

Report of the School Board

The School Board met to reorganize on 3/9/15 and since then has worked on our challenges, built on our successes, and moved forward on our strategic plan. As always our biggest challenge is to continue to improve while still being affordable. This is compounded by some costs over which we have no control (e. g. Sanborn tuition, special education, salaries and benefits) as well Fremont's already comparably high tax rates with other towns. We also understand that the municipality of Fremont also has its own needs and challenges.

In the Fall of 2015 we were able to return \$374,158 back to the town to offset taxes, but that might not be the case this year. In the past we based our budget on the final tuition estimate given to us by Sanborn, which was always higher than what we actually paid, thus giving us an unexpended fund balance at the end of every year. In order to be fairer to the taxpayers the Board based the