

Challenges for Change

Public Forum Results from November 8, 2010 For the Essex Junction School District PK-8

Facilitators: Dave Riester (**DR**), Brenda Dawson Crocket (**BC**), Michael Smith (**MS**), John Gazo (**JG**), Judy DeNova (**JD**), Charlee Day (**CD**)

First draft of reductions* proposed to Prudential Committee by superintendent's office:

• Target	240,439
• SU Savings	14,095
• Salary/Benefit Assumptions	23,000
• Higher FY'12 Fund Balance	50,000
• Reduce Custodial by 1 FTE (Shared Services)	11,410
• Reduce Computer Tech by 1 FTE (Shared Services)	13,050
• Use Aesop vs. substitute caller	10,000
• Reduce Capital Fund Contribution	50,000
• Crossing Guard Reductions	65,000
• Reduce Maintenance FTE (Shared Services)	10,000
• Reduce 50% ADL Guidance summer days	5,000
• Total Reductions	251,555
• Amount Beyond Target	11,116

**The actual dollars shown here are a place-holder and are not necessarily final (for instance, the proposed crossing guard reduction has prompted the PC to form a committee to study the details of location, new infrastructure, etc. and that committee will present findings to the board by Feb. 1, 2011). Participants were asked to focus on the categories, not the amounts.*

Responses to Reductions

Group facilitated by Dave Riester:

- Crossing guards: ensure safety first
- Some items are one time savings and are not sustainable into the future
- Should we identify more reductions to compensate for inflationary increases?
- Need to do administrative cost analysis (admin costs are \$900K)

Group facilitated by Brenda Dawson Crocket:

- Grave concerns about reducing crossing guards
- No need to employ a guidance counselor during summer months
- Complaints that board chair was being defensive and shooting down suggestions
- Suspicion that board members had already decided where cuts were going to be made and that this process was just a sham
- Recommendation that teachers should be surveyed for their anonymous opinions about where cuts could be made as teachers know better than anyone where there is waste and where there are inefficiencies
- No need for 2 superintendents
- Suggestion that 5 day/week physical education be eliminated at middle school

Group facilitated by Michael Smith:

- Eliminate transportation to/from scholastic sports events (use parents and volunteers)
- Reduce or eliminate color printing
- Look at class size
- Reduce number of crossing guards
- Encourage early retirement
- Look closely at salary and benefits in the next contract negotiation process
- Look at food service delivery system
- Look at cost of Fleming (Nightingale program) homework help

- Look at reducing cost of purchasing materials and supplies (other vendors)
- Offer Pre-K courses as fee for service since parents would not be paying for day-care – would this save on the costs of special education?

Group facilitated by John Gazo:

- Look at class sizes – possibility of larger numbers for older classes? (personnel reductions?)
- Hold the line on teacher salaries/ask for greater contributions for health care
- Cut back on maintenance/building and grounds
- **Bring in efficiency experts** (to see where savings could be made)
- Food service – food is terrible – kitchens are not being used so why did we spend so much money on them with no improvement in quality? (food being thrown out by students)
- Make cuts in administration from central office down to principals

Group facilitated by Judy DeNova:

- Look at crossing guards at corners where there are electronic devices to assist pedestrians
- Look at need for crossing guard at high school
- Heat could be turned down at Hiawatha
- Why are there flat screen tvs at ADL (this was purchased for use with the Wii exercise system for both before and after school activities – it was grant funded – not funded by tax-payers)
- Appreciation that reductions are focused on administrative efficiencies and that prior district-wide efficiencies have positioned us to meet these targets without cutting programs

Suggestions from the public at other venues:

- Only fund athletics that include all students who want to participate. Transfer team sports over to recreation venue.
- Improve food service in nutritional and taste quality; adjust serving sizes for youngest students to reduce food waste.

- Question about adding world languages to our elementary schools – is this really necessary? Does it take away from time allotted to core subjects?
- Run breakfast/snack cart before school to increase students' learning time in classroom.

Other Questions/Issues

1. Is the current grade/building configuration right? Is the neighborhood school model still valuable?

- **DR:** current model is preferred but single building model could yield significant savings. Recommend that the board begin exploring options.
- **BC:** general agreement that single K-5 building model should be explored
- **MS:** Support current configuration, especially separation of youngest (K-3) from oldest (4-5) with acknowledgement that a single, centralized building (K-5) could be beneficial. Gains: fewer crossing guards, energy efficiencies.
- **JG:** one elementary school building to save on administration costs and supplies but NO busing
- **JD:** should proceed with formal study of school building configuration and explore a model that may prove to be more cost effective over time (C4C is not a one year need or solution)

2. How and where do we reallocate resources to ensure that we are doing the best possible job? Early education vs remedial interventions?

- **DR:** Yes, early intervention is important but do not remove remedial intervention until we see results from early education.
- **JG:** Pre-K should be taken on by the district.
- **JD:** offerings are well-rounded (arts, foreign languages, music and PE); appreciation for the expansive offerings beyond the 'tested' curriculum
- **JD:** appreciation for early education initiatives (be proactive)

3. Are we delivering outcomes you expect? Should we be looking at year round school/other model like 4 days per week?

- **DR:** Yes on longer year (10/2, 10/2, 10/2, 10/6), no on 4 days/week
- **MS:** look at year round school and shorter school week; explore partnership with Brownell Library for after-school programming for middle school students

- **JG:** not in favor of longer day/shorter week
- **JD:** school year calendar is a larger conversation at the state level (too difficult for one community to support if cycle is different than rest of state) but board should explore opportunities at the state level.

4. Should we be engaged in conversations with neighboring districts about school district consolidation? If so, which ones?

- **DR:** Yes, Essex, Westford, Williston
- **BC:** consolidation is like beating a dead horse
- **MS:** Yes, Essex Town and Westford. Is there an opportunity for savings in special education by merging districts?
- **JD:** dust off recent Unified Union Study Report and update information; before convening a study group, model the impact based on legislative incentives and begin from the perspective that this could result in more efficiencies and ultimately lower tax impact.

5. Are you aware of the recreation governance debate and if so, do you have concerns about shifting oversight from the school district over to the municipal government?

- **DR:** Yes and yes.

6. Other issues?

- **DR:** Funding model is not sustainable.