to maintain opportunities for the students as well as take small steps in improving the quality of education in Brookfield. It will also, equally as important, maintain and improve the quality of life for each student.

The Board of Education understands the huge amount of work, time and energy every member of the Boards of Selectman and Finance put in to not only create a budget that takes care of the needs of the Town, but to continue the work of improving our town throughout the entire year. As we are also residents and taxpayers, you have our thanks for that hard work and continued support the schools have been afforded over the years.

Thank you for your consideration, and remember...its all about the kids.

Sincerely,
The Brookfield Board of Education

Michael Fenton, Chair
Robert Gianazza, Vice-Chair
Jane Miller, Secretary
Harry Shaker, Member
Bruce Macdonald, Member
Ray DiStephan, Member
Victor Katz, Member