

FROM THE COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

How much is a quality education worth? And, can we afford it? Colchester taxpayers will be wrestling with these and other questions over the next few weeks, as the Board of Education deliberates over next year's school budget and our educational priorities. These are not new questions – we wrestle with them every year. This year, though, the affordability question is more difficult than ever. Consequently, the Board of Education has an even greater challenge convincing taxpayers of the tremendous value they are getting for their education dollar.

Over the next few weeks, as the budget is discussed and debated, we will be reaching out to inform and to explain what's in the budget, what's not in the budget, and why. We will also tell you about our innovative approaches to providing low-cost and even no-cost solutions to our challenges, and we will highlight the achievements we have attained with the limited resources that we have. The residents of Colchester have always supported education. But if we are asking you to continue to show that support and to vote for a tax increase, we know that we must continue to show you results and we must convince you that we are doing all we can to preserve resources.

The Superintendent of Schools has proposed a budget that calls for a 4.75% increase over current spending – that's a substantial number, and higher than many area towns' initial proposals. We know that, and rest assured we know the economic times we are in. Why are we even considering such an increase in such times? Here's why:

- we are a growing school district: This year we have 77 more students in our system than we were projected to have. Across the state, school population is down 2%. Not so here.
- we are one of the lowest spending districts in the state: We've heard the statistic that we are among the lowest in the state in per-pupil spending. We can interpret that ranking in different ways. On one hand, we are clearly challenged by limited resources. On the other hand, we are encouraged that we do so much with the resources that we do have. Regardless of how it's interpreted, that ranking means we are starting from a lower base number. We have already done the re-allocations and the reductions that many districts are just starting to do. We already have class sizes nearing maximum levels at Colchester Elementary School and Bacon Academy.
- we cannot continue to postpone capital needs: In the past, in our consistent effort not to eliminate programs, we have reduced, even eliminated, spending on our facilities. But the needs do not go away, and we all know it's far less expensive to repair than to neglect and eventually need to replace.

We have a school system in Colchester of which all residents can truly be proud – our students achieve higher than state averages on CMTs in 14 of 20 test levels. Our dropout rate is among the lowest in the state at 0.5% (the state average is 2.5%). Eighty-seven percent of students pursue higher education. Our decisions are all data-driven and student-centered.

Colchester's innovative use of resources has created a district that provides tremendous value for its education dollars. Yes, the Board of Education is asking for more of those dollars, but rest assured it will be money well-spent.

Ronald A. Goldstein, Chair
Phone: 860-334-7726