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Frequently-Asked Questions 2005-06 Budget

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
SOUTH ORANGE AND MAPLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY

525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ| 07040

Peter P. Horoschak, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Brian F. O'Leary
President

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

On March 7, 2005 the Board of Education will vote to approve a preliminary budget for the 2005 ~V 2006 school year.| After the budget is approved, it will be submitted to the county superintendent for review and advertised in local newspapers. This document addresses several frequently asked questions about the budget.

What is the current budget?

The current proposal totals $88.2 million, divided among the general fund ($82 million), certain funds restricted by the state or federal government ($2.7 million) and debt service ($3.5 million). For details, see the one-page budget summary providing a side-by-side view of revenues by source and expenditures by program (/files/finance/budget/SxS-022305.pdf), the comparative line-item budget (/files/finance/budget/0506-ComparativeBudgetAsOf030205.pdf; **showing FTE employees by budget line, what's being cut/added and change from the 2004-05 budget**), or the annotated line-item budget (/files/finance/budget/0506-AnnotatedBudgetAsOf030205.pdf; **providing a narrative account of what types of expenditures are contained on each budget line**).

How much is the budget increasing?

The proposed General Fund budget (excluding debt service and the Special Revenue Fund) increases spending by slightly less than $2.5 million over 2004-05, or 3.07%.

What is the expected tax increase for that budget?

The actual tax increase depends on the amount of state aid provided for the coming school year.| At this writing, all New Jersey school districts are still waiting for that information.| Assuming that the amount of aid is unchanged, the schools portion of the local property tax rate for the coming year would increase by 4.71%.

How will the budgeted money be spent?

A chart at the end of this document shows the breakdown by major area of spending.| About a third is used to fund salaries for regular education (in-class support).| Another third is split more or less evenly between special services and health benefits, with decreasing amounts for support services, transportation, professional development and extracurricular activities.

How did the Board get to this budget?

At the January 24 Board meeting, the Superintendent described a ~Smaintenance budget~T, the amount of money that would be needed to deliver this year~Rs programs and services at next year~Rs expected costs.| The maintenance budget assumes that we provide the current level of services and then adjusts for anticipated changes in the costs of salaries, benefits, insurance, energy and the like.| This ~Smaintenance budget~T totaled $83.5 million. At that meeting, the Superintendent also presented the first draft of his proposed preliminary budget. That proposed budget contained roughly $2.3 million in proposed spending reductions from the "maintenance budget", in order to conform to the state's spending CAP.

At that meeting, the Board asked that the administration revisit the maintenance budget and make certain that all reasonably anticipated increases in spending had been included.| The Board did so for two reasons: to make sure that we had an accurate picture of anticipated need in 2005 ~V 2006, and to be able to make decisions about potential reductions as part of the budget process.

Since that meeting, the staff has identified $1.6 million in additional, necessary spending, much of that in the area of special services.| This additional spending increased the estimated General Fund maintenance budget to $85.1 million (with another $0.5 million in the Special Revenue Fund, this represents a maintenance budget of $85.6 million).

Why not just ask for a General Fund budget of $85.1 million?

Last June, the state passed legislation that limits the rate at which local school districts can increase spending.| Absent any other considerations, a school district can increase its costs by no more than 3% annually.| Any programs or services that the district provides today must fit under the allowed amount or be discontinued.
See /files/finance/budget/BudgetChangesSince012405.pdf for more detail and the comparative line-item budget for the line-by-line detail on what spending has been increased and/or reduced from the 2005-06 maintenance-level budget.

What does the proposed budget cut?

The proposed budget includes several operating changes whose financial benefit will allow the district to meet the spending restrictions of the state law enacted last year.| These changes include: outsourcing custodial services at Columbia High School; improving scheduling efficiencies at our elementary and middle schools; reducing certain administrative costs; and organizing to address the needs of some students currently receiving out-of-district special education services using in-district staff. See /files/finance/budget/02-03-05-SuptMessage.pdf for a description of the reductions proposed on 1/24/05. See /files/finance/budget/BudgetChangesSince012405.pdf for the list of additional reductions proposed on 2/23/05.

How do these changes affect students?

While the policy for elementary class sizes has not changed and will continue to be followed, the average class size in our elementary grades may increase and trend closer to the policy maximum. See

The proposed changes in special education will help the district meet the needs of students locally, improving their local connection and reducing the time required for out-of-district transportation.

At the middle schools, the district will no longer offer a half year of French in the 7th grade.| This decision was made after reviewing 7th-grade French enrollment, which was low, and considering the alternative (7th-grade students will continue to take a half year of Spanish as a world language).| In the eighth grade, students will be able to choose between a full year of French and a full year of Spanish, as has been the case in the past.

Also at the middle schools, a part of the physical education curriculum (dance) will be discontinued.| Other physical education activities will be offered to students.

How does our spending compare with that of other school districts?

The state requires that the district track expenses in a way that allows direct comparison with similar school districts (K ~V 12 school districts with more than 3,500 students) throughout the state.| District per-pupil spending has for the last several years been at or somewhat below the state average.| It is also lower than per-pupil spending in Livingston, Millburn, West Orange and Montclair. See /files/finance/budget/budgetworkshop011905-final.pdf#page=8 for more detail, as well as /files/finance/budget/Budget101-082003.pdf, which compares our district's spending by category and rate of spending growth with a selection of 60+ districts for the period 1996-2003.

and /files/finance/budget/budgetworkshop011905-final.pdf#page=17 for more detail on the local property tax base and /files/finance/budget/budgetworkshop011905-final.pdf#page=20 for a 10-year history of state aid as a proportion of our school budget revenue.

What happens once the Board adopts the budget on March 7?

After the Board approves the preliminary budget, it is submitted to the county superintendent for review and approval.| Once approved, the budget is returned to the Board of Education, which votes on a final version to be submitted to the Board of School Estimate for consideration.| The Board of School Estimate then meets to review, adopt or amend the total budget request.

How can I obtain more information about the budget?

Questions on the budget and any of the background reports may be directed to the Superintendent's office.| He can be reached at (973) 762-5600, extension 1820.

Regular education	27,309,462	33.4%
Special services	14,778,232	18.1%
Benefits	11,063,345	13.5%
Facilities	10,301,235	12.6%
Support services	7,065,221	8.6%
Student support	4,778,646	5.8%
Transportation	3,883,076	4.7%
Professional development	1,959,033	2.4%
Extracurricular	722,760	0.9%
	81,861,010	100.0%

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