

School committee tackles budget concerns for 2009

By Michaela Kennedy

The Jamestown School Committee spent over two hours reviewing the district's revised operating budget at its Feb. 7 meeting. The school budget workshops will continue tonight, with a final vote for recommendation scheduled for the Feb. 28 meeting.

Superintendent Marcia Lukon provided the committee with updated budget figures, reflecting reductions in retiree health benefits, health insurance costs, and capital reserve projects. Lukon also noted four major areas that make up significant increases to the budget. Salaries increased by \$139,000, benefits for employees and retirees rose by \$214,000, and tuitions ballooned over \$359,000. "Tuition to North Kingstown alone has an annual price tag rising over \$2.1 million," Lukon added.

Director of Student Services Robert Fricklas explained a reason for North Kingstown High School increases in tuition was because students with special needs require

stronger instructional support. "The average rise in tuition fees is between three and four percent," he said.

Fricklas suggested exploring a community-based learning initiative to support education while keeping costs down. "We are looking to use community resources, like the farms, and marine services, especially for those (students) who are at risk of dropping out. The curriculum would be different, but would be standards driven. Jamestown is the absolute perfect place for this to happen," he said.

Facilities Director Lewis Kitts noted that after school programs have increased and 90 percent of the rooms are used in both schools. "Gym programs are going later at night. After the youth program, there's an adult program, which is new," he commented.

The superintendent again recommended an employment change in the budget to include a full-time principal at the Melrose Avenue School. According to the

acting business manager Jane Littlefield, the difference in the salary would be \$6,500. However, Littlefield explained that the assistant principal position had previously been budgeted with yearly pay increases. "If the former assistant principal had stayed three years, the difference in pay would have been under \$2,000," the business manager said. Lukon emphasized that the extra money would be well spent, since a principal would work throughout the summer. "It's a solid recommendation," she said. Comments from the committee echoed support of the change.

The total spending plan of \$11,766,331 represents a 5.99 percent increase over the current 2008 budget, a five percent increase in the general fund contribution. Committee Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser explained the ironic upshot of the descending tax levy, which makes budget increases under the limit imprudent. "This committee feels strongly that with the decreasing cap, the budget should

be held to the cap of five percent," Kaiser noted.

Kaiser agreed that, with a declining cap leading up to 2013, the district will be able to raise less money. "The philosophy behind the 3050 (law) is our costs should stay within five percent now and four percent later," she explained.

Committee member Julia Held commented that instructional materials fees were going down quite a bit. Principal Kathy Almanzor noted that the new math program implemented this year impacted the reduction.

Committee member William "Bucky" Brennan voiced a strong opinion against funding the student assistance counselor.

In a public forum, Anthony Rafanelli, chairman of the Special Education Local Advisory Committee asked for more time to review the proposed budget. Rafanelli thanked the administration for their work on a difficult budget, but at the same time expressed concern about lay-offs. He noted

that SELAC planned to hold a special meeting on Feb. 26 to look at the draft. "We totally oppose any further reductions to the special education staff," Rafanelli added.

In other business, the committee approved appointments to fill school staff vacancies. Andrea Brayman was appointed as a part-time physical education/health teacher. Debbie Saul was approved as administrative assistant to the director of student services, and Margaret Moretti as school secretary. The committee also approved by unanimous vote Karyn Kauffman's request for maternity leave, and by a 4-1 vote Sara Sweetman's request to continue during the 2008-09 school year as a part-time teacher-in-residence with the Guiding Education in Math and Science Network project. Kaiser noted that the new hires were filling vacant positions, not creating new jobs.

School

Continued from page 1

posed cuts before a budget vote on Feb. 26. One committee member asked if they could try to get the numbers in time for consideration this year, and it was indicated that might be possible.

"I would not say at this point that anything has been taken off of the table for consideration," Doug Roth, chairman of the NK School Committee, said. "However, I do not support cuts like this."

The origin of the proposal, Roth said, is not known. "We submitted budget cut ideas anonymously, so that the politics would be taken out of the process and each proposed reduction could be discussed on its merits," he said. "But, the fact that someone would even bring this as a suggestion goes to the priorities and sensibilities of some of the members."

Roth said he hates to make any cuts, but when considering possible reductions, there are certain things to keep in mind. "I am in this for the kids. Everything else we look at is a piece of equipment, or a service, or a position, but this affects the kids directly."

Committee member Renee

Cockerill agreed. "Athletics are something that keep the kids engaged in school," she said. "If someone thinks this is something that will really work, they will have to bring some evidence to show me. All evidence points to the opposite - that it goes towards their academic nature."

