

1. Q: Why was the 2010-2011 Coxsackie – Athens Central School District budget so difficult to develop?

A: The first draft of the 2010-2011 budget was \$1.4 million greater than the 2009 – 2010 budget. Employees' salaries, retirement costs, and health insurance costs contributed to the majority of the increase. The Governor's budget would mean a decrease in aid to the district of \$1.055 million. The actual decrease would be closer to \$1.3 million. The difference between the budget increase and State Aid decrease totaled **\$2.7 million** in January.

2. Q: How does the cost of students in our district compare with the cost of students in other districts?

A: According to data from the State Education Department, C-A spent \$8,579 per General Education student and \$23,082 per Special Education student in 2007-2008. Districts of Similar Size spent \$9,104 and \$24,153 for each General and Special Education student. All New York State schools spent \$10,257 and \$24,479 for each General and Special Education student, respectively.

3. Q: What steps did the District take initially to reduce the budget increase for 2010 – 2011?

A: The district continued reductions from 2009 – 2010, leaving the administrative position of Director of Technology Services vacant for 2010 – 2011. Refinements in retirement costs once actual contribution rates were available plus actual premium increases for worker's compensation and health insurance generated an additional \$325,000 in savings. Further reductions in health insurance were achieved by converting the CDPHP HMO program to an EPO program and by eliminating plans that were not cost efficient for Custodians.

4. Q: Were other steps taken before considering cuts in staff members?

A: All parts of the budget were reviewed for cost savings. Reductions were made in fuel, equipment, supplies, technology, and travel and conference expenses to generate another \$225,000 in savings.

5. Q: How did the district determine proposals for staff reductions?

A: A program review was carried out in each building and department. Items such as class size, reduced need for student services, non-mandated programs, and reduced staffing with the least impact on student learning were factors considered. This review led to proposed staffing reductions of nearly \$750,000.

6. Q: What are the benefits of a small number of C-A students attending Tech Valley High School?

A: Students selected by lottery from the Capital region attend this innovative B.O.C.E.S. high school program. The benefits reach far beyond the experiences of the four students who would attend in 2010 – 2011. Innovative instructional approaches and project – based learning experiences are consistent with the world of work students will enter, and serve as means to help all school districts, including C-A, to elevate the level of curriculum and instruction now and in the future.

7. Q: What is the cost of Tech Valley High School?

A: Tuition for Tech Valley, before aid, is \$12,000 per student. Transportation for all four students before aid, costs \$70 per day. The cost for each student after BOCES and Transportation aid is \$4,570.

8. Q: How does the District determine who would be laid off if reductions in staffing were necessary?

A: The procedures to develop seniority listings are set by the State of New York, not the school district. The least senior person in each area is the first person to be laid off.

9. Q: Would a person being laid off have any rights to be called back?

A: Each person laid off would be placed on a seven – year, preferred eligibility list. In the event a position in a teacher’s tenure area, for instance, became available within that period, and the teacher was the next person available on the seniority listing, he/she would be invited to return to the District.

10.Q: How are employees’ salaries and benefits governed within the District?

A: Six labor unions represent the majority of employees of the Coxsackie – Athens Central School District. These bargaining units negotiate contracts with the District’s Board of Education. Other employees have individual contracts with the District, also overseen by the Board of Education.

11.Q: Why did the District employ an Interim Middle School Principal this year?

A: The District believed a break between a long – standing principal and a new principal would be wise and prudent. What’s more, an interim principal costs the district less money than a full – time principal since the district pays no benefits except that of Social Security for an interim principal. The interim principal will continue to serve until the conclusion of the 2009 – 2010 school year since the interviewing process has not identified a first – rate candidate to serve in this role according to the various members of the District who have conducted two rounds of interviews.

12.Q: Could another District administrator fill the role of Middle School Principal for the last two months of the year?

A: The various responsibilities of other administrators (e.g., staff evaluations, student discipline, test coordination, and others) are not such that he/she could cover the role of Middle School Principal while carrying out responsibilities of his/her original position. This was one of several options reviewed and rejected by the Board of Education.

13.Q: What types of benefits are provided for employees of the Coxsackie – Athens Central School District?

A: Most employees have health insurance and dental insurance through the District. All employees have sick leave, personal leave, and bereavement leave. Twelve – month employees are accorded vacation leave. Most employees continue individual health insurance coverage into retirement as that in place while they are employed.

14.Q: Have employees been asked to reduce the cost of the District for 2010 – 2011.

A: Yes, all employees were asked to take a pay freeze. The Superintendent of Schools offered to take a pay freeze which was acted upon by the Board of Education on March 30, 2010. Two other employees have offered to take a pay freeze since that time. No bargaining units have stepped forward to take a pay freeze. If, as an example, one bargaining unit had taken a pay freeze, it could have saved the District \$500,000.

15.Q: What would happen if the school budget were to be defeated on May 18, 2010?

A: The District's Board of Education could take one of three actions. First, it could submit the same budget to voters on June 15, 2010. Second, it could submit a revised budget to the voters on the same date. Third, it could prepare a contingency budget rather than submit a budget to the voters a second time. If a budget were put before voters and not approved a second time, the District's Board of Education would be obligated by State law to adopt a contingency budget.

16. Q: What is a contingency budget?

A: The amount of a contingency budget is set by a formula from the State of New York. The District would reduce the current budget nearly \$280,000 to be under the contingency budget cap prescribed by State law. Specifically, \$72,500 would be reduced from the administrative component, \$195,161 from the program component, and \$12,000 from the capital component. The Board of Education has made no decisions as to what reductions would be made. It would seem plausible, however, that some further staffing reductions would be needed to meet the contingency budget cap.

17. Q: Has the Governor proposed changes to the School Tax Relief (STAR) program?

A: Yes, the Governor has proposed changes to the STAR program. Taxpayers are encouraged to consult the News link on the District's web page at www.coxsackie-athens.org or to contact the Office of Real Property Services to learn of details.

May 14, 2010