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One of the topics I heard very clearly from our community during my Listening and Learning Tour is the need for greater financial transparency. I couldn't agree more. Having a high level of fiscal transparency is very important as we are responsible for being wise stewards of taxpayer dollars. As we begin to plan for next school year, now is the perfect time to engage our stakeholders to help drive our budget conversations.

Building a budget is a year-round process that is constantly being monitored and adjusted. Most of the district's revenue is based on enrollment so that is a key factor we track. Like many districts, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools' enrollment growth has slowed. Trends we are watching that impact our enrollment include birth rates, housing growth, the economy and school program offerings, just to name a few. As we form our projections we must be as accurate as possible so that we can allocate funding accordingly. If our projections are off, we risk having to use our fund balance.

To help our community make sense of our budgeting process, we have made some changes to the way we approach our planning calendar that includes more stakeholder involvement by conducting Town Hall meetings. In January and April we will hold these public meetings for the purpose of explaining how our funds are allocated, providing an enrollment update and showing our five-year forecast. These meetings will also include time for stakeholder questions and gathering perspectives so we can build our budget accordingly.

January will also usher in a new year along with a new school board that will work to set budget priorities for the 2023-24 school year. The district's Financial Advisory Committee will also help to provide input on financial issues. This newly-formed committee is made up of administrators, staff and community members who meet quarterly.

Our website is also a good resource where our community can find current and historical budget information at www.plsas.org

As I have stated, my commitment is to deliver to the board and the community a structurally balanced budget and stay within our means while prioritizing student learning. This includes engaging our staff, parents and community in budget conversations as we work to make the best decisions possible on behalf of our students.

Our strategic plan, written with the help of our community, calls for us to continue fiscal accountability through operational excellence and the alignment of human, financial and physical resources to meet district goals. I ask our community to remain engaged in our district as we work to increase our level of transparency and build success through partnerships.