

Superintendent's Budget Message

The 2015-2016 school budget is designed to expand educational initiatives and to efficiently staff our schools. This budget reflects our District's commitment to quality education for a diverse student population. As promised, the 2014 school referendum did not raise the debt service tax. However, as discussed during our referendum presentations, the general operating budget accounts for increases in fixed costs including salaries and benefits. Therefore the overall tax levy is 1.29 % over last year. This increase translates to \$798,479. This amount is below 2% for the fourth consecutive year.

As a result of the 2% cap, 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, cafeteria and technology 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.

To raise standards and expand educational opportunity for the children, the budget supports the continuations of full day kindergarten. Research indicates that funds invested in early childhood education lead to powerful returns. Studies reveal that children in full day kindergarten show greater gains in both reading and mathematics. In addition, the budget includes technology, textbooks and supplies that support the implementation of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, Common Core State Standards in mathematics and language arts and the Next Generation Science Standards. At Ocean Township High School, emphasis is being placed on Advanced Placement courses and new electives. New courses include Multivariable Calculus, Principles of Chemistry and Physics, Civic Leadership, Dance & Choreography II, Digital Photography II, Sports & Entertainment Marketing, and Sports and Ethics. There will also be new curricular pursuits at TOIS in the areas of Multi-Media Production/Coding, Theater Arts, and Robotics. This budget supports expansion of mandated programs for special education students. These programs require additional special education teachers and instructional aides.

This budget maintains the essential infrastructure of our computer network. In addition, it supports additional educational technology. In 2015-2016, all students in grades 3-12 will have a personal Google Chromebook. Students in grades K-2 will have access to technology through computer labs. 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's scores on the math and writing sections of the SATs are above state and national means. Ocean Township High School offered 23 Advanced Placement courses. Last year 610 AP Exams were administered to 302. Ocean Township High School has been highly ranked by both *New Jersey Monthly* and *Newsweek* magazines, the *Washington Post* and the *Star Ledger*.

The 2015-2016 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