

IMPORTANT BUDGET MESSAGE

FROM DR. MARTHA LIDDELL, INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

To: CMSD Educators & Stakeholders

RE: CMSD Planning Process for Cost Effective & Educationally Responsive Budgets

The time has come for each building level principal and department head to implement a “boots on the ground” approach for participating in the district’s budget planning process for FY 2012-2013. In order to ensure the long-term financial health of Columbus School District while concurrently implementing research-based strategies to improve student achievement, our spending priorities for next school year must focus accountability toward positive student learning outcomes and tax payer accountability.

I can assure educators, parents and community stakeholders that Columbus Schools’ hands-on approach to budget planning and prioritizing this school year will ultimately create a strong, viable and high achieving school district. My goal is to develop, along with our financial advisors and building level administrators, a much more transparent budgeting process that reflects positively on the financial future of Columbus Schools. I am pleased to say that every avenue for identifying and implementing cost efficiencies has been the cornerstone of the district’s cost efficiency and budget planning priorities over the past six months and this important work is still underway.

Although essential sacrifices will have to be made to revitalize the district’s financial strength, we are committed to educating each and every student to his or her fullest potential. This will require creativity, innovation and courage; however, Columbus Schools is fortunate to have all three in the talents of our people. The following are key considerations for cost efficiencies related to Columbus Municipal School District’s Budget Plan for FY 2012-2013:

- Reduce Columbus Schools administrative costs across the board;
- Reduce Columbus Schools athletic and support services costs across the board;
- Reduce Columbus Schools non-instructional staffing including attrition, re-assignments, staff reductions and combined positions;
(This includes re-allocating district and school resources toward curriculum and instruction to raising student achievement.)
- Reduce Columbus School District certified and non-certified personnel staffing through attrition, staff reductions and reassignment to other areas where certification and/or expertise as appropriate. Personnel changes will be in accordance with district policy; (Presently, 76% of the district’s budget is allocated to personnel.)
- Raising Teacher/Pupil class sizes to state regulations of 27:1 for grades K-6 and 150:1 for grades 7-12; (However, the district will develop a BOOST student achievement schedule for Grades K-12 where student instructional groups will consist of 21 students or less per teacher for core instruction.)

- Implementing Project 20/20 to recover MAEP (MS Adequate Education Program) funding for eligible students who have dropped out of school and implementing a data tracking system for at-risk students who are in danger of dropping out of school;
- Reduce paper consumption and textbook costs (many secondary textbooks exceed \$100 per book in the current market) by implementing digital tools in schools such as iBooks, Kindles, electronic textbooks, and e-learning where appropriate to promote 21st Century Skills. (Implement a Netbook / Laptop lease-purchase program for Columbus Middle and High School students. For example, a Netbook / Laptop lease-purchase of \$350 paid over the course of 9 months is \$39 per month for parents to own their child's Netbook at the end of the school year. E-Textbooks will be provided for Netbooks.
- Outsourcing support services as appropriate areas;
- Seeking external grants and funding for innovative initiatives; and
- Re-instating Early Release Wednesdays (Board approval required) for teachers' professional development and professional learning communities to reduce substitute teacher and stipends costs across the board.

Due to declining local, state and federal revenue, we have focused on our core mission which is to ensure our students receive a high quality education from qualified, caring teachers in every school. We believe our district's most important resources are our students, our educators and our parents who are entrusting their child's education to Columbus Schools. We are determined not to let them down. When asked who is responsible for ensuring Columbus, Mississippi, has an educated contributing citizenry, my answer is EVERYONE is responsible so every member of the Columbus Schools' family is important and has value in the organization.

Thanks for all you do!

Note: The CMSD Spring Budget Workshop is Saturday, February 4, 2012, from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at Brandon Central Services Center. The workshop is open to the public.

