

Superintendent's Budget Message

May 5, 2008

This year, the School Committee first requested that I develop a "Level Services Budget" for fiscal year 2009 (FY09). A Level Services Budget represents a budget that reflects the same level of programs and offerings for students as in FY08; and a budget that includes all costs in order to provide those services, based on enrollment projections, student demographics, contractual obligations, and economic factors. No new programs are added in a level services budget. We presented this budget to the School Committee in December, two months earlier than done in past practice.

Subsequent to the Level Services Budget presentation, the School Committee asked me to prepare a budget that represented what was needed to move the school system in a forward direction, given the context of the extraordinary budget reductions that have occurred over the past several years. These reductions have resulted in damage to some programs and elimination of others and reduced opportunities for students. The quality of numerous programs has been negatively impacted.

In developing this budget my priority was to be strategic and identify what is needed to increase student achievement rather than approach the task as simply a restoration of what has been eliminated. Also, a priority was to develop a budget that was fiscally responsible but sufficient to keep our schools moving in a forward direction with our mission to provide an education that prepares our students for their futures. This budget moves the school system toward its mission, where a level services budget continues the decline in quality and reduction in competitiveness. I believe this budget supports what is necessary at this moment and nothing more.

This budget does not restore foreign language at the Middle School, leaving Newburyport in a small minority of cities and towns that do not provide foreign language instruction before grade nine. Nor does this budget reduce class sizes to what the School Committee voted as maximums a number of years ago. This budget does not support any restoration of the arts, or many of the other reductions of past years. These must remain goals for future years.

The 2007-2008 school year has been difficult following budget reductions that resulted in the closure of a school, the reconfiguration of our elementary and middle school grades into three buildings, the reduction of staff, increases in class size, and elimination of programs. However, I am very proud of how our students, staff, parents, and community have responded to the challenges. We continue to make progress in important areas including curriculum and instruction across all subjects. With wonderful assistance from the Newburyport Education Foundation, The Newburyport Education/Business Coalition, Rotary International, Swasey Foundation, Parent-Teacher Organizations and others, the schools have made substantial progress toward replacing outdated reading books and teaching systems with research proven new materials and instructional strategies that will significantly increase student achievement in future years. We have begun an important initiative to replace an outdated special education model with one that is more efficient and more equitable for all students.

The City will experience a better FY09 due, in great part, to lower than anticipated health care costs increases. Good work by a citizen committee formed to investigate additional revenue sources holds promise for the development of new revenue sources. The Mayor is working with

others to develop financial solutions that will address structural issues in the City's economy and finances. I am grateful that conditions may exist to support this school budget to accomplish the aims described above. I am hopeful that Newburyport's future will be one in which City services can be supported to a level desired by its residents.

We have a talented staff that has been committed and resilient through these difficult times. We have leadership committed to improving programs and raising student performance and success in a cost-effective manner. We have excellent fiscal management and continue to be committed to finding ways to reduce costs through innovation and changes.

The school system is advancing an exciting vision and plan for the future that seeks to prepare our students with the knowledge, skills and values needed to succeed in the global economy and in a world that will see unprecedented change.

My goal as Superintendent of Schools remains to work with others to improve the Newburyport School System and raise the performance levels and reputation of our schools. I am committed to achieving this. Also, I am grateful for the support of the School Committee, City Council, and Mayor and the level of support that our schools receive from this community every day.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin M. Lyons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Kevin M. Lyons Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools