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No salary increases for some school staff in lean budget year

By Eileen M. Daly

Jamestown Schools Superintendent Marcia Lukon and Director of Finance Jane Littlefield presented next year's proposed operating budget of \$11,606,867 – a 1.37% decrease from Fiscal Year 2010 (FY10), Lukon said – during last Thursday's School Committee budget workshop.

Lukon said that administrators will forego a salary increase for the second year in a row, electing to “put student needs before their own” in order to draft a lean budget. The school clerks and secretaries will also accept a zero percent salary increase, she said.

School Committee member B.J. Whitehouse took exception to the fact that administrators, clerks and secretaries will forego any salary increase.

“I disagree that there should be a zero increase. I don't think it's fair at all,” he said, adding that he might have to spend some of his “political capital” to remedy the situation.

Lukon was appreciative of the support, but said that the department's focus is on “improvement and programming” at the present time.

Lukon also said that the administration's goal was to build a responsible budget that focuses on the “school's mission

and strategic plan, maintaining effective programs in the most cost-effective manner.” For the second year in a row, the administration has employed a zero-based budget process to build the current budget, she said.

“We start from scratch and determine the needs of the students,” she said. “We look at the current needs instead of just taking the previous budget and adding on a certain percent.”

Lukon thanked her administrative team members and acknowledged the “countless hours” that were put into the process of developing the budget.

“It was a pleasant process to see my team work in such a focused and collaborative way,” she said.

The proposed budget assumes a reduction in state aid and a town contribution of \$11,178,034, Lukon said. The town contribution represents a 0.78% decrease – \$88,339 less – from FY10, she said.

Littlefield walked the committee through a detailed budget presentation, and responded to the committee's questions regarding the fiscal ramifications of the district's participation in the statewide transportation system.

She acknowledged that Jamestown has not received the finan-

cial benefits that were hoped for from participating in the plan. In fact, she said, participating in the program has cost Jamestown money.

Lukon said that the administration is currently reviewing transportation options and is looking for alternatives, including a possible withdrawal from the statewide plan.

Special Education Director Gwenn Spence presented the \$2,101,239 special education budget. This budget represents a 5.55% decrease from the FY10 budget, she said, adding that the special education department is able to utilize other funding, including grants and federal monies.

Lukon said that technology development and improvement remains a firm goal for both the administration and the school committee. Improving technology is a strategic plan objective, as well as a school committee goal, she said.

Lukon presented “year two” of the technology capital improvements plan, which provides for a full-time technology coordinator – an increase from the current part-time position – as well as the creation of computer centers in each Melrose classroom and four additional Smartboards (one at Melrose, and three at Lawn, along with student response remotes).

Wiring for the computer stations is part of the \$136,875 capital budget presented by Building and Grounds Director Lew Kitts.

The school committee commended the administrative team for drafting a lean budget while preserving services and responding to the economic constraints the town is experiencing.

The School Committee will hold additional budget workshops on Feb. 4 and Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. in the Lawn School Library.

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