



DATE: April 23, 2010

TO: New Jersey Visual and Performing Arts Educators

FROM: Bob Morrison, New Jersey Arts Education Partnership

SUBJECT: Defeated Budget Process

The current state budget crisis and the unprecedented election results of this past Tuesday have created a tremendous need for information and facts about “what happens next” in the ongoing effort to finalize school district budgets. The New Jersey Arts Education Partnership has been participating in meetings with the various statewide education organizations so we may clarify the next steps in the process, how this may impact the quality of arts instruction and how concerned citizens may participate in the process.

If your school district budget passed on Tuesday, CONGRATULATIONS! You were in the minority. We recognize that even in districts where budgets were passed there were significant reductions to arts learning opportunities for students in many of these districts.

In order to help minimize any further reduction to arts education programs for our students we have prepared the following chronology of next steps for districts whose budgets were defeated on Tuesday.

So What Happens Now?

Step 1 – Certification of Election Results. The election results are not final until they are certified. All election results will be certified on Monday April 26, 2010.

Step 2 – Delivery of Defeated Budget Package to Municipal Councils. The local school board must deliver to the municipal councils the defeated budget package two days after the certification of the vote. This means town councils will receive these packages no later than April 28, 2010.

Step 3 – Review of the Budget. The municipal council then reviews the budget. In many instances the school finance officer will assist the council by providing the rationale for the defeated budget. This will include an outline of any cuts that were made based on mid year funding reductions as well as cuts made based on the reduction or elimination of state aid.

Step 4 – Public Meeting(s). The municipal council will hold at least one public hearing. This may be solely a council meeting or a combined meeting of both the school board and the town council. This is the time when the public will be able to hear from the municipal council about the budget process. We expect these meetings to start during the week of May 2.

CRITICAL POINT – The municipal council has only two options:

1. Accept the Defeated Budget as Presented. This would mean that after review the council believes the budget as presented was reasonable and in the best interest of the citizens. In communities where the budget was narrowly defeated this seems to be the most logical outcome as long as the public turns out to support accepting the defeated budget.

This action would bring an end to the budget process. If they do NOT accept the defeated option the process moves to:

2. Propose Specific Budget Cuts. This is important. The municipal councils cannot tell the school board to reduce the budget by a certain dollar amount. Law requires them to identify the specific cuts. These cuts must then be formally adopted by RESOLUTION in a public vote by the municipal council. The municipal council's proposed cuts would then be sent to the school board for review. It should be noted that the municipal council may not increase the funding.

It is critical that parents who are concerned about arts education program reductions for their children are present at the public meetings to ensure there are no further reductions proposed. Municipal council members are not educational experts. Something they believe might make sense as a reduction may actually be educationally detrimental for children. Having informed citizens engaged in the process will allow the case for arts education programs to be made if the need arises.

Step 5 - Consideration of Budget Reductions by the School Board (Public Meeting). Once the budget reduction resolution is passed the process moves back to the local board of education. The board may either accept the recommendations of the municipal council OR they may reject the specific recommended program reductions and replace them with reductions that are equal to the dollar amount of the suggested program reductions from the municipal council. THE SCHOOL BOARD DOES NOT HAVE TO ACCEPT THE MUNICIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS. However, they MUST honor the dollar amount reductions. This will be conducted in a public meeting. Once again, parents and concerned citizens must be present to ensure no further arts education program reductions are included at this step of the process. The school board must adopt their final budget that meets the requirements of the municipal council.

This process MUST BE COMPLETED BY MAY 19.

What You Can Do

Get Informed: Determine what, if any, contingency plans your district has outlined in case of a budget defeat.

Take Action, Have Supporters Show Up! Be sure there are concerned citizens attending any and all public meetings by the municipal councils and the local school boards. The greater the presence of people supporting the original budget proposal the greater the chance of having an impact on the decision-making process.

Message is Important. So is the Messenger! Having the right people making the case is as important as the case itself. Parents, students, citizens and local business leaders often times will have the greatest influence.

Know the Law: Arts education programs in New Jersey are governed by state code and are considered as part of a “through and efficient” education as determined by the state supreme court. This policy is outlined in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Stay Calm and Professional: A recent survey of arts administrators across the state highlighted the challenges our school boards have been handed. They recognized the arts are not being singled out. The arts education programs are threatened because of larger issues impacting all of education in our state. Try to be a resource to help be part of the solution. Understand school boards are searching for the best solution for everyone.

Protect Programs for Students: Every effort should be made to maintain high quality arts education programs for all students.

Being proactive, informed, and engaged are the most important things any concerned educator or citizen can do to have an impact on the process.

Have a question? You may contact me by email at: bob@artsedresearch.org or Kristin Wenger at kris@artsednj.org

State Policy and Arts Education: Know the Facts

The New Jersey Administrative Code

Core Curriculum Content Standards: Content standards specify expectations in nine academic content areas: the visual and performing arts, comprehensive health and physical education, language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, technological literacy, and career education and consumer, family, and life skills. (NJ Administrative Code 6A 8-1.1)

Graduation Requirements: 5 credits (1 year) in Visual & Performing Arts for High School graduation effective with the 2004-2005 grade nine class. (NJ Administrative Code 6A 8-1.1)

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS)

In New Jersey, equitable access to arts instruction can only be achieved if the four arts disciplines are offered throughout the K-12 spectrum. At the K-6 level, it is the expectation that students are given broad-based exposure through instruction as well as opportunities for participation in each of the four art forms. In grades 7-8, they should gain greater depth of understanding in at least one of those disciplines. In grades 9-12, it is the expectation that students demonstrate competency in at least one arts discipline. These expectations translate into curricular requirements for schools. (NJCCCS)

Districts are expected to provide opportunities for learning in ALL four arts content areas using sequential instruction.

The New Jersey Constitution: A Thorough and Efficient Education

"The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen years."

New Jersey Constitution, Article VIII, Section IV, paragraph 1

In May of 1997, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Abbott v. Burke* on the two main parts of the Comprehensive Education Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA) signed into law in December of 1996 by Governor Whitman. CEIFA was comprised of two parts: the core curriculum content standards and a school funding formula. Justice Adam B. Handler, writing for the majority, upheld the standards, commenting in his decision that they "are facially adequate as a reasonable legislative definition of a constitutional thorough and efficient education." (Source: *Abbott v. Burke*)

It is this ruling that codifies the NJCCCS as the definition of a "thorough and efficient" education as guaranteed by the state constitution. The NJCCCS codify arts education as a part of this definition.