



COLUMBIA SCHOOL SYSTEM

LOL FEARON, SUPERINTENDENT

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Dear Parents,

I wanted to give you an update on our progress on both the 2018/19 Budget and the status of the Future Needs Committee. Both projects have been at the top of the Board's agenda over the last several months.

Budget 2018-19

The Board presented the 2018/19 budget proposal to FiPAC on March 14th. FiPAC, at its meeting of March 28th, voted to send the budget forward to the Public Hearing scheduled for ***Wednesday, April 25th at 7:00 pm in Yeoman's Hall.***

- The 2018/19 Budget request is \$12,610,633, an overall *decrease* of \$283,736 or -2.2% over current spending. The decrease is attributable to two major changes; significant decreases in Special Education tuition costs and the reduction of three positions
- The proposed budget enables us to maintain our current class sizes at the elementary and middle school levels, provide appropriate support and program choices to our students
- Our plans for 18/19 also include two exciting new initiatives.
 - We are joining *Project Oceanology* based out of Groton Long Point. *Project 'O'* is a hands-on, environmental science program that explores the estuaries, rivers and marine life of the CT shore. The program provides on-site, on-the-water and lab experiences for students in grades 5-12. Participating students learn aboard *Project 'O'* research vessels that can accommodate up to 50 students. A sampling of program offerings includes, *Introduction to Oceanology, Seal Population Study, Intertidal Zone Field Study and Shoreline Water Chemistry.*
 - The second initiative is a pilot World Languages program in *French* for grade 7 students. This program will be offered as an elective for interested students and combines on-line learning with supervision by our World Languages teacher. The plan is to extend the program in year 2 to grade 8. The curriculum aligns with the requirements of *French* in grade 9 at both our high schools.

- The Town Budget Hearing is scheduled for April 25th. The Annual Town Meeting is May 15th. Both meetings are at Yeoman's Hall at 7:00 pm. Please mark your calendars.

Future Needs Committee (FNC)

The Board of Education has scheduled a ***Public Forum*** for ***Monday, April 23, 6:30 pm-8:00 pm in the Porter School Cafeteria***. The meeting is designed primarily to gather input from parents, community members, students and staff on two essential questions that have been the focus of the FNC's work:

- *Should the BOE consider a single designated high school when our contracts with Bolton and Region 19 (E.O. Smith) expire in 2022?*
- *Should the BOE consider tuitioning out our middle school students to another district as we do our high school students?*

Columbia must inform the high school districts of its intent to renew the contracts no later than **June 2021**. Our long-range planning began back in 2015 in an attempt to be proactive in our deliberations and to provide sufficient time to examine all options that might be available. The surveys, committee meetings and last June's focus group session have all provided important data. We are looking for wider participation and hope that you can add your voice to the process.

The agenda for the meeting will also include a brief overview of the Committee's work to date and a summary presentation of the results of Survey II by Andy DePalma, EASTCONN, who tabulated the results for the district.

The Board will also be planning smaller "focus group" sessions over the next 2 months to engage with parents, staff and community members as a follow up to the April 23rd session. I will send out those dates as soon as they are set.

I hope that you are able to join us. We will also post both budget and FNC information on our district website at www.hwporter.org

Thank you,

Lol Fearon, Superintendent