



The Ridgewood News
Superintendent's Corner
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by
Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.

The following column appeared in *The Ridgewood News* on March 27, 2020.

School budget supports the district's mission and vision

This year's election faces many challenges due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, which has resulted in the closure of schools, businesses, and public spaces across the country.

On Thursday, March 19, Gov. Murphy announced that Annual School Elections scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, will be postponed until Tuesday, May 12, and will be conducted solely via vote-by-mail ballots, which will be sent to all registered voters.

These unprecedented yet necessary measures to flatten the curve and lessen the burden on our health care system have already had a significant impact on our daily lives. Parents are juggling work schedules and remote learning for their children. Grocery stores are scrambling to restock items as quickly as possible, but shelves continue to be emptied. Our beautiful, vibrant downtown is still and quiet; our businesses are being hit hard. People are feeling isolated and disconnected. As the district leader and a community member, I empathize with the students who miss their classmates, teachers, and school activities, the elderly who are alone, the individuals who are being laid off, and the health care workers who are on the front line of this crisis.

This is a historic and unprecedented event for society and public education. Regardless of these harrowing circumstances, the teachers and administrators of the Ridgewood Public Schools have approached this situation with resolve, creativity, and vigor because that is what they do. I am grateful for their commitment to their students and their profession. They are problem solvers, thinkers, learners, creators, storytellers, collaborators and leaders. To students, they are also listeners, mentors and advocates, who are remembered many years later. Teachers have a profound impact on our lives that reaches far beyond the classroom. This, and so much more, is what it means to be an educator.
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At the May 12, 2020, Annual School Election, the Ridgewood community will have the opportunity to vote on the 2020-2021 school budget as proposed by the Ridgewood Board of Education, as well as to vote for open Board of Education seats. What do you need to know about the school budget? The budget of the Ridgewood Public Schools supports the mission and vision of the district. The Ridgewood Public Schools, committed to a tradition of excellence and innovation in partnership with the community, provide a rich and challenging learning environment, enabling students to maximize their



unique potential to become lifelong learners and productive, responsible citizens. This is our mission.

Our Vision 2024 Strategic Plan, like our mission, defines the ultimate goal of a Ridgewood education as the development of lifelong learners. Contributing to this goal are four habits of learning; these are critical thinking, empathy, creativity and resilience, which have been defined as essential skills for student success, given global factors shaping the future. With that in mind, our school budget is developed to meet the needs of the students through our educational programs, provide the necessary staff, fulfill contractual obligations, and responsibly maintain our buildings and grounds, while staying within statutory caps.

The budget supports continuous growth and improvement of our educational programs to meet and exceed the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. All areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment are supported with professional development and resources to enhance instruction and provide students with engaging and relevant experiences. This year, formal curriculum studies were conducted in Mathematics (K-5), World Language (6-12), and Library/Media (K-12). All recommendations for these areas are supported in this budget, including curriculum writing and the purchase of text licenses and instructional resources. The district is dedicated to the ongoing improvement of technology integration to foster 21st-century life and career skills for all students. Without our robust technology infrastructure, we could not deliver meaningful instruction during this unexpected time of remote learning.

Nearly 70 percent of the budget is comprised of staff salaries and benefits, which enable us to fulfill our contractual obligations and effectively meet the needs of our students. For the 2020-2021 school budget, no additions will be made to staff, as a number of essential positions were added last year, including three elementary guidance counselors, three special education teachers, two behaviorists and one nurse. These positions have added tremendous value to our students' experience, which is already evident less than one year later.

Our specialized programs, including the Language Learning Disabilities (LLD) Program, the Strategic Actions for Innovation Learning (SAIL) Program, the Ridgewood Intensive Services (RISe) Program, the NOVA Program, and Ridgewood Intensive Therapeutic Supports (RITS), enable us to provide instruction tailored to the specific needs of our students. We continue our efforts to return students to the district, as we believe there are innumerable benefits to being educated in your home school system. Furthermore, we are examining the possibility of establishing a program for the 18-21-year-old population.

To properly maintain the district's facilities, the budget supports ongoing buildings and grounds needs and summer maintenance projects. These projects include the Orchard School soil remediation project, replacement of the Stevens turf field, bathroom renovations at both middle schools, and districtwide paving and sidewalk repairs. Classroom renovations, asbestos abatements, and painting are additional summer maintenance projects reflected in this budget.

The 2020-2021 school budget is fiscally responsible, as it meets all of the current needs of the district while staying within the guidelines of the state statutory tax levy cap. The proposed general fund tax levy increase is two-percent. Based on the 2020 average assessed home, the average tax increase would be \$247.93.

Budget presentations to the Board of Education are posted on the district website at www.ridgewood.k12.nj.us. Have a question about the budget? Email budget21@ridgewood.k12.nj.us. Thank you for your continued support of the Ridgewood Public Schools.

Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D., is Superintendent of the Ridgewood Public Schools. Dr. Fishbein can be reached at 201-670- 2700, ext. 10530, or via email at dfishbein@ridgewood.k12.nj.us. For more information on the Ridgewood Public Schools, visit the district website at www.ridgewood.k12.nj.us, the district Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RidgewoodPublicSchools, or follow us on Twitter @RwdPubSchools.