

Community members:

I am writing, on behalf of the Board of Education, to provide you with a summary of our current response to the budgetary situation we are facing because of the COVID19 pandemic. As I do so, I must note that the situation remains, of course, extremely fluid. Our staff is working tirelessly to adapt and lead in this incredibly volatile and challenging environment. They deserve our thanks, patience, and grace, as we all continue to navigate this crisis.

As you may know, the Governor cut the revenue we receive from the state by \$635,000 this year. We are projected to have another similar cut for next school year as well. Additionally, we receive 20% of our revenue from the Bexley income tax. While we do not know exactly how much of a drop to expect, we believe our income will be negatively affected given the sharp rise in unemployment and the economic uncertainty around the stock market -- things that occurred in the 2008 recession when we saw a 20% decline in our income tax revenue in 2010.

When we passed our levy last fall, although it did not create a typical surplus in funding, it did put us on solid ground to continue to pursue our strategic plan. COVID19 has now created a situation where the Board of Education needs to give the administration guidance on how to proceed in operating the district with over a million dollars less revenue.

To that end, we asked the administration in May to review our expenses and provide us with reports on how much could be cut from our budget while remaining faithful to our strategic plan. We requested that the reports be broad -- leaving nothing out -- so we could get a complete picture of the options.

Our superintendent, Dr. Miller, cut her own budget first and then met with every department head and each submitted proposed cuts. They looked at each department, building operation, supplemental contract (for staff and administrators), staffing in general, and our extracurricular and co-curricular offerings and presented us with an expenditure reduction report.

It became clear that we needed to address staffing first. In fairness to our excellent educators, we wanted them to know their assignments before summer break. You may remember from our levy conversations that salaries and benefits account for nearly 77% of our expenditures every year. We knew that we needed to give the superintendent guidance on personnel in order to begin to address our budget shortfalls. Therefore, at

a May 18 special meeting, we passed a resolution to ensure that all existing personnel retain employment for the 2020-21 school year, while also instituting a hiring freeze (with very limited exceptions) during that same time frame. Additionally in that meeting, we discussed the expenditure reductions report presented by the superintendent and asked the community for feedback.

Having received that input from the community, we met again on June 2 to pass a resolution directing the administration to reduce our general fund expenditures by 1.35 million dollars for the 2020-21 school year. Because the administration, not the board, are the experts in the field of education, the board does not specifically direct line by line how cuts should be made. The board does, however, give the administration information and guidance in what we believe the community sets as priorities.

The administration presented us with a creative and thorough roadmap to cut expenses while keeping first and foremost the continued support of our student's academic and social/emotional growth. It states that there will be the following reductions for this year only: approximately \$850,000 in department and building operations (this includes items such as maintenance, professional development, and contracted services); \$66,000 through the elimination of certain supplemental contracts, including all that were paid to administrators (please note this does NOT include any reductions in athletics or arts/music supplementals which we will seek to fill as soon as health authorities allow); and \$185,000 in staffing. This staffing cut to expenditures realizes the hiring freeze enacted in our May 18 meeting and also requires the re-assignment of some of our staff. Again, all current staff remain with the district and those who will serve in different capacities in the fall have been notified of their new assignments already.

One of those reassignments is our amazing theatre teacher. Because of the COVID pandemic, it is extremely unlikely that we will be able to have theatre productions, at least as the school year starts. We understand that our theatre department is one of the most beloved in the school, serving a wide array of students both in learning a craft and in developing important relationships. In order to keep this talented teacher on our staff and still be fiscally responsible, she will be serving as a school librarian. That assignment does leave her unavailable to teach her theatre class to 14 students this semester (some of whom have previously taken this same class) but we feel this is the best use of our limited resources. Importantly, this also allows that, if the health department authorizes us to start having productions, we can then offer her full supplemental theatre contracts so we can provide as rich of theatre offerings as authorities permit under her leadership.

