

Plainville Citizen March 2012, Op-Ed

In spite of the difficult budget decisions that are made every year, we have much to be proud of in our school district. The Board of Education and the administration have maintained an unwavering focus on *students, teaching and learning* throughout the budget development process. This approved budget is tied in every way to the continued implementation of the Board's goals and to student success. We have continuously made the connection between the quality that exists within our schools and the value that our schools bring to the community as a whole. We ask for the support of the Town Council and the entire community for this budget, and the positive impact it will have on the students of Plainville.

On March 5th, the Town Manager and Superintendent presented the budget to the Town Council. On March 8th a public hearing was held, and the Board of Education will meet with the Town Council on March 20th and 27th to discuss any questions Town Council members have on the Board of Education's budget. Ultimately, the Town Council will vote to set the 2012-13 Town and Board of Education budget in early-April for the Budget Town Meeting vote on April 24th.

The current spending plan approved by the Board of Education for the Plainville Community Schools includes an increase of 1.77% -- or \$577,309.

The budget process was underway long before the Board began their review. The one single factor most influencing our budget development for next year was undoubtedly the impact of minimal increases to our budget over the last three years (0.05%, 0.75% and 0% respectively). The administration worked with the Director of Finance and Operations and me to explore all possible spending reduction and cost containment opportunities. After those efforts, a number of additional reductions were made to staffing increases and program improvements proposed by school and department administrators. Finally, we explored all available outside funding sources to minimize the financial impact to the community for those improvements that we felt essential and are included in the approved budget.

The Board of Education approved FY12-13 budget does not include reductions to existing staff, but does add one elementary classroom teacher to meet an expected enrollment shift and help maintain the Board's class size policy. The administration and the Board have worked to reduce expenditures in nearly every area of the budget. During their budget development process, the Board agreed to utilize funds from the 2011-12 Project Choice Grant to begin implementing a few initiatives this year. By doing this, the Board was able to eliminate these expenses from next year's proposed budget. The 2012-13 Board budget also utilizes the State's Excess Cost Grant to help minimize the overall budget increase. Another cost savings component of next year's budget will be our participation in the Energy Education program, which allowed for reductions in our utilities budget projections.

One item is included in the capital plan for 2012-13 - - replacing the cooling tower at the Middle School at a cost of \$80,000. Additional items originally included in the capital plan were: re-piping the sprinkler system at Wheeler, re-roofing a section of the Wheeler roof, replacing the underground storage tank at Wheeler, and carpet replacements at Wheeler and the Middle School. However, these items were ultimately reduced by the Board of Education from the 2012-13 request.

If town voters approve of the budget on the April 24th ballot, that approved amount will be the starting budget for the next fiscal year which begins on 7/1/12. Plainville provides the opportunity for voters to accept or reject the proposed budget up to three times, via the voting process. This structure allows residents to provide feedback on the budget to the Town Council, yet brings closure to the budget setting process in a timely manner. Once the budget amount is either approved by voter acceptance, or decided by the Town Council, the Council establishes a mill rate and brings closure to the annual budget setting process.

The Board of Education budget is always constructed in the context of meeting the needs of our students through the goals set forth by the Board and administration. Goals include increasing student achievement in Math, Science and Language arts, maintaining district communications, enhancing school climate in a safe and secure environment, and maintaining the condition and appearance of school facilities. If the Board of Education approved budget is reduced, some of the funding that was earmarked to address these goals will have to be removed. For example, any further reduction in the Board of Education's budget could mean a further reduction in teachers and other staff, a reduction in supplies and support, or possible cutbacks in our intervention programs.