

Superintendent's Budget Message

The 2019-2020 school budget corresponds to our district strategic plan and is designed to maintain educational initiatives and to efficiently staff our schools. This budget reflects our District's commitment to quality education for a diverse student population. As a result, the overall tax levy is **1.97 %** over last year. This increase translates to **\$1,266,133**. This amount is within the state imposed allowable tax levy cap without applying for any waivers. In fact, the school budget expenses are up less than 1% over last year. Losses in other revenues (Mainly State Aid) have led to the 1.97% increase in the tax levy even with only a minimal increase in expenses.

Over the past several years, our District has been losing state aid as a result of a recalculation of the school funding formula. This loss of state aid, coupled with the loss of the Village of Loch Arbour from the District, has left quite a financial burden on Ocean taxpayers. Our Board of Education is fighting back. Ocean is one of eight school districts suing the New Jersey Department of Education over the loss of funding. In addition, we have joined an advocacy group made up of dozens of school districts that is lobbying in Trenton for lawmakers to provide fair funding across the state.

Our school district strives to contain costs through numerous shared service agreements with other school districts and the Township of Ocean municipality. Such an agreement provides the Deal School with maintenance and cafeteria services and the Long Branch School District with school bus mechanic services. These services are provided on a time and material basis by Ocean Township School District employees. The Board of Education continues to provide a former conference room in the administration building to the Ocean Township Chamber of Commerce for office space for approximately \$10,000 per year in rent. These are but a few of the many cost containment and alternative revenue generation strategies utilized by the school district.

The budget includes technology, textbooks and supplies that support the implementation of the New Jersey Learning Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. At Ocean Township High School, emphasis is being placed on Advanced Placement and dual enrollment courses and new electives. The 2019–2020 school year will be the inaugural year for our new Spartan School of Visual & Performing Arts. This exciting program will allow students to explore their artistic creativity and prepare students for success in multiple fields. The Spartan School of Visual & Performing Arts joins the School of Business and Finance and the School of Technology. Financially, this program will be supported by a grant from the Department of Education in the amount of \$100,000 per year for 5 years.

This budget maintains the essential infrastructure of our computer network and additional educational technology. In 2019-2020, all students in grades K-12 will have a personal Google Chromebook. This project was a multiyear initiative that is the cornerstone of our educational technology plan.

The Township of Ocean School District has been recognized as a “high performing district” by the New Jersey Department of Education. I am very proud of our students and our teachers. Our elementary and intermediate school students continue to score above the state and peer school averages in most areas. Ocean Township High School offers 21 Advanced Placement courses. Last year 572 AP Exams were administered to 298 students. Ocean Township High School has been highly ranked by both *New Jersey Monthly* and *Newsweek* magazines, the *Washington Post* and the *Star Ledger*.

The 2019-2020 school budget strives to provide all of our children with a rich, challenging, equitable and developmentally appropriate education. While we are doing well, we still have many challenges to face to ensure that all children achieve to the best of their ability. The budget is both educationally sound and fiscally responsible.

Jim Stefankiewicz, Ed.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS