

2009-10 Proposed Budget

The Board of Education recently approved a \$112.3 million budget for the 2009-2010 school year with the lowest tax increase in more than two decades. The budget will be presented to the Board of School Estimate, which will take action to levy taxes.

The following are answers to frequently asked questions about the budget:

Q. What cost-saving measures will be implemented to minimize the budget increase?

A. The district was able to minimize the proposed budget increase, and therefore minimize increase in taxes, by implementing efficiencies in maintenance and operations. The portion of the budget allocated for maintenance has been kept to a minimum by major infrastructure repairs the district made in recent years. Because significant repairs have been made to district buildings, maintenance costs can be kept low and reducing energy costs. We have also achieved savings by delaying the addition of proposed middle school technology studios, and we have reduced transportation operating costs by reorganizing bus routes in a manner that will result in the reduction of the number of buses needed to serve all students.

Q. How does this budget allow the district to improve education?

A. The cost saving measures noted above not only limit the need to increase the budget, but also make funds available that will enable the district to increase support for instructional programs, and maintain staffing levels so as not to compromise current class size policy. All of these measures support district goals, which include student learning, professional staff development and recruitment, communications and resource management.

Q. How does implementing phase II of full-day kindergarten impact the budget?

A. The completion of the second and final phase of full-day kindergarten accounts for only one tenth of the proposed tax increase. The Board believes this to be one of the measures needed to support early learners in the district's efforts to close the achievement gap. It is also an important asset in attracting new homeowners to the South Orange-Maplewood community

Q. Why are 11 teachers being hired in the elementary schools?

A. Four teachers are needed for full-day kindergarten and seven are needed in grades one through four to accommodate a projected elementary enrollment increase. In addition, there may be a return of students from private schools due to the economic downturn. This makes up one sixth of the proposed increase. Without these additional teachers, class size would increase beyond the district's established limits--and above the size of classes offered by neighboring towns.

Q. What technology programs are budgeted for the 2009-2010 school year?

A. There are three new programs from the long-range technology plan that will be implemented through this budget. They are all aligned with Board of Education, New Jersey and national educational goals. The new programs include: 1.) A program called *Read 180* will address the language arts needs of students who are performing below grade level at the secondary school level; 2.) The district will install wireless infrastructure in the secondary schools to support the infusion of technology into the classroom. This will begin to bring this district on par with some of our neighboring districts; and 3.) The district will fit 35 classrooms (all fifth-grade classes and some at CHS) with multi-media technology tools to aid teachers in the delivery of instruction.

Q. How has the district budgeted for special education?

A. The district budgeted for lower tuition and other costs for special needs students by keeping the number of students who must be educated out of district from increasing. This is being accomplished by developing new classes and services within the district that meet the needs of special needs students. A third-grade inclusion class is in place this year and a fourth-grade class is budgeted for next year.

Q. Did the district receive any extra state aid?

A. No. The district received nothing extra this year.

Q. Will the district receive any federal stimulus money?

A. We have not received any federal stimulus money to date and it is unclear if we will in the future.

Q. How will the budget impact taxes?

A. The tax increase was pared down to 3.98 percent, the lowest in more than two decades.

Q. What happens next?

A. The 2009-2010 budget will now be submitted to the Board of School Estimate. The Board of Education and Board of School Estimate will hold a joint public workshop on March 25 at 7:00 pm in the District Meeting Room of the Board of Education building. The Board of School Estimate will hold a public hearing on the budget on March 30 at 7:00 pm in the same location, at which time action will be taken to levy taxes.