NK athletic director Keith Kenyon said the numbers speak for themselves. "Sixty to seventy percent of student athletes at this school are either on the honor roll or principal's honor roll. In my opinion, if we saw these kinds of cuts we would lose some of the best and the brightest students at this school to transfers to private schools," he said. "That is not to say that every bright student in this school is an athlete, but a lot of them are."

Amy Smith, an island resident and parent of an NK athlete, agrees. "We would definitely send our daughter to another school if they took away athletics. That is such a huge part of our lives," she said. "They learn to be leaders on the sports fields; it balances out their high school careers by allowing them stress release and teaching them time management skills."

Track coach Jen Chabot sees

the difference athletics make in her athletes lives. "Sports keep kids focused, they build their confidence and self-esteem," she said. "With athletes who might be borderline academically, their drive to succeed is much higher. If they know they have to keep their grades at a certain level to play, they will."

Basketball coach Aaron Thomas said that in his 19 years of coaching he has only had two players fail off for academic reasons. "We are always stressing to kids the importance of school to kids and it gives them extra reason to succeed."

As for the idea of the parents or Booster club supporting the athletic program, that idea is not feasible said those involved.

"Pay to play" is not legal in

Rhode Island and a change in statute would be required before that could even be considered.

Even if there were a change in the rule, Thomas said that brings in another set of problems. "I used to coach in Massachusetts where the athletes were required to pay a stipend to play. When parents are paying for their kids to play, they want equal playing time for their child. That is not feasible at the varsity level to be a competitive program. There is a reason this school is so high ranked and people want to send their kids here," he said.

Some families would not be able to afford the stipend, especially where multiple children from the same family are involved, which is

one of the reasons the law exists.

The Booster Club is run entirely by volunteers and could not sustain funding for athletics beyond its current involvement. "To presume the Booster Club would pick up the funding is not fair to a group of volunteers," Kenyon said.

Not only not fair, but unrealistic, said club past president Vincent Siatti. "The Booster Club was not formed to make up a budget deficit. We sponsor awards nights for each season and purchase awards for the athletes, buy needed equipment that is not part of the athletic budget, provide scholarships and fund coaches education," he said. "All of our funding is based on

See "School" on next page



Weekdays 'til 9 • Fri. & Sat. 'til 10 • Sunday Noon 'til 6
9 Ferry Wharf • Jamestown • 423.0070 • www.grapesandgourmet.com

WEEKLY SPECIALS

Yellowtail Wine - All Varietals	2 for \$20
Woodbridge Wine - All Varietals	2 for \$22
Popov Vodka 1.75ltr	\$11.75
Captain Morgan Spiced Rum 750ml	\$13.75
Jim Beam Bourbon 750ml	\$14.75
Jose Cuervo Tequila 750ml	\$17.75
Heineken Premium Light 6 Pack Bottles	\$6.50
Bass Ale 6 Pack Bottles	\$7.50
Coors Light 12 Pack Cans	\$8.75



With purchase of 1 LB of Paula's Famous Salsa



Open Later Every Night - to Serve Jamestown Better

Best Rate in Rhode Island!
And Free ATMs Nationwide**

EARN
6.0% APY*

Checking Balances up to \$100,000



BANK NEWPORT
An OceanPoint Financial Partner



banknewport.com • 845.BANK (2265)

To earn the bonus rate & free ATMs, perform these requirements each qualification cycle:

1. 12 Debit Card Transactions
2. One Direct Deposit or One ACH Auto Debit
3. Receive Electronic Statement

Account Balance	Conditions are met	Conditions are not met
\$0.01 to \$100,000.00	6.06% APY	0.10% APY
\$100,000.01 or more	1.01% APY	0.10% APY

* 6.06% Annual Percentage Yield (APY) paid on balances between one penny and \$100,000, and 1.01% APY paid on all amounts above \$100,000 each cycle the minimum requirements are met. If you do not meet the requirements per cycle, your account will still function as a free checking account earning 0.10% APY; however, it will not receive ATM refunds for that time period. Rates as of 10/10/07. We may change the interest rate and APY at any time after the account is opened. No minimum balance required. "Qualification cycle" means a period beginning one business day prior to the current statement through one business day prior to the close of the current statement. Deposit minimum of \$25 to open account. Available to personal accounts only. No monthly service charge. ** Unlimited ATM refunds if requirements are met each qualification cycle.

Equal Housing Lender

Member FDIC