

Hudson City School District Board of Education
BUDGET COMMITTEE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

December 17, 2012

This meeting of the Budget Committee was a Community Conversation. The meeting was held in the John L. Edwards cafeteria, and the intent was to gather input from the community on what was most important to them as the district begins budget planning for the 2013-2014 school year. In addition to the Budget Committee, four people attended the meeting: one parent, two teachers (Mr. Vorwald and Ms. Albino), and one district employee (Wayne Francis). Maria Suttmeier began the discussion with the school board's stated goal of a 15% graduation rate increase over the next three years, and asked for suggestions on how to budget to ensure this goal is met.

A parent and member of the Booster Club spoke about the importance of sports programs. Her son is on the soccer team and she's seen a great transformation in him since joining. She wanted to hold her son back in sixth grade and couldn't. Her son has been participating in sports for six months, and she's seen him mature significantly in that time. She discussed the cost of funding modified sports (roughly \$8,500 for fall and \$10,000 for winter). She asked how much of an impact \$30K has on each taxpayer. She mentioned that the Booster Club feels a lot of pressure to fundraise this year.

Scott Vorwald, a music teacher at MCSIS, discussed how one of his fellow department members is retiring this year. He is concerned that the district will not backfill the position. He mentioned that sixth grade choir has already been cut. He talked about his vision to create a wind ensemble comprised of highly achieving music students. He mentioned that there is a waiting list of more than 100 students to participate in band. The school does have some instruments to provide to students, and the Galvan Foundation has donated \$3,000 to the music program. Music lessons are given once a week on a rotating schedule so students are not always pulled from the same class. In the intermediate school, scheduling in general is an issue. Students have multiple study halls, but cannot get scheduled for band without conflicts with key classes. This teacher noted that he sees less interest to participate in music among junior high students.

Liz Albino, an art teacher at HHS and head of the art department, talked about how she's lost two teachers in the last few years. The remaining teachers are all now stretched to cover more grades than they used to. This teacher has 26 painting and drawing students in her last class, and not enough tables to accommodate all students. She mentioned that the district lost an animation class last year.

Everyone was pondering where we cut while still increasing the quality of HCSD graduates. It was generally agreed that sports, art, and music are what keeps the kids coming back.

Bobby Yusko talked about state mandates, and how things have historically gone with budget votes. Maria Suttmeier described how we build the school through budget, starting with essentials (i.e., teachers, transportation, special education). She stated that there is no right answer or perfect decision.

The parent asked if the district can mandate teachers to volunteer. She shared a story of a time she had scheduled a lunchtime meeting with one of her son's teachers. The teacher arrived late to the meeting and left early, mentioning that it was lunchtime. Maria Suttmeier stated that there are teachers who volunteer.

Mr. Vorwald asked for assistance in grant-writing for arts and music. Maria Suttmeier explained that the district cannot get grants that supplant what should normally be provided

by the district. The district does receive grants from entities such as the Berkshire Taconic Foundation and the Galvan Foundation. Much of the grant funding received by the district must be used for very specific purposes (e.g. Title I).

Wayne Francis suggested that the district provide a way to submit suggestions anonymously via the web. The group discussed the use of surveys, town meetings/calls, home mailing, and webinars as ways to gather public input.

Bobby Yusko urged everyone to attend and urge other to attend meetings of local governmental bodies to impress upon elected officials the dire situation with district's funding. With the revenue shortfalls, tax issues, and PILOT programs, the district is in a bind. He further explained the inequity of state funding among school districts throughout the state.