

Cost Control Strategies FOR MAINTAINING A QUALITY ACADEMIC PROGRAM DURING TIMES OF FISCAL STRESSES FOR SCHOOLS

Presented to NYSASBO on November 30, 2011 by
Douglas Burton, Superintendent of Schools, Fort Plain CSD
Kathy Dougherty, Superintendent of Schools, Northville CSD

The success of any budget, and the basis for this document, is the premise that the Board of Education, along with the support of the Business Official, must all be on the same mission with the same goals. The Business Official needs to be the supplier of financial information to provide actual supporting data which will demonstrate the potential savings of the proposed reductions by the Superintendent to the Board of Education.

1. Maximize the terms and conditions of your present and future bargaining units' contracts.
 - a. Stretch class sizes to allowable limits and beyond. Many contracts allow higher maximum class sizes when new students arrive over the summer, or reductions in support services when class sizes decrease any time during the school year.
 - b. Analyze employees' benefits for language that supports adjustments in health insurance (shop for providers)
i.e: increase co-pays and reimburse the employees only if required in the contract
 - c. Limit benefits to full-time employees only.
 - d. Negotiations need to be steered away from the Triborough Amendment. The days of automatic raises are gone; step increments are part of the raise or the whole raise.
 - e. During consideration of reductions to staff a close eye needs to be kept on the revenue side of the budget. (i.e: increasing class size may eliminate federal funds for reduced class size money; Universal PreK funds, etc.).
 - f. Make sure all teachers are teaching maximum allowable number of classes as per contract. For secondary, that is usually six, with two planning or one planning and one duty - plus lunch - during a nine period day. For elementary, instructional duties should be assigned all day except for one planning and one lunch period. Watch out for "gaps" in schedules and make sure administrators frequently review and monitor teachers' close adherence to master schedules.
2. Explore refinancing of outstanding serial bonds.
 - a. Caveat: the Comptroller looks for a "Net Present Value Savings" of at least 2% to approve a refinancing. Your bond counsel can calculate this information for you to let you know if this is a possibility.
3. Look for opportunities to replace top step personnel with entry level, part-time replacements, or better yet, don't fill vacated positions.
 - a. Brainstorm with administrators: How can positions be combined and the work still be accomplished? Can additional tasks be added to a current employee's duties instead of paying another person?
4. During negotiations, lessen top step increases and/or salaries while making bottom steps more attractive in order to retain good employees.
5. Limit energy costs.
 - a. Energy Performance Contracts
 - b. Button-up the Building Day
 - c. Lights Out Fridays
 - d. Qualify for and file for Energy Star status.
 - e. Use of green energy: Although the return from your original construction cost and price of equipment may be long term with building aid to offset the initial impact, you can reduce your electrical costs.
 - f. Turn off parking lot lights and if possible switch out fixtures to L.E.D. units.
 - g. Monitor power usage to determine power peaks and adjust equipment operation to reduce those peaks.

6. Share services with other districts, such as:
 - a. Purchasing and other Business Office functions, including energy consortium, DCMO- BOCES, Regional Information Centers
 - b. Supervisory
 - c. Instructional
 - d. Transportation, vehicle maintenance, fuel station, bus inspections, 19-A documentation and dispatcher
 - e. Athletics
 - f. Visual and Performing Arts
 - g. Other electives
7. Cross train employees to reduce / eliminate substitute and overtime costs.
8. Maximize transportation aid.
 - a. Push as much of your administrative oversight of transportation from your district office to the transportation operations.
9. Balance the Food Service budget or, preferably, make a profit.
 - a. Use commodity foods (call NYS Office of General Services, ask for Sue Joslyn or Anne Marie Hastings for leads on commodity foods) or look for emails from them.
 - b. Cook from scratch.
 - c. Don't use disposable serving items.
 - d. Recycle unused foodstuffs into next day's offerings such as soups, stews.
 - e. Push for submission of Free / Reduced lunch applications.
 - f. Food Service Supervisor should have restaurant / kitchen experience in knowing how to use commodity foods in creative ways.
 - g. Don't overstaff the kitchen and do cross-train employees.
 - h. Be conservative with electric, gas usage, and if possible, take operating costs (garbage bags, cleaning supplies, utilities) out of Food Service Department budget and not out of local funds.
 - i. Turn electrical and gas equipment on only when needed and at different times (avoids power surge that is basis of daily energy consumption rate).
10. Maintain your equipment and facilities.
 - a. Standardize vehicle purchases to limit parts overhead cost, fuel cost and training costs. Standardize hardware platforms, switches, networking equipment.
 - b. Standardize purchase of HVAC and lighting equipment for same reason.
 - c. Perform as many maintenance and repair duties as possible with in-house personnel.
11. Control Special Education Costs.
 - a. Reduce expensive out-of-district special education placements by creating in-district classes if the students' IEPs permit that change. Make sure that the total cost of operating the class will be less than sending the students out-of-district.
 - b. Compare costs of providing itinerant support staff services (SLP, OT, PT, Psychologist, etc.) through BOCES to hiring locally. Be sure to include your district's BOCES aid as part of the calculation.
12. Maximize your grant awarding possibilities apply for any and all you may qualify to receive. Time spent and money spent on a grant writer shared service can be very beneficial.
13. Solicit cost-savings suggestions from district staff members as well as from the community.