

**BOYERTOWN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
FINANCE COMMITTEE
BUDGET EDUCATION FORUM
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Comment – Personally, I would like to see an evaluative procedure for department leaders expanded to lead teachers, given the costs involved.

Response – Actually, the comment is reversed. There is no evaluative procedure for department leaders, but there is one for lead teachers. While department leaders are renewed annually, there is not an evaluation tied to that renewal. In fact, in many cases, the annual renewal is perfunctory. The lead teachers, however, are evaluated using a narrative format completed by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. This narrative is then attached to their evaluation document.

What is the difference between a Lead Teacher and a Department Leader?

Response – The department leader duties are more administrative including such activities as conducting department meetings to disseminate information, working with administration and the lead teachers in the selection and ordering of textbooks and materials, and ensuring the department operations are addressed through teacher scheduling, monitoring of new staff, assuring supplies and materials are deployed properly. Lead teachers' responsibilities involve curriculum development and instructional practices. Lead teachers work closely with Administration to develop research and standards based curriculum. The initiatives are communicated to department leaders, who work with the lead teachers to select appropriate materials for students. Lead teachers train and support all staff in developing strong instructional practices through collaborative efforts.

What are Elementary Advocates?

Response – Elementary Advocates are teachers, one from each District elementary school and from various grade levels, who represent the interests of each elementary school on the Curriculum Council. These teachers provide necessary input and feedback into the development of curriculum and programs for future professional development.

Elementary Advocates will facilitate discussions during in-service days. Advocates also provide support to new teachers in conjunction with the teacher induction program.

The PSSA as an evaluation tool are being replaced by the Keystone exams. How do they equate?

Response – At this time, we don't really know the answer to this question. The Keystone Exams are currently being field-tested by districts across the state. Boyertown Area School District is participating in the field test so we can have the opportunity to see what the Keystone Exams will look like.

Explain the use of textbooks and the possibility of using e-texts (electronic online versions of textbooks)?

Response – Textbooks are not the curriculum. Textbooks are a tool used as a resource to teach the curriculum. There are many online options, some are better than others. The long-range goal is to have an open source textbook that will be available online, hopefully at minimal or no cost. The problem is that students need access to the online version of the textbooks. This may require a one-to-one laptop or netbook computer for every student in lieu of a textbook in every subject.

Wouldn't this be expensive?

Response – The purchase of a laptop or netbook for every student would be a long-term investment, given the savings the District would realize by not purchasing textbooks. Textbooks would have a longer period of use than technology, which normally becomes obsolete in 4-5 years. The district is working on a plan to allow students to bring their laptop computers to school. Obviously, there will be a need to upgrade the web environment and security to assure the network is secure.

Have the results of the SAT tests increased with the increase of the District's PSSA testing results?

Response – The SAT results have not shown significant gains, although more students have taken the test over the past several years. To address this issue, the District is considering administering the PSATs to all 10th graders during the regular school day. This will serve as one

means of preparation not only for the SAT, but also as a practice for taking the PSAT again in grade 11 when students qualify for National Merit Scholar status.

Are we part of the most effective procurement process for supplies?

Response – When to the District’s advantage, Boyertown utilizes the joint purchasing consortium in Berks County through the BCIU or various consortiums established through the State. Given the size of BASD at times the bid prices received for a single shipment are less expensive than a consortium.

Has the team thought about reaching out to companies/businesses for donations?

Response – The District has a history with several local companies in receiving donations and services to reduce the cost of several projects. The District is open to establishing relationships with local businesses.

Do we have a grant writer?

Response – The District does not currently have a professional grant writer. Most grants are derived from individual or group efforts as grant opportunities become available. Many grants are reviewed to determine if the grant meets and contributes to the District’s Strategic Plan. Grants are also evaluated based on matching funding and longevity of the program and grant funds.

Can we rent our student artwork to businesses and/or have our music students perform at business functions?

Response – This suggestion will be explored further and a legal opinion will be necessary from the District solicitor.

Have we considered eliminating bussing for after school and extra-curricular events?

Response – Field Trips, post season and state and national competition transportation have been reduced in the proposed budget. Elimination of transportation to away sporting events has not been considered at this time.

Have we examined transportation waivers?

Response – This subject will require guidance from the District Solicitor to determine the legality of the issue.

Have we examined our processes and eliminated waste in all areas including personnel?

Response – Evaluation of the existing processes is an ongoing effort. Many changes have been instituted over the years increasing efficiencies and making employees more productive.

Have we explored creative ways to increase revenue through rentals and advertising?

Response – The District has tried to maximize revenue based on the utilization of our buildings subject to Board Policy. Advertising revenue has been received to offset certain costs throughout the District. Naming rights were explored several years ago and the idea was met with some philosophical resistance from the School Board (XYZ Company Memorial Stadium or Any Bank Bear Gym).

Can we have students rent textbooks?

Response – The legality of this suggestion is being investigated.

Are we utilizing computers and conserving paper?

