

Looking to the Future: Curriculum Initiatives and Programs

Piscataway parents want the best for their children, and that's what the district strives to deliver. The district offers a curriculum that emphasizes a variety of student opportunities and hands-on learning at all grade levels. Ranging from the performance of our high school in the 2014 National Ethics Bowl in North Carolina, to receiving the Greater Middlesex Conference Sportsmanship Award for our entire athletics program, Piscataway students exemplify the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to make a positive impact on the world around them.

The proposed 2014-15 school district budget reflects the Board's dedication to student achievement:

- Two new classes, *Anatomy and Physiology*, and *Dynamics of Health Care in Society*, will be offered to support students seeking a pre-med track. This is part of a larger trend to offer additional career-track courses, such as pre-engineering, to meet the interests of students. These high school classes complement other high-level courses, including 19 Advanced Placement and 15 Honors courses.
- The district's Gifted and Talented Dance Program, a partnership with the professional *Lustig Dance Theatre* and *Young Audiences of New Jersey*, will be expanded into grades 4 & 5. The program has been successfully implemented in grades 2 & 3 for 2 years.
- The Middle School iPad Initiative will be expanded to include incoming sixth grade students in 2014-15. Current middle school students participating in the initiative during the past two years have created film projects interactively with their peers, tracked activity and progress in physical education classes, taken "field of view" photos through microscopes, and put math applications into practice at appropriate grade levels.

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Piscataway Board of Education Adopts Budget with Investments in Technology and Academic Support

The Board of Education has adopted the 2014-15 school budget, which supports a vital investment in technology, maintenance of current student services, and expanded academic offerings.

As in previous years, the district budget is impacted by the number and cost of unfunded state mandates that the Board is required to implement. Some of these mandates include staff training in the use of automated external defibrillators (AEDs), dyslexia, and harassment, intimidation and bullying; new principal and teacher evaluation systems; out-of-district special education placements; and technology upgrades for new standardized tests known as PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). While the actual costs of implementing PARCC are estimated to be over \$1 million, Piscataway received \$73,450 from the state toward the purchase of the necessary technology.

One of the "unknowns" that looms under the radar when the district budget is developed is approval for new housing developments in the township. The Board of Education and district administration continue to monitor trends in rising enrollment, as construction of new units is completed and/or approved. A projected enrollment study completed in the fall of 2013 anticipates that estimated enrollment in the 2018-19 school year will be 7,796 students, a rise of 6% from 2013-14 enrollment of 7,334.

"The Board has approved a school budget that maintains a clear focus on academic achievement and needs of our students, despite the many financial challenges that face us each year," said William Irwin, president of the Board of Education.

The 2014-15 budget carries a 2.62 percent increase in the local tax levy, translating to an increase of \$93 per year for the owner of the average home assessed at \$276,040. While local tax levies generally cannot increase more than 2 percent annually, Piscataway is able to use a "banked cap waiver," available from past years when the district presented budgets that were under the 2% cap.

For 2014-15, the Board of Education approved the use of \$509,138 in available banked waiver to fund PARCC upgrades, a special education literacy specialist, middle school athletics, and building repairs.

Piscataway received an increase of \$146,900 in state aid for 2014-15, bringing the total state share of the budget to \$15,709,700. As calculated by New Jersey's state aid formula, Piscataway should be receiving over \$40 million in aid. (See related story on page 3.)

"The Board of Education is fiscally conservative, and exercised caution in the development of a sound and prudent budget that is focused on what our children need," said Teresa M. Rafferty, superintendent of schools. "The future is uncertain. We face revenue shortfalls at the state level, increasing costs for out-of-district placement for special education students, and enrollment increases. This budget is balanced against the economic realities of our community, and provides the best educational program that we can afford."



Members of Piscataway High School Robotics Team 224, "The Tribe," mentor Piscataway FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Lego League Team 8878, "Forever Green," as they prepare for a regional robotics competition.

TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES

Support Educational Needs & Initiatives

Several items of critical importance to technological progress in the district are contained in the 2014-15 school budget. Hardware replacements are driven by the mandated requirement that all students be ready to take PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments online in the next school year.

In addition, all district computers must be upgraded to Windows 7 in order for students to take PARCC assessments online, as Microsoft no longer supports Windows XP, the operating system installed on most district computers. These upgrades cost approximately \$1 million, although Piscataway received just \$73,450 in state aid for PARCC technology upgrades.

Some upgrades occurred during the 2013-14 school year, when the Piscataway School District was selected as a field test site. Over \$627,000 was spent this year, but more still needs to be done.

The second technology component requiring attention in the 2014-15 budget is the replacement of the district's outdated Microsoft Exchange e-mail server, which will reach the end of its functional life during summer 2014. Replacement cost is approximately \$175,000.

Additionally, phase one of necessary upgrades to Wi-Fi capability at Piscataway High School is included in the budget to ensure wireless capability throughout the entire building. Current wireless capacity at the high school is sporadic, or not available in certain parts of the facility.

Finally, students entering grade 6 in September 2014 will participate in the third phase of the Middle School iPad Initiative. District administration is currently developing an economical plan to replace limited and expiring iPad insurance coverage.



Students at Schor Middle School use iPads to calculate how to create the most stable, tallest tower using random materials. The experiment was part of the middle school STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) curriculum.

INITIATIVES continued

- Updated psychology textbooks will be purchased to align with curriculum.
- The addition of *PD 360*, an online learning library of educational professional development programs, allows teachers to view videos on such topics as Common Core learning standards, classroom management, and individualized instruction.
- The proposed budget maintains support for supplemental and advanced academic programs, including Saturday and Summer Academies, Sneak Peek, and tutorial programs.

Initiatives Serving the Special Needs Population

Our schools offer a variety of special education programs for in-district students with disabilities. However, a number of students identified with more complex educational needs require out-of-district placements, resulting in additional tuition and transportation expenditures.

These unavoidable costs can raise the district budget beyond the mandated 2% cap.

Several class adjustments are included in the 2014-15 budget to accommodate the increased special needs population of the district:

- Addition of a Learning and Language Disabled class at the middle school level.
- The Behaviorally Disordered program at the elementary level will be operated by the district, ending our contract with the Somerset County Educational Services Commission, at a savings of \$265,000.
- Additional Pre-Kindergarten inclusion slots will be offered at Children's Corner PreSchool. The expanded opportunity to educate preschool children with disabilities is cost effective, and benefits students with placement through participation in an education environment close to home.

Middle School Sports Initiatives

Recognizing the importance of creating additional after school fitness options, and developing "feeder" programs for high school athletic teams, the Board of Education has incorporated several new middle school sports in the proposed 2014-15 budget. These include boys' baseball, co-ed track and field, and co-ed tennis. The cost of these programs, including staff salaries, totals \$28,000.

Already established middle school sports programs include soccer, field hockey, cross country, boys' and girls' basketball, wrestling, and softball.

Property Assessment Revaluation and Your School Taxes...

Earlier this year, Piscataway Township officials determined the need to revalue the assessments of homes, businesses, and other properties, from which taxes are calculated and collected. The township is responsible for assessing and collecting taxes; the Board of Education is not involved in this process.

As a result of the revaluation conducted in early 2014, the assessed value of the average home in Piscataway rose from \$110,000 to \$276,040, and you may have noticed that the assessed value of your home has changed. Your “assessed value” is the price placed on a home by the municipality for the purpose of determining taxes; the “Market value” refers to the current value if your home were sold. The last revaluation of Piscataway property took place in 1975.

So how does this affect your pocketbook?

Your school tax bill could increase or decrease from last year depending on your property’s recent assessment. Tax rates can be calculated by looking at each \$100 of the average assessed value of your property. With the revaluation, there are now more hundreds of dollars in each property value, but this decreases the total tax rate per hundred. The tax increase in the proposed 2014-15 school budget is estimated to be \$92.94 for homes with the average assessed value of \$276,040.

