

Memo

To: **Lyme Budget Committee**
From: Mike Harris
Date: 1/12/2015
Re: school budget considerations

At the budget committee meeting on December 17, the members of the committee asked the school district representatives about reductions and decisions that the district had already made in preparing the budget that was proposed. I believe that the committee members wanted particularly to be informed of reductions that would affect the educational programming at the school insofar as the most obvious pressures on the budget were being made by expenses for personnel benefits and special education. The example that was cited at the meeting was the elimination of the funding for new math textbooks, and we very much appreciate the committee's restoration of those funds (\$20,000) into the budget.

I, therefore, submit the following list of educational and programmatic items that had been considered and then rejected or eliminated from the budget proposal that you received on December 17:

1. **Instructional time for academic differentiation and support.** Jeff Valence explained this at the meeting in some detail. For several years, the Lyme School has employed differentiation specialists in math and in reading to work with children who require compensatory instruction as individuals or in small groupings. The instruction is usually intended for children who do not require special instruction but who have lagged behind the achievement of the full class and who can continue with the class with the assistance of a period of individualized instruction. The differentiated instruction can also provide additional attention for students who benefit from more enrichment. The availability of the differentiation specialists allows for a better teacher student ratio that facilitates more individualized instruction. Neither of the differentiation specialists currently works full-time; one is a 0.8 FTE employee, the other is 0.6 FTE. The district would have considered employing them for more time at a maximum addition of \$50,000, but that option was precluded by the budget total.

2. **Sabbatical for curriculum coordination.** Jeff Valence had proposed this option as a means of addressing a couple of issues. Under this proposal, a sabbatical would be offered each half-year to a teacher who would then assume the role of curriculum coordinator for the school and work primarily on the school's alignment with the Common Core standards. The administration also contends that this arrangement would facilitate the professionalism, the collegiality, and the instructional skill of the entire staff as teachers rotated through the position over a period of several years. This option would either reduce the active teaching staff by one position (approximately \$75,000) or require the additional funding of a teacher, and neither possibility was considered feasible under the current budget.
3. **Professional development.** Because the enhancement of professional development opportunities is featured in the district's Strategic Plan, the administration had hoped to increase funding in the budget's Instructional Improvement accounts. Three specifics were discussed as district ambitions: (a) increasing the individual teacher allowance for professional workshops in a year, (b) paying for two graduate-level courses per year per teacher instead of one, and (c) increasing the stipend account for curriculum coordination. The total of those items would be about \$20,000. However, the pressures of the budget total instead focused attention on possible reductions in those same lines. In the end, the account amounts in the proposal remained at the levels of the current year.

Aside from listing those items, the administration also wants to point out that two other sets of accounts in the budget were adjusted carefully to minimal levels that entail some risks, i.e. high school tuitions and retirements. In both accounts, the numbers have been reduced to minimal coverage so that any additions of high school students or the actual retirement of four staff personnel would result in overages of expenditures. Normally, we would budget so as to cover ourselves more effectively for a range of circumstances. That was not possible with this budget.