

BURLINGTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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Open Letter to Burlington Township Families regarding the 2021-2022 Burlington Township Schools Budget

The Burlington Township Board of Education will be holding the public hearing on the 2021-2022 budget on Wednesday, April 28, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. The public meeting was originally scheduled to be held in the Hopkins Cafeteria. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the current restriction on public gatherings, the meeting will be conducted virtually. More information about the virtual meeting will be forthcoming. The [presentation of the 2021-2022 budget](#) is available on our [webpage dedicated to the budget process](#).

Some Highlights

After working for many years on advocating for our schools, the district was finally recognized by the NJDOE as being underfunded by the state's funding formula. Additional funding was received for the 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 budgets.

The Budget Process

The budget process is not just an early spring activity. The budget begins in the fall on a zero-based budgeting basis. This means we construct the proposed expenditures per account for the budget year instead of applying a percentage increase from the current year. The Board receives and analyzes the impacts from the prior budget process in December or January, once the district is able to reflect on the impact of budget changes to student achievement and effectiveness of operations.

During the budget development, the Board held multiple meetings in public. The Board has insisted in transparency and, as such, [every document](#) that is shared with the Board is provided on the district budget website as well. The Administration provides a means to answer questions submitted and the Board was prepared to hear from our community members regarding various matters. The Board appreciates input and works to weigh information received from all sources.

The Board engaged the community in two meetings in March 2021 prior to the submission of the initial budget to the Department of Education. The public hearing is the last step in the process. With the adoption at the public hearing, the 2021-2022 budget will be finalized.

Budget Overview and Revisions

The 2021-2022 budget maintains all the programs, services, and positions included in the previous budget. Some positions may be reduced by attrition and the funding re-allocated to other programs based on enrollment projections at all grade levels and in all programs.

Two part-time academic achievement positions are being replaced with one-full time position. Additionally, a 1.0 FTE social worker and 0.5 FTE nurse are being added through the Preschool Expansion Aid grant. This is an overall net increase of 1.5 FTE for the 2021-2022 school year, although there was a reduction of 0.5 FTE contracted parent liaison.

The 2021-2022 budget includes costs for textbooks and materials for a new mathematics program in grades 2-5. Other additional costs include funds for a school based mental health counselor from Rutgers and increased summer school support, some of which will be funded by the ESSER grant. Please see the [Proposed Budget 2021-2022](#) document for a full summary.

The infusion of technology over the past couple of years has assisted our students in countless ways. The district wishes to continue and broaden our one-to-one initiative in classrooms. We want to be able to offer devices to students to use at school and home as needed. This summer we will bid for additional devices to further expand this initiative.

2021-2022 Budget General Fund

The 2021-2022 budget General Fund totals \$68,788,993 with a tax levy of \$43,728,011. The General Fund is the operating fund of the district. The cost of staff salaries, maintenance, transportation, supplies, athletics and all other operating expenses are accounted for in the General Fund.

The 2021-2022 budget contains \$2,354,430 of anticipated Special Revenue Fund receipts from federal sources such as IDEA and ESSA. These funds support particular programs in special education, professional development and at risk students. Preschool Expansion Aid, which the district first received in 2019-2020 and will receive a small increase in 2021-2022, is also part of the Special Revenue Fund.

The final piece of the 2021-2022 budget is the Debt Service Fund which represents the mortgages we owe on the buildings and renovations undertaken over the last couple of decades. This fund totals \$3,010,430. The state provides assistance for the repayment of approximately 1/6 of this amount and \$2,501,809 is to be raised in tax levy. Debt Service refinancing was completed and the bonds sold for the December 2015 referendum were financed at 1.79% for 10 years.

