

Piscataway School Budget Adopted; Educational Programs Enhanced

The Piscataway Board of Education has approved the 2012-13 school budget, which includes cost-containment initiatives and invests in technology upgrades for students at all levels.

With prudent long-term fiscal management, the Board of Education is able to return \$200,000 to Piscataway taxpayers in the form of tax relief, while, at the same time, directing funds to programs that directly address student needs.

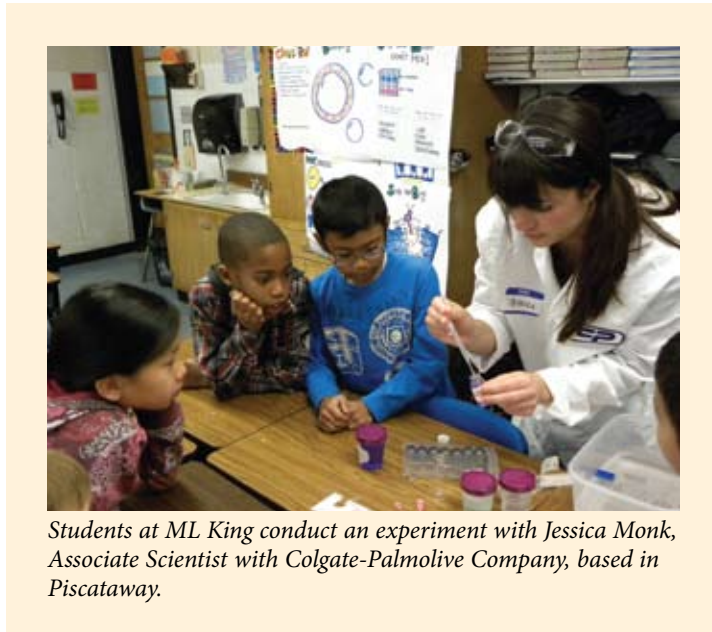
Development of the Piscataway School District budget is driven by several factors. Financial objectives are related to the goals and actions of the district's Strategic Plan, and the Board of Education's dedicated focus on student achievement.

"Over the past two years, with serious financial constraints, the Board faced hard decisions cutting programs in order to balance our budget and cope with reductions in state aid," said Dr. Paula A.Y. Maas, president of the Board of Education. "This year, I can smile, as the Board is able to include significant program improvements in next year's budget. We still have a long way to go, but we are in a much better place this year than in the past."

The 2012-13 budget carries a 1.15 percent increase in the local tax levy, well below the 2 percent cap allowed by New Jersey law. This translates to an increase of \$73 per year for the owner of the average home assessed at \$110,000.

Further reductions in the tax levy were hampered by a significant loss of township ratables in the past year. The assessed value of land eligible for taxation in Piscataway

decreased .73 percent. Had township ratables remained intact, the school tax increase would have been \$29 for the average homeowner.



Students at ML King conduct an experiment with Jessica Monk, Associate Scientist with Colgate-Palmolive Company, based in Piscataway.

In other words, had township ratables not decreased, Piscataway residents would have only incurred a tax increase of \$44 instead of \$73.

"I am confident that this is a bare-bones budget," said Thomas Mosier, vice president of the Board of Education. "Concerted efforts to capitalize on efficiencies in the district have allowed the Board to keep rate increases to a minimum and remain sensitive to the economic circumstances faced by Piscataway residents."

Included in the 2012-13 budget are the following staff changes and adjustments to address district growth:

- A new hands-on science and engineering program called "Project Lead The Way"

will take students to the next level in preparation for technological advances in a global society.

- The world language program will be enhanced in the elementary schools, and struggling students will receive assistance from two classroom instructional support teachers which are included in the 2012-13 spending plan.

- Due to increased enrollment at Schor and Quibbletown Middle Schools, the 2012-13 budget includes an additional guidance counselor/psychologist at each. Educational support staff will provide individualized assistance in language arts literacy and mathematics at Conackamack, Quibbletown and Schor.

