

Letter to the Editor,

11/2/07

The Deerfield School Board recently appointed us to a Citizen Advisory Committee, to advise the board on a future referendum dealing with the needs of our schools.

Yes, the Deerfield community will soon be hip-deep in debating another school referendum, this one about exceeding the revenue cap. Here's why:

- The revenue cap on school districts (instituted by the state Legislature back in 1993 to rein in property taxes) increases an average of 2.75% a year.
- According to another state law – the Qualified Economic Offer – the district must offer the teachers' union a package increase of at least 3.8% a year to avoid potential outside arbitration.
- Meanwhile, school costs continue to rise, such as utilities, transportation and materials.

You don't have to be a mathematician to picture those trend lines, and see the budget squeeze that results. And while it may be easy to blame the teachers' union, remember that the 3.8% package increase includes health insurance costs. In fact, the Deerfield teachers' union has been working with the board to help contain costs. They gave up a generous union insurance plan for an HMO. They've also repeatedly settled for the minimum 3.8% package increase – and have already agreed to do so in 2008-2009.

As for those trend lines and the cuts they require to the annual school budget:

- \$311,000 cut in 2005-2006
- \$318,600 cut in 2006-2007
- \$261,200 must be cut in 2008-2009

That's money that isn't being used to buy new textbooks, upgrade equipment, fund extracurriculars or maintain facilities. The board has cut teaching, aid and librarian positions. They've raised activity fees, gotten creative in job-sharing, and tried splitting positions with other districts.

Unfortunately, the cuts are starting to do real damage, which is why you're hearing about a new referendum.

Some of us on the Advisory Committee will be touring the middle/high school facility at 3:30 p.m. on Wed., Nov. 7, to see for ourselves what needs immediate attention. This month, we'll also be meeting from 6:30 to 8:30 on Nov. 7, and again on Wed. Nov. 28.

We invite you to attend these meetings. If you have questions or concerns you'd like to raise, please give one of us a call. If you have ideas, we'd love to hear them.

We'll also work to keep you in the loop about what we're learning and how we're leaning when it comes to prioritizing the district's needs. Please check the Independent, WDEE, the Deerfield Schools Web site, and regular school mailings for updates.

Thank you,

Gary Borgrud

Eric Nelson

John Polzin

Patti Knapp

Angie Haag

Meg Tolmie

Laurie Steen

Alan Mikkelsen

Mary Lemke

Nathan Brown