

June 2013

A Letter to the Community:

The Scarsdale Board of Education is pleased to present the second proposed budget for the 2013-2014 school year. This budget is subject to public vote on June 18, 2013. Scarsdale is an extraordinary learning community where teachers, students, parents, residents, administrators and Board members work together to make the schools outstanding. We believe that this proposed budget, which totals \$143,899,713, supports our continued commitment to a first rate public school system while being mindful of economic realities.

The Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow

The Board seeks to provide all Scarsdale students with an intellectually rich and humane education. The Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow recognizes that *today's students*, as tomorrow's graduates, must be prepared to know, think and act in an interdependent world. We believe all students should have ongoing opportunities to realize their individual potential. The schools work towards this end by differentiating instruction, providing a range of student support services, offering multiple course levels at the High School, and providing many opportunities for student growth in academic, athletic and extracurricular areas.

Know: A priority is advancing student knowledge with globally competitive skills and experiences, while fostering a love of learning. Students begin inquiry research as early as first grade, culminating in the fifth grade Capstone project. The Middle School house system, CHOICE and the Alternative School prepare students in smaller communities that promote learning. At the High School, our faculty is developing numerous cross-disciplinary studies to supplement a range of invigorating coursework.

Think: The Scarsdale Schools are empowering students to think critically and creatively, learn independently, and persevere. Teachers at all grades use the arts to develop thinking skills that apply in a wide range of situations: deep noticing, paying attention to detail, and finding connections and patterns among ideas and experiences. Elementary school students create their own melodies. Middle and High School students view films and then connect them to literature themes or the historical period they are studying in class.

Act: The Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow inspires students to collaborate, embrace diversity, and make positive contributions locally and globally. The schools support service learning, disaster relief projects, and sustainability education, consistent with the value of "non sibi," not for oneself.

Standards of Excellence: This school district continues to hold itself accountable by creating and using local assessments to evaluate student work. The elementary school narrative writing assessments, Middle School e-portfolios, and the ninth grade "world cities" project at the High School measure how well our students are improving their capacity and skills, at the same time as being motivational experiences. Scarsdale is part of an international collaboration of educators that is engaged in benchmarking student work in the world's highest-performing schools.

These are just some of the many examples of the programs and values that we seek to continue through the 2013-2014 budget.

The Budget Seeks to Preserve Community Values

In crafting the budget for 2013-2014, we have been challenged because of another year of high increases for state mandated retirement benefit payments and an uncertain economy. We seek to control budget and tax increases through budgeting that balances the needs of all of our students and best serves the entire community as a whole. Over the past four years, the District has streamlined the budget in many non-personnel categories. At the same time, we remain committed to providing instruction and facilities that are vital to a high quality education.

This budget encourages teaching of the highest caliber, student-teacher interactions, program improvement, and professional development. The Board is mindful that salary and benefits are a sizeable cost that requires control and involve longer-term fiscal issues that are beyond this year's budgeting process. At the same time, quality teaching has immeasurable impact on student learning in and beyond the classroom.

Therefore, we have moved carefully and conservatively in reviewing staffing increases, consolidations and changes throughout the District. The resulting budget projects 5.5 fewer teaching positions and 0.4 additional civil service positions. We capitalize on retirements to create cost savings. The proposed staffing continues current class size practices in the elementary grades. The budget envisions staffing adjustments at the Middle School and High School consistent with the rise of a large eighth grade class into the High School. Although the budget proposes to reduce teaching positions through attrition, it seeks to do so in ways that minimize impact on instruction and allows the District to retain quality employees who recently joined the school system, reexamine staffing patterns throughout the District, and plan and incorporate new hires in a thoughtful and targeted manner to preserve and enhance core programs.

We endeavor to keep our facilities and equipment safe, well-maintained, inviting, and operating effectively. Both the facilities and personnel budget lines contain safety-related expenditures, following a reassessment of the District's procedures in the wake of the Newtown tragedy. Overall the request for plant and capital improvement funding is less for 2013-2014 than for the current year. The Board is taking care in its decision-making process to consider short-term and long-term term facilities needs.

The proposed budget funds staff and equipment improvements for administrative technology and instructional support. This will enable the District to serve students better in modern times and address rising data requirements from the state government.

Changes between First and Second Budget Proposals

Following the voter's May 21, 2013 defeat of the first budget vote, the Board reduced the budget by \$1,386,500 in a manner that seeks to preserve Scarsdale's commitment to educational excellence but exercise more fiscal constraint. The second budget proposal removes the appropriation of \$325,000 for the Center for Health, Fitness and Learning. Other changes, which bring the proposed budget \$360,233 below the state's tax levy cap, include reductions from the first budget in the areas of plant upkeep and improvement, teaching and support positions, the Center for Innovation, program assessment research, life insurance costs, and fund balance.

In community conversations about the budget, the Board has expressed interest in further consideration of structural issues about staffing, facilities, and fiscal planning during the coming year.

Budget Amount and Tax Rates

The Board has developed a budget that translates into a total investment of \$143,899,713. This represents a 1.49 percent budget increase for 2013-2014 over 2012-2013, the lowest percentage increase in at least thirty years.

The property tax rate, which remains the major source of revenue for the District, is estimated to increase 2.82 percent for Scarsdale residents and 2.91 percent for Mamaroneck Strip residents. The difference between budget and tax rate increases is primarily due to a multiyear effort to decrease the District's reliance on planned surplus and fund balance. The discrepancy between Scarsdale and Mamaroneck Strip is the result of a state funding formula involving the relative property values in each area.

The proposed school budget results in a tax levy increase that is below the maximum allowable tax levy limit under the state-imposed tax cap. That means the budget will require a majority vote to pass.

If the second proposed budget does not receive 50 percent voter approval, the District by law would revert to a contingency budget, which would be \$3,605,090 below the level of the second proposal. This would require reductions in educational programs, administration, community services, and equipment and non-essential building projects.

Community Participation

Throughout the January-June budget process this year, the Board has sought, listened to, and reflected upon community input as it made its decisions. We welcome members of the public to learn more about the budget, ask questions, and share your views. If you have questions or comments on the proposed budget, please call us at 721-2410, write to the Board of Education office at 2 Brewster Rd., or e-mail us at boardofed@scarsdaleschools.org. The District is making a complete copy of the proposed budget available at the Scarsdale Public Library, at the Board of Education office, and online at www.scarsdaleschools.org.

Please mark your calendars for the school budget vote on Tuesday, June 18, from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Scarsdale Middle School. If you need an absentee ballot, please call the District Clerk at 721-2410. Thank you for your interest and participation.

SCARSDALE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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