Even though property values have increased, the amount of money to be raised in school district taxes still cannot exceed 2% of the prior year’s budget, plus available “banked cap,” as per New Jersey statute.

PISCATAWAY REMAINS UNDERFUNDED

Piscataway continues to be significantly underfunded. According to the state’s own school funding formula, Piscataway should receive over \$40 million in state aid. In 2014-15, the state will fund only \$15.7 million, shifting the burden of additional costs to the taxpayer.

Although Piscataway ranks fifth in Middlesex County in the number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, it is ranked 16th in state aid per student.

If Piscataway received the full funding it is entitled to, the school tax rate would be flat, and there would be no increase to homeowners.

Staff Changes Address Student Needs and Program Development

Included in the 2014-15 district budget are the following staff adjustments that encourage student achievement, provide special education support, address technology needs, and reflect changes in administrative structure:

- A Language Arts Literacy Specialist for grades 4 – 8 to support and train special education teachers in strategies that increase student achievement.
- A teacher of the Learning and Language Disabled at the middle school level to meet the needs of a growing number of students moving from grade 5 to middle school.
- An elementary (K-3) teacher if enrollments exceed district projections.
- A School Psychologist/Behaviorist at the high school to provide interventions for students with emotional, behavioral or disciplinary problems. This position has been added at other schools in previous years, with positive results.
- An Information Technology Technician to prepare for PARCC testing and full implementation of the Middle School iPad Initiative.
- An Accounting Manager as part of the restructuring of the district Business Office.

2014-15 GENERAL FUND BUDGET SUMMARY

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM AND HOW IT’S SPENT

A balanced school budget reflects revenue from a variety of sources. Expenditures are distributed toward non-discretionary, fixed costs first, followed by line items that support other educational, operational and indirect costs.

REVENUES	
Local Tax Levy	\$83,790,620
State Aid	15,709,704
Extraordinary Aid	845,000
Miscellaneous	1,159,803
Transportation Fees	300,000
Budgeted Fund Balance	3,000,000
TOTAL:	\$104,805,127

EXPENDITURES	
Direct Instruction: Teachers, supplies and equipment for regular and special education programs	\$67,733,610
Indirect Instruction: Counseling, nursing, and other pupil support services, instructional administration and staff services, and principals	\$17,409,138
Operations and Maintenance: Maintenance, operations, utilities and custodial services for all schools	\$9,701,394
Pupil Transportation: Bus transportation for students	\$5,649,463
Central, Fiscal, Community and Internal Services: District Communications and Technology Services (phone, internet, administrative informational technology), purchasing, warehouse, publications, research and assessment, charter schools, and human resources	\$2,914,595
General Administration: Professional Services (architectural/engineering services, audit fees, and legal services), facility usage, Board of Education and Executive Administration	\$1,396,927
TOTAL:	\$104,805,127



The "Gen En," or Genetic Engineering Club at Piscataway High School conducts genome studies to identify characteristics of various plant forms. The club activities supplement advanced biology and chemistry coursework.

How Do We **COMPARE?**

The Piscataway Board of Education continues to hold the line on expenses. The 2014-15 school district budget is \$20 million below the amount that the State of New Jersey says each district should spend to educate its children. This state formula considers factors that include the number of low income, special education, and English language learners enrolled in school, as well as a district's size and character (urban, suburban, rural), staffing, and geography. This is the seventh consecutive year that the district spends under adequacy.

Here are some examples:

Per Pupil Indicators	State Average	Piscataway
Support Services	\$2,059 per pupil	\$1,801 per pupil
Administrative	\$1,494 per pupil	\$1,162 per pupil
Ratio of Students to Educational Support Personnel	81	100.4
Ratio of Faculty to Administrative Personnel	15.7	17.5

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 1515 STELTON RD • PO BOX 1332 • PISCATAWAY, NJ 08855-1332
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