Property Tax Impact

In order to compare the increase year over year, we are assuming steady ratables of \$2,364,534,326 and a steady average assessed home value of \$235,358. Keeping the ratables and average assessment the same, the increase in the school district budget will result in an increase of approximately \$84 per year on the average home in Burlington Township. The portion of this attributable to the general fund is an increase of

approximately \$85 per year and a decrease of approximately \$1 per year for the debt service fund. However, due to an approximately \$34.5 million increase in ratables, the averaged assessed home in Burlington Township will actually see a net increase of approximately \$26 per year. The decrease attributable to the increase in ratables may have been seen in the August 2020 tax bills because the Township operates on a different fiscal year than the school district. The overall tax rate in support of the schools went from 1.9478 to 1.9551.

Stewardship and Efficiency

Burlington Township remains one the most efficient districts in New Jersey. For every dollar spent, more of that dollar is spent in the classroom than most other districts of similar size and configuration. In fact, in Burlington Township, our overall spending is about 96% of the state average for similar districts, but we spend more than 100% of the state average for classroom instruction and support services. This means that Burlington Township spends a larger percentage in the classroom than other districts with higher per pupil costs.

State and Local Funding

Burlington Township was on the forefront of the funding issue. We began holding meetings with the Commissioner of Education as early as 2012 to discuss our concerns. We continued to raise our concerns by communicating again in 2014. We believe that our actions, along with other underfunded districts, changed the outcome of our funding and our district received additional funding for the last four budget years.

Planning for the Future

The Burlington Township School District is closely watching how to provide resources to our students while balancing the revenues available. This requires the district to balance the budget using the 2% property tax cap. In a district like Burlington Township, the 2% property tax cap results in an increase of about 1.67% because property tax controllable by the Board is only $\frac{2}{3}$ the budget with the other $\frac{1}{3}$ of the budget being state aid and not controlled by the Board. The Board and Administration are aware of the fiscal constraints and are working to lessen the impact as much as possible.

Planning for the Future and Protecting our Investments

In December 2015, the voters approved a \$10.1M bond referendum. The district has sold those bonds at a rate of 1.79% for ten years. The final round of referendum projects were completed in summer 2019. These include lighting upgrades in the Performing Arts Center at the High School, field irrigation at High School, Hopkins, and Middle School, and front entrance canopy repainting at Fountain Woods. Other referendum projects completed in prior years include: toilet room renovations in the B. Bernice Young School, High School, and Hopkins; track resurfacing and football field drainage; weight room renovation at the High School; paving at B. Bernice Young School, High School, and Hopkins; roof sections

at B. Bernice Young School and the High School; kitchen and cafeteria renovation at the High School; gym floor and bleacher replacements at B. Bernice Young School, High School and Hopkins; and upgrades to the finishes in the Performing Arts Center at the High School.

What the Future Holds

Burlington Township's future is bright! We are reflective in our practices by taking the time and effort to simply listen to our families and community about our programs, offerings and the district. We highlight our committed and engaged staff and never lose focus on our students - the reason for our very being!

We have been asked by the Board to consider how we can continue to provide the best instructional programs while ensuring the safest schools. We believe there is a direct correlation between the upkeep of our buildings and student pride. According to security experts, this translates to safer schools. We are pleased that our relationship with the Township and Police Department will continue the funding of four School Resource Officers, one for each building in our district. This support emphasizes the importance of safety in our schools. The District will continue its work on safety by supporting the mental health and physical security measures currently underway.

In order to continue to maintain our investment in our schools, we will be exploring a potential referendum for the mid-2020's. Our existing debt will diminish over the course of the next six years. The need to refurbish our schools is much the same as the need to refurbish our homes. In time, we will need to replace our roofs and upgrade our heating systems. We need to upgrade our high school spaces to offer the best programs and support our students in their post-secondary adventures. Unlike in the past when the District grew so rapidly without additional state aid that put a large tax burden on our homeowners, we will strive to maintain the investment in our schools while practicing fiscal responsibility to our taxpayers.

Burlington Township is always striving to provide the best programs for our students while operating the most efficient district in the safest schools and maintaining a highly engaged community.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Bell

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Superintendent of Schools

Nicholas Bice

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School Business Administrator