

As I finalize next year's Education Budget Proposal I can't help but reflect on how this momentous task has changed in my tenure as Superintendent of Schools. My first-ever district budget plan was for 2006-07, the year in which we were opening Colchester Elementary School. Because we were moving 66% of our classrooms in the entire school system as a result of our new school, my budget theme that year was The Big Move. That budget contained costs for operating the new school and the funding needed to move grades 4 and 5 to what is now JJIS, and for WJJMS classrooms to occupy badly-needed space in what was formerly CIS. The budget increase supported by the community that year was 7.49%.

The next school year proposal (2007-08) was aimed at funding the Board's new Strategic Plan. Because the Plan was based on education needs identified by the community, the Board of Education directed me to show them what it would cost to fund it. My initial proposal included a total of \$367,000 of reallocated resources to meet the district's most critical needs, hence the budget theme for that year: Maximizing Resources to Improve Student Learning. The budget also contained data-based rationales for new staff and programs we were requesting to improve teaching and learning for our students.

Early Intervention, Future Success For All Students, the theme of the 2008-09 budget year, captured our effort to provide increased academic opportunities and support for students all schools. We achieved our goal primarily by redefining the responsibilities of our math and language arts specialists and adopting research-based curricula. The total budget increase that year was 2.97%. Our decisions led to continued increases in student achievement.

With the economic downturn we began to experience last year, Colchester saw its first reduction of staff in more than fifteen years. Teacher, administrator and support staff positions were cut and Federal Stimulus Funds were used to reduce the bottom line. I was proud to be the leader of the only district in the state to achieve contractual concessions from every one of our labor unions and nonunion staff, largely due to the positive relationship between the Board/Administration and our dedicated employees. The theme last year: Sustaining Excellence During Challenging Financial Times. The increase: 1.55%

This year's decision-making process was more challenging than ever for our administrative team. It was, quite frankly, an excruciating process. The painful decisions we made to eliminate 10 positions and reduce 7 additional jobs are reflected in the title of next year's proposed budget: Educating Colchester's Children: Tough Times...Tough Decisions.

As I shut down my computer Sunday night after countless revisions of my Power Point Budget Presentation to the Board, I made one final change. I deleted the word 'Recommended' from 'Superintendent's Recommended Budget Proposal' a byline that has previously appeared under every budget theme title. Although I know that our proposal is an educationally responsible and fiscally responsive budget in this dire economy, I just can't bring myself to include that word in the title.

Karen Loiselle

Superintendent of Schools