

2015-2016 Budget Introduction and Overview

This introduction outlines the Superintendent's budget request to the Board of Education for the 2015-2016 school year. This proposal totals \$40,152,387 which represents a 4.07% increase of \$1,571,917 from our current budget allocation. This request evolved after more than 3 months of assessing the academic, operational, and financial status of the Brookfield Public Schools. In addition, my staff and I reviewed and considered input from a wide range of our community--- administrators, teachers, non-certified personnel, students, parents, elected officials and residents of Brookfield. This information then underwent a thorough and comprehensive examination as I pursued my charge to provide a quality and appropriate educational program for all students, at every spectrum; and to continue our operational functioning in a safe and secure manner.

We believe this budget proposal identifies what we need, not what we want or wish to have. It reflects a concentrated effort to properly categorize expenses into appropriate accounts so as to build good, historical actuals for future budgets. This standard is necessary to instill confidence and trust in our request.

To execute my responsibilities proved to be a formidable and challenging task given the following factors:

- The current, difficult economic times experienced locally, in the State, and throughout our country which subsequently cause a difficult plight for taxpayers.
- Already, school resources have been extended, efficiencies have been enacted, and cost-effective approaches have been applied.
- Our reduced 2014-2015 budget allocation increase of .75 of a percent (\$290,000) and unanticipated shortfalls have contributed to an approximate \$400,000 projected budget overexpenditure. Similarly, several accounts were not an accurate reflection of monies budgeted or past spending trends, and some expenditures were made, but monies were not in place to cover them.

The district is currently implementing measures to address this shortfall, including a district spending freeze and a request to the Town for a supplemental appropriation of \$400,000.

Candidly, I believe the Brookfield Public Schools are at a critical crossroads--- will we move forward and provide our students with the best educational program possible to meet one's diverse and escalating needs; or will we labor to address only the basics in carrying out our responsibilities. Brookfield Public Schools have always strived for the highest standard but to continue this quest, monetary support is necessary. Of equal importance, we, as a school district, must make a concentrated effort to utilize the monies given to us in a cost effective and accountable manner. We have an obligation to ensure that funding by the Town will be applied wisely, responsibly, and as intended. We must remain committed to providing Town officials and our community with greater scrutiny, additional transparency, and increased specificity. We encourage public examination, involvement, and awareness of educational issues and the district does not take this obligation lightly.

Budget proposals usually contain 3 components: current items judged important to continue; new initiatives or submissions assessed as necessary to address evolving areas; and those items deemed important for restoration as their omission has proven difficult.

As one reflects on the proposals in this document, the vast majority of its content focuses on continuation of areas successfully employed in the 2014-2015 school year; new positions or initiatives recommended and items proposed for restoration are of a minimal nature.

My 2015-2016 request identifies 4 areas of focus:

- **Continued emphasis on achieving our class size guidelines and maintaining our support services that directly impact students.**

A concentrated effort was directed to meet Board of Education class size guidelines and, as such, 2.0 teachers at Huckleberry Hill and 2.0 teachers at Whisconier Middle School have been added. An offset to the cost of these positions has been achieved through declining enrollment numbers at Center School (-2.0) and Brookfield High School (-1.5).

Brookfield Board of Education Class Size Guidelines:

- **Center School:** 17-20 students with a target of 19 students;
- **Huckleberry Hill School:** 19-21 students with a target of 20 students;
- **Whisconier Middle School:** 21-23 students for grades 5 & 6 with a target of 22 students;
- **Whisconier Middle School:** 20-22 students for grades 7 & 8 with a target of 21 students; and
- **Brookfield High School:** 19-21 students with a target of 20 students.

- **Address an increase in our Special Education enrollment that has grown by 5% in the past 5 years.**

Special Education Focus:

During the 2009-2010 School year, under the guidance of the Office for Civil rights (OCR) and litigation proceedings, our Special Education Department adopted new measures and provided training opportunities to comply with the federal "Child Find" laws under IDEA. (It appeared that Brookfield Public Schools were under identifying students for special education services).