Another reassignment is our coordinator of experiential learning. Because some of the in-person and group activities he specializes in will also likely be disallowed by health authorities, we have reduced that position to part time and he will teach middle school social studies for the other half of his contract. We believe this will allow us to continue to support his creative and innovative work envisioned in our strategic plan while also working within the constraints of our hiring freeze. He is an excellent teacher with many years of experience so we know our middle school students will benefit as well.

As one of the limited exceptions to the hiring freeze, we will be replacing our orchestra teacher who resigned last year. In order to be fiscally responsible, however, we will hire that person at a slightly less than a full-time position initially so that if we cannot offer in person orchestra instruction in school due to any health restrictions, we will not be paying a teacher for those hours. If we are able to meet in person and health directives allow, we will immediately hire that person full time.

Also, because of the hiring freeze, and the assignment of our Spanish teacher to the middle school and high school, we will need to pause for this year only the 30 minutes once a week that we offered Spanish to our elementary students. While we are disappointed with that loss, knowing the likely time limitations on in-person instruction, the complex rules around teacher licensure, and the budgetary realities, it is one we will accept for this one year.

Further, as part of these expenditure reductions, the administration will undertake a review of our recent practice to pay for each AP exam that our students take. This costs approximately \$90,000 (\$94 per test) for the 2020-21 school year (free and reduced lunch students do not pay a fee). We deeply value our extensive AP offerings and intend to keep all of them. What the administration will do now is determine the most cost effective way to pay for these exams, while still ensuring that everyone who wants to take them will be able to do so.

Finally, the board applauded the administration for their resourcefulness and creativity in looking for alternate resources to address our budget shortfall. As an example, they were able to secure a \$250,000 impact grant from the Bexley Education Foundation to cover the cost of our 1:1 devices for this year and a commitment to raise money for the following two years. This will provide a device for all of our students grades K-12 starting this fall. Given the current health crisis, that technology is becoming an

essential delivery mechanism for our educational programs. Our community is incredibly fortunate to have the exceptional leadership and generosity of the BEF.

Obviously, this epidemic has created complete uncertainty of what school will look like in the fall. Our best information at the moment tells us that the health department may limit our time with our students because of social distancing requirements and/or we may need to alter or pause our delivery of some of our co-curricular and extracurricular offerings if mandated by the state to do so. As you can see from the issues noted above, it is a complex balancing act. To be clear, no one wants to make cuts. Our community has a long history of prioritizing and generously supporting all aspects of education. That being said, we do not control the economic realities of a pandemic. We believe these cuts and re-assignments are tolerable because they ensure that our resources remain focused on student learning, relationships with teachers, and co-curricular and extra curricular offerings. If we are allowed by the health authorities to do so, all arts, music and athletic programs will take place in the 2020-21 school year.

I should also note that if we suffer higher than expected cuts from the state or extremely low income tax revenue in the future, we may need to consider deeper budget cuts. As for now, however, we believe we have struck the proper balance between fiscal responsibility in response to this crisis, while supporting the staff and programming our community holds most dear.

Now, as we move forward, our administration is working tirelessly to collect and assess state and county health directives, best educational practices and student and parent feedback. This is challenging work that has become exponentially more so during the pandemic. Dr. Miller will continue with her bi-weekly newsletter to the community to keep everyone informed about what our educational offerings will look like in the fall. Again, I ask everyone for forbearance and fortitude as we undertake these temporary but important modifications and move ahead into the next school year as the only thing I can guarantee is that things will change as this pandemic, and its effect on our society, evolve.

Your board members remain committed to serving our community. The documents I discussed above and the records of our meetings are available at <https://www.bexleyschools.org/BoardofEducation.aspx>. Please feel free to call or email any of us with any questions or comments.

Be well,

Marlee Snowdon, President on behalf of the Bexley Board of Education:

Michelle Mineo, Vice President
John Barno, past President, Member
Alissha Mitchell, Member
Victoria Powers, Member