

*SANDYSTON-WALPACK CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL
BOARD OF EDUCATION*

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May 8, 2018

Dear Mayor Harper and Members of the Town Council,

We would like to take the opportunity to inform you of our goals and objectives in relation to the Sandyston-Walpack School budget for the 2018-2019 school year. We, as a Board, have engaged in meaningful dialogue with our community members throughout the year and have spent countless hours researching and planning for this budget. Decreasing enrollment has pressed every district to face tough budgetary decisions. It is a new reality that schools across the county are cutting staff and sharing services.

What does that mean for SWS? To be proactive, we have been investigating shared services in an effort to align our curricular programs and address the issue of staff reductions due to decreasing enrollment in the region. Throughout the year, the Boards of Education and Superintendents have engaged in Shared Services committee meetings with members from each school. We have discussed curriculum alignment and reviewed staffing in every department. There are several interrelated issues with shared services, such as over/under staffing, full-time/part-time staffing, staff turnover, staff evaluations, curriculum revisions, and budgeting. All of the discussions about these issues have been conducted in an effort to continuously improve our instructional programs, meet the needs of our students, and ensure high student achievement.

The schools already share some services and participate in district-wide professional development activities and split the costs. There are additional opportunities for share services that we are exploring. It is not only effective planning to improve our programs, but with shrinking enrollment, absolutely necessary to engage in these conversations as we plan for the future. Next year, the Sandyston-Walpack School will undergo the state monitoring known as QSAC. Some of the issues being discussed and planned in the shared services meetings will better prepare the school for the upcoming evaluation also. During the QSAC process, the state monitors will review our school's performance in all departments, most importantly, instruction and programs related to student achievement. Achievement is measured in many ways. The state of NJ relies on the PARCC assessment as one measure of student achievement in Language Arts, Math, and Science, starting in grade three. Five years ago, SWS was identified as a school in need of improvement based on state test scores. With that in mind, decisions need to be made to raise student achievement, not just in the tested subjects, but across the curricular areas.

Over the past few school years, we have addressed many areas of weaknesses in our curriculum, professional development, mandated trainings, and compliance with state and federal regulations. One

area we are still lacking in is the need for Basic Skills Instruction, or the RTI model known as Response to Intervention. Changes were made in the master schedule to provide this much needed and required service based on our scores and students' needs.

We fully believe in educating the *whole child* and are matching up our services to be in alignment with the other sending districts to Kittatinny to this end.. As a result of our shared services meetings, we discovered that Sandyston-Walpack currently offers PE/Health four days per week, whereas the other districts offer PE/Health three days per week. Therefore, the program modification is to reduce PE/Health from 4 to 3 days per week. There are no changes to the art and music programs, as they are already similar between the schools. We already share an art teacher with Fredon, so the shared service agreement for the art teacher will remain unchanged. However, due to the relatively low number of students participating in Band, we are currently overstaffed in the music department, so the program modification is to reduce the music teacher from 4 to 3 days per week. Students will continue to have music, chorus, band, and band lessons each week. This means that instead of having an average of 2-3 students per lesson, it will now be 3-4 students per band lesson.

The class that will replace the one period of PE/Health will be based on students' individual needs. Students will attend Basic Skills, Pinwheel gifted & talented, Speech therapy, OT, PT, or small group/independent instruction with their homeroom teacher. This schedule change will reduce the amount of time students are pulled from content area courses to attend these other classes. These changes will allow us to serve many of our students struggling with an ever changing and advancing curriculum.

We realize these modifications to the schedule will have supporters, as well as some critics. Serving on a School Board of Education brings with it many challenges and decisions, which are not always popular. We take our roles very seriously. The ultimate role of the Board of Education is to enhance student achievement. We recognize that student achievement is not merely based on tested skills and we value a well-rounded curriculum, which we have provided to our students for decades and will continue to provide.

In addition to ensuring student achievement, is our responsibility to the taxpayers of Sandyston and Walpack. We have worked diligently with our Superintendent and School Board Secretary to stay under cap in the budget, while still providing a program that meets the myriad needs of our student body. Unfortunately, there are many areas where our hands are tied and there are fixed expenditures that consume parts of the budget.

We do not make decisions lightly, or without regard for individuals. It is a difficult thing to do, yet we are tasked with making tough decisions. We have spent countless hours meeting in committees, reading curriculum and policy to stay up to date, and discussing shared services with our regional partners. The students of Sandyston-Walpack School and the taxpayers of Sandyston and Walpack are always at the forefront of our decision-making and will continue to remain our primary focus.

Thank you for your continued support as we work for the best possible outcomes for all of our students. There is nothing more rewarding than watching our students reach their full potential. We are extremely fortunate to have a remarkably dedicated staff and administration, as we are all in this wonderful and sometimes challenging journey of raising and educating our children together.

Sincerely,

The Sandyston-Walpack Board of Education