- Teacher assistants will provide supplemental instruction in certain high school classes where students need support. Classes include Advanced Placement English Literature, Honors English and Calculus, English 1 - 4, and several Algebra courses.

- District technology, which received little attention over the past several years, will receive equipment upgrades as well

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The Budget Battle Continues

While state aid increased for the 2012-13 school year, it does not make up for the cuts that were inflicted on the district for the last two years. In 2010, Governor Chris Christie slashed funding to school districts, and Piscataway suffered a 30 percent loss in state aid, or \$5 million. Another \$700,000 was cut by the state from funds that the district had saved for tax relief and capital projects.

Additionally, over the past three years, the state defaulted on a portion of its obligation to fund \$440,660 in school improvements that it authorized in 2002.

Hence, despite this year's state aid increase of \$1.2 million, Piscataway has still suffered a net loss of over \$3 million over the past two years.

Moreover, the School Funding Reform Act

of 2007 was supposed to develop a funding formula that established equitable distribution of state aid to all school districts. At that time, the formula calculated Piscataway's fair share of state aid to be \$38 million.

Recently, that calculation was reduced by Acting Commissioner of Education Chris Cerf to \$20 million. This means that Piscataway taxpayers are being denied \$18 million from the 2007 tax reform, and are still \$4.8 million away from the aid they are entitled to under Acting Commissioner Cerf's determination.

If Piscataway received the full funding provided by the School Funding Reform Act, the school district would be able to return over \$1,000 to the average Piscataway taxpayer AND maintain all existing programs. 🍌

BUDGET ADOPTED continued

as resources for the engineering program at the middle schools. Overseeing these technology initiatives will be the Supervisor of Educational Technology.

- The positions of librarian and technology teacher at the middle school level will be combined to reflect changing needs, current practices and advancements in these areas.
- Participation in district athletic programs has increased, reflecting healthier lifestyles and requiring support for health and wellness initiatives. An Assistant Athletic Director will be appointed to meet those student needs.
- Two K-8 teaching positions will be eliminated for the 2012-13 school year based on shifts in enrollment. 🍌

An Investment in Technology is an Investment in our Future

Keeping up with technological advances is an ongoing challenge when financial resources are limited. The 2012-13 district budget includes additional steps to prepare Piscataway students for success in a global society.

"Our students cannot be left 'behind the times' as a result of the budget cuts over the past several years," says Robert L. Copeland, superintendent of schools. "We must put a new technology plan in place which assists our students to become creative, accomplished, successful leaders."

The 2012-13 budget includes necessary replacements of printers, DVD players, and flat screens at all grade levels, as well as district-wide network enhancements and required upgrades.

A new project that uses iPads for one-to-one learning at the middle school level will be implemented through a lease/purchase agreement from the Office of Community Education. 🍌



The 2012-13 district budget includes investments in district-wide technology initiatives that support student learning.

PISCATAWAY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

2012-13 GENERAL FUND BUDGET SUMMARY

You can examine the entire budget online at www.piscatawayschools.org or call 732-572-2289 x 2520 to review a copy.

EXPENDITURES

HOW THE DOLLARS ARE SPENT

Direct Instruction: Teachers, supplies and equipment for regular and special education programs	\$58,975,810	59.04%
Indirect Instruction: Counseling, nursing, and other pupil support services, instructional staff services, and principals	\$18,403,928	18.42%
Operations and Maintenance: Maintenance, operations, utilities and custodial services for all schools	\$11,344,097	11.36%
Central, Fiscal, Community and Internal Services: Fiscal and community services, county treasurer's fee, purchasing, warehouse, publications, research and assessment, planning and communication services, human resources and informational services	\$2,480,842	2.48%
Pupil Transportation: Bus transportation for students	\$6,426,599	6.43%
General Administration: Board of Education, executive administration, and instructional administration	\$2,264,495	2.27%
TOTAL:	\$99,895,771	100%