In 2010, Brookfield's special education population was at 7.34% or 214 students; as of October 1, 2014, that number has escalated to 12.09% or 330 pupils. The State's average special education enrollment is in the 11-12% range. Although our student numbers have risen significantly, our staff increases have been minimal and not kept pace. It is becoming more difficult to accommodate student needs and implement one's IEP. Please note that the identification process and resultant student IEP are mandated by Federal/State law; and Brookfield continues to spend the least amount of

money relative to our DRG and falls in the bottom 11 of school district funding across the State.

- **Attention to our Plant Facilities to help ensure we function safely and efficiently.**

A safe and secure learning and working environment must be maintained. To address the needs of this important area, the district re-established the Facilities Supervisor position to oversee our buildings and custodial/maintenance staff. One of this position's initial charges is to assess our facilities and incorporate district needs into our operating budget or into the Board/Town Capital Projects Plan.

As this assessment began, it was apparent that we face several concerns that are associated with an aging plant. Phase II of the Milone and MacBroom Demographic Study, scheduled for later in the school year, will provide further direction as to the best way to proceed in this area. Similarly, I have directed our Facilities Supervisor to closely examine key maintenance/plant accounts to determine if they are being, in an efficient manner and/or if they should be the subject of an RFP plan.

It is proposed to provide an additional \$20,000 in a designated facility account to address immediate plant needs that historically arise in the course of a normal school day or year. Some examples include replacement of doors, carpets, floor tiles, locks, clocks, sinks or faucets; other items could be sidewalk repairs, paving of small areas, light fixtures.....

The community should know that large projects are included in the aforementioned 5-year Capital Projects Plan, which involves facility infrastructure and building program needs. (i.e. security enhancements, sound and lighting system upgrades, classroom construction, gym floor replacement. This funding is not included in our operating budget but is handled by the Town, usually via bonding or General Fund monies

- **“Phasing-out” of our Pay to Participate athletic program fees.**

Recommendation:

Begin phasing out Brookfield High School and Whisconier Middle School interscholastic athletic fees by \$25, to \$125 and \$100 respectively. Cost: \$15,000.

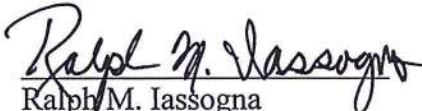
Additional Relevant Information

- Brookfield is considered a quality school district that provides a diversified academic and ancillary array of programs and opportunities to meet the changing and varying needs of our students.
- The Brookfield Board of Education takes very seriously its fundamental responsibilities contained in Connecticut Statute 10-220, especially in providing

- “educational activities that will serve best the interest of the district”; nevertheless the Board of Education is cognizant of the difficult economic situation facing taxpayers and has strived to contain expenditures.
- Our 2015-2016 self-funded health insurance rates are projected to remain stable.
- Total enrollment is projected at 2701 reflecting a decrease of 29 students.
- Each 1.0% of the budget increase totals \$385,000.
- Replacement salaries are calculated at \$50,991, (MA -1 of the teacher’s schedule) and benefits at \$15,810.
- Approximately 80% of our costs are driven by salaries and benefits, as is the case in most school districts; 15.7 % of our budget is required for mandated costs including Special Education and Transportation services; only 4.3% remains for discretionary spending in areas such as textbooks, professional spending, copies, equipment and instructional materials.
- To help offset Board of Education expenditures and to assist local taxpayers, the Town received (or is anticipating to receive), approximately \$1,863,860 in 2014-2015 from a variety of sources:
 - \$1,515,266 from the State Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS)
 - \$20,000 in Transportation Reimbursement
 - \$328,594 in several combined grants
- The Board of Education receives approximately \$1,750,000 in grant monies to offset its expenses (i.e. Title’s I-V, Perkins, IDEA, Special Education Excess Costs, School Lunch, Universal Services)

I reiterate that the development of this budget proposal proved to be an extremely difficult undertaking, particularly due to the fact that almost the entire Board of Education 2014-2015 budget had to be reconstructed to help ensure that our 2015-2016 financial data was accurate and built on a solid foundation.

I respectfully ask that this budget request not be judged on past issues, but rather on its substance and ability to meet the needs of our students and the expectations of our parents and community. I view 2015-2016 as a new beginning in which the Board of Education and its staff will make every effort to meet the many increasing challenges we face, but do so in a reasonable and cost-efficient manner.


Ralph M. Iassogna
Acting Superintendent