Response – The District is making every effort to save on the cost of copying and paper. Electronic weekly packets have been made available in lieu of paper copies. Current financial software was used to email pay vouchers and direct deposit was made mandatory. Email is the preferred method of communication and recently a centralized printing solution was installed at all elementary schools to save on inkjet printer cartridges and monitor printer usage. Secondary schools printing processes will be addressed later this year.

What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the Assistant Superintendents and is there a way to outsource what they do?

Response – There are two Assistant Superintendents, one for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment and one for Student and Administrative

Services. There are also three Assistants to the Superintendent. These positions are responsible for three distinct areas, Business Operations, Human Resources and Professional Development & Intervention Services. There are no plans to outsource these positions.

Are there administrative cuts included in the budget?

Response – The administrative budget for 2011-2012 is less than the 2010-2011 budget. This reduction is due to several senior administrators leaving the District and being replaced by new lower cost administrators. The Administrators, including Central Administration, Act 93 Principals and the Supervisors also agreed to contribute 1% of last year's salary increase back to the District to offset the ever increasing cost of health care. No other group of employees gave back to the District. The 1% contribution was in addition to the current 13% of monthly health insurance premiums that Administrators contribute.

What is the impact on the average homeowner if the Board raises taxes?

Response – Based on a maximum allowed tax increase under Act 1, which includes the published Act 1 Index of 1.7% for BASD and approved exceptions, the District could legally raise taxes 1.17 mills or 5.69%. With the average home in Boyertown assessed at \$120,000 that would be an increase of \$140.40 per year. A home assessed at \$100,000 would increase \$117.

How many students are being affected with the proposed cuts?

Response – The proposed cuts presented Tuesday, March 29th were very broad and far-reaching. Most likely the cuts would affect every student in BASD, there were 7,081 students attending Boyertown schools at the end of February

What type of phone system are we using?

Response – The District has been using a Cisco IP telephony phone system for the last seven+ years. The total number of landlines and subsequent phone bills eliminated with the installation of the phone system exceeded 200.

Are we using performance contracting?

Response – The District has utilized performance contracting to upgrade the lighting fixtures in all buildings from T12 light fixtures to more efficient T8 light fixtures. This project was completed more than six years ago and the District has realized significant energy savings during that period. More recently the District entered into a performance contract to replace the old inefficient light fixtures in all the building gymnasiums with high efficiency high bay fluorescent fixtures saving energy and increasing light output. The District is currently evaluating performance contracting to replace antiquated boilers at both New Hanover Upper Frederick and Pine Forge Elementary schools. The first performance contract also included enough savings to upgrade the boiler at Earl Elementary. The District has realized a significant savings in oil consumption for the last six years.

Are we purchasing electricity through deregulation?

Response – The District purchased electric from Metropolitan Edison (Met-Ed) through the end of 2010, when the utility rates were deregulated. The District is currently purchasing the electric commodity through GDF/Suez Energy Resources for a cost of \$.07195/KHW through June 30, 2013.

Can we share administrative resources with other districts?

Response – The District has explored this concept with neighboring school districts.

Have we asked administrators, lead teachers, department heads and supervisors to look for cuts?

Response – The submission of cost-cutting ideas has been communicated to all employees and Administration is open to all ideas. Ideas have been received from classified staff, professional staff, supervisors and administrators. Several ideas have been included on the expenditure reduction list.

If we make large scale cuts to the electives, where will students go?

Response – The District realizes there will be less elective choices for students. To have a minimal impact on the time spent in class or possibly in study

halls, Building Administrators may need to alter the current daily schedule.

Have you done an analysis of the electives that aren't selected the most?

Response – The District evaluated various electives over the past year and implemented a minimum number of students prior to the class being scheduled. As the expenditure reduction plan is implemented, the evaluation of the more popular electives will be considered to minimize the affect on students.

Have we encouraged the use of volunteers?

Response – The District always encourages volunteers and recognizes the contribution of those who do volunteer work in our schools. Requests have been made to retired teaching staff to serve as volunteers for the students.

Insurance contribution to 14%

Response – The professional staff through their collective bargaining agreement will be contributing 10% toward health care premiums next year, an increase from the current 8.75% contributed in 2010-2011. Administrators contribute 13% and classified staff contribute 7%. The District has not budgeted an increase to the administrators or classified staff as this would remove the “grandfathered” status of the District’s health care plan under the new Federal Health Care Reform Act (a.k.a. Obamacare). The increased benefit costs for enacting the new wellness benefits of the reform bill would outweigh any possible savings through increased contributions.

Health Insurance premium increases of 2%. Can't the premiums be negotiated? Has the District considered Self-insurance?

Response – The District is self-insured for medical, prescription and dental insurance coverage. The District has had self-insured dental coverage for more than 10 years. The District started the self-insurance of medical and prescription coverage effective July 1, 2010, when BASD left the Berks County Health Trust, which paid a fully insured premium. The program thus far has been very successful, building a reserve to handle potential catastrophic claims. The District agreed to mirror the benefit structure and premium structure for both 2010-2011

and 2011-2012. The Berks County Health Trust has accepted a 2% premium increase, which BASD will match for one more year.

Can the District fine parents for their child's misbehavior? For example, levy a \$5 fee for each time a student is written up on a disciplinary matter or \$10 per in-school suspension.