REVENUES

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

Local Tax Levy	\$79,851,482
State Aid	16,009,189
Miscellaneous	500,000
Transportation Fees	510,000
Interest/Tuitions	375,100
Budgeted Fund Balance	2,650,000
TOTAL:	\$99,895,771

Tax Impact

For the average Piscataway home assessed at \$110,000, there will be a \$73 annual increase in the tax levy, or about \$6.08 per month. 🏠

Long-Term Fiscal Management Results in Long-Term Savings

Piscataway taxpayers reap the benefits of district efforts to contain expenditures in the areas of special education, health insurance, transportation, personnel and energy savings.

- **Special Education** - \$4.35 million in savings from special education expenditures over the past six years by reducing costly out-of-district placements and keeping Piscataway students in their home district.
- **Health Insurance** - \$2.75 million in savings from health insurance premiums over the past five years. This was accomplished through self-insurance prescription and dental programs, plus a continued "opt out" program to reduce enrollment in district health plans. Piscataway staff members who choose to maintain health benefits through a family member's insurance receive an annual reimbursement significantly lower than the district's cost of providing health coverage.
- **Transportation** - \$2.2 million in transportation savings over the past five years through revisions in bus schedules, fuel purchase programs and a reduction in contract expenditures.

- **Personnel** - \$800,000 savings in salaries, wages and fringe benefits from outsourcing classroom/bus aides and substitutes.
- **Energy Savings** - \$600,000 over the past five years through energy efficient lighting, boilers, faucets, windows, and solar panels at the middle schools. Regional gas and electric purchasing cooperatives also contribute to the savings. 🌱



Piscataway students experience hands-on research opportunities.

Important Changes to the Election Schedule

Earlier this year, the New Jersey Legislature proposed Senate Bill 3148, and Gov. Chris Christie signed the bill, which provided the option of moving school elections from April to November. The Piscataway Board of Education voted unanimously to move school board elections to November in order to increase voter participation.

In addition to placing school board can-

didates on the November ballot, the new law eliminated the annual vote on the proposed school budget, provided that the budget is at or below the state's 2 percent cap on the tax levy.

Since the 2012-13 Piscataway School District budget includes 1.15 percent increase to the tax levy, well below the 2 percent cap, Piscataway voters are not asked to vote on the budget. They will cast ballots to elect mem-

bers of the Board of Education during the November general election.

Members of the Board whose terms would have expired in April 2012 will remain in office until the Board's reorganization meeting, which will be held in the first week of January 2013. 🍷

The Roofs Need Repairs

In December 2011, the Board of Education asked voters to approve a referendum proposal that would have authorized desperately needed roof repairs throughout district school buildings, and, at the same time, install solar panels throughout the district. This would have served as a source of revenue for years to come.

The referendum was defeated by Piscataway voters; however the roofs still require repairs. The cost for these repairs is estimated to be approximately \$10 million. To hold down the potential tax impact for Piscataway homeowners, a new plan to fix the roofs has been recommended, extending the renovations over a period of eight years.

Phase One this summer will include roof renovations at Piscataway High School,

Conackamack and Quibbletown Middle Schools, and Arbor and Randolphville elementary schools.

Solar panels will be installed on the renovated roofs, but the energy savings will not match the rate of return in the initial referendum. The new project will be funded by a five year lease/purchase agreement. 🍷



Roof repairs and installation of solar panels will begin this summer as part of an abbreviated renovation plan that spreads necessary repairs over a period of eight years.



PISCATAWAY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

1515 STELTON RD · PO BOX 1332 · PISCATAWAY, NJ 08855-1332
(732) 572-2289 · www.piscatawayschools.org

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Robert L. Copeland

Publication of this newsletter is supported through a grant from the Office of Community Education; no taxpayer funds were used.

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