

2011-2012 Budget Questions, Answers and Response to Survey Input

1. The school district should eliminate tenure.

Tenure protection for teachers is provided in New Jersey Statutes. Local school districts do not have the power to eliminate tenure. Only the New Jersey Legislature has the ability to eliminate tenure.

2. Reduce teacher compensation and increase teacher contribution towards their benefits.

The contract with the Long Hill Education Association runs through June 30, 2012. When negotiated in 2009, the teachers agreed to a change in health benefit providers that saved hundreds of thousands of dollars for the school district. In addition, in the 2010-2011 school year, the teachers agreed to begin to contribute 1.5% of their salary towards health benefits. This was done voluntarily by the association two years prior to when contributions towards health benefits would have been required under N.J. law.

All school employees currently contribute 5.5% of their salary towards their pension. This rate is established by the state and cannot be increased by local school districts.

3. The district should offer retirement incentives to encourage the most highly paid teachers to retire.

State law that was enacted several years ago prohibits school districts from enacting retirement incentives for their employees.

4. The district should reduce the number of administrators. A principal is not needed in each building.

State education code requires that there be a principal in each school building. Exceptions can be made only with the approval of the Commissioner of Education. The Gillette School Principal position is a part time position which is combined with the part time position of Director of Curriculum to provide a full time administrative presence in the school.

5. Why doesn't the district offer full day Kindergarten?

There would be considerable additional expense in offering a full day Kindergarten program. The current Kindergarten teaching staff would have to be doubled (Starting salary for a teacher is \$47,405 plus benefits of approximately \$18,000 would put the expense for increasing our program to full day at over \$125,000.) With reductions in state aid and a 2% budget cap, many neighboring districts, such as Bernards Township, are considering reducing their full day Kindergarten programs to half day in 2011-2012.

6. Can't Gillette School be closed to generate savings?

During the summer of 2010, a Strategic Planning Committee for Facilities Utilization was formed. The committee spent four months studying school enrollment capacity, program needs and state regulations regarding the use of school classrooms and facilities. An extensive report was prepared by the committee and presented to the Board of Education on November 22, 2010. A copy of the full report and the committee's PowerPoint presentation is available on the district's website at www.longhill.org. The committee concluded that the projected combined enrollment of Gillette and Millington Schools can not be accommodated at Millington School in 2011-2012. Consolidation may be possible at some point in the next few years if district enrollment continues to decline and there is no new construction of residential units in the Township. Consolidation will be re-examined in the fall of 2011.

7. Why can't money be redirected from special education to support general education programs?

Provision of educational programs and services to special education students is governed by state and federal law. Local school districts must meet the child's needs as outlined in the Individual Educational Program (IEP). Parents of special education students cannot be required to pay for the services that their children receive in accordance with their IEP.

8. Parents, community residents and employees should be asked for their suggestions on money saving alternatives.

The Board of Education has a Cost Containment Committee that was created to explore cost saving measures. Any suggestions can be forwarded to the committee by sending an email to CCC@longhill.org.

9. Eliminate busing to reduce costs.

By state statute the district is required to provide transportation for all district students who are more than 2 miles from the school they attend. We are also required to provide transportation for special education students if it is included in the IEP. The district did initiate a subscription busing program beginning in the 2008-2009 school year to allow parents whose children live less than two miles from school to obtain transportation to school for their children for a fee.

10. Is physical education essential? Can't it be cut or reduced?

In accordance with state statute, all students must have 150 minutes of physical education/recess each week.