Response – This is a legal and philosophical question. The District Solicitor can opine on the suggestion, but do we want to label good children and bad through making parents pay a fine.

How many tax bills or taxpayers are in the District?

Response – The District generates over 32,000 per capita tax bills per year and over 18,000 real estate tax bills.

What is the relationship of Assistant Superintendents to Student functions?

Response – Each of the two Assistant Superintendents has a significant position that directly and indirectly relates to students. Each position is distinctly different but many times collaboration between the two is necessary with the Superintendent of Schools. The following is a brief description of their numerous duties. As members of the Central Administration, both are cabinet level positions that work closely with the Superintendent of Schools and act as School Board liaisons at the committee level and have enormous interaction with the School Board.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment is responsible for development of K-12 student curriculum, directly dealing with instruction for the students. The Instruction function is the delivery of the State approved curriculum to properly deliver the curriculum uniformly across all schools. The assessment is the grading, evaluation and state reporting of all students standardized testing results for which the District is held accountable. This position is also directly responsible for the use of and development of technology initiatives throughout the District.

The Assistant Superintendent for Student & Administrative Services is directly responsible for all special education services, guidance, health and other non-regular instructional services provided by the District to students. This position handles all disciplinary issues,

alternative education and special education placements outside the District.

College students for mentors and remediation

Response – The District will continue to explore the use of student volunteers as addressed earlier in this document.

Sponsoring of children

Response – The District will explore the financial and non-financial issues for the sponsoring of BASD students. How we identify the students in need of sponsoring may be a challenge due to the confidential status of economic situations and sharing of academic performance.

Pay freezes?

Response – Discussions with various levels of employees are ongoing.

The pension plan needs to be restructured to a 401K plan. Traditional pension plans are absolutely a thing of the past. I would bet a majority of your taxpayers are not getting a traditional pension in this day in time and it is time for the BASD to also get with the times.

Response – All school district employees are covered by the State Pension Plan, Pennsylvania School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS). The State manages the plan and mandates what each school district must contribute into the pension system each year. Eligible employees must contribute up to 7.5% of their pay into the system based on when they entered the pension system. The pension benefits are by law. State workers and Legislators are also covered by a similar type plan called the State Employees Retirement System (SERS). Details of the pension plan and projected contributions are available at <http://www.psers.state.pa.us/>.

For the students that go to other schools, (private, parochial, etc.) Why can we not charge them for the use of the buses that are used to transport them to their school of choice? Especially since we have wonderful schools that they can easily attend!

Response – Student Transportation services are governed by the Pennsylvania School Code of 1949 as amended, Section 1361. As quoted, “The

board of school directors in any school district may, out of the funds of the district, provide for the free transportation of any resident pupil to and from the kindergarten, elementary school or secondary school in which he is lawfully enrolled, provided the school is not operated for profit and is located within the district boundaries or outside the district boundaries at a distance not exceeding ten miles by the nearest public highway,..." Based on this law the District cannot charge for bussing resident students.

Why doesn't the District contract for Transportation Services? Can we privatize transportation?

Response – The District moved to contracted bus services in the late 1990s. The contractor for transportation services is Quigley Bus Service in Bally. The company provides transportation service to over 6,000 students and operates a fleet of almost 100 vehicles. The bus drivers are employed by Quigley and are not paid by the School District. The District compensates Quigley based on a negotiated contract through fiscal year 2014. In reviewing privatization, you must consider the PA School Code from the previous question and therefore eliminate "free" transportation services to all students. This would put the decision of transportation on each individual student's guardian about how the student would be transported to school. This idea might have merit if there were public transportation available in the Boyertown Area and has worked successfully in more urban school districts.

What options does the district have to raise taxes other than real estate taxes?

Response – School Districts currently have several taxes that are levied. They are from largest to smallest, Real Estate taxes, Earned Income Tax (1% split 50/50 with municipality), Real Estate Transfer Tax (1% transfer tax paid by seller and buyer of home is split between county and School), Per Capita Tax (Bill is for \$15 with the School District retaining \$10 and Municipality getting other \$5), and Occupational Privilege Tax (OPT) of \$10 or in some municipalities Local Services Tax of up to \$52. The District gets \$5 per employee working in the District. Municipality keeps the difference. The law limits the District's ability to raise taxes on any tax besides the real estate tax. The real estate tax is also limited to the recently passed (2006) Act 1 index plus any qualified exceptions for mandated expenditure increases.

Why not charge an appropriate activity fee to cover the particular activity's cost. This will allow the District to eliminate these costs from its budget while still having extracurricular programs. Many school districts across the state and the country already do this.

Response – The concept of an activity fee (a.k.a. Pay to Play) has been discussed over the last several years during budget preparation. Many school districts have already implemented an activity fee and many more are proposing a fee for next fiscal year. The BASD preliminary budget includes an activity fee for all secondary students participating in any extra-curricular activity. Currently the proposed fee is \$80 per student regardless of the number of activities. The estimated revenue generated from this fee is projected at \$100,000. Details of the program are under development, including family caps and sponsorships for students unable to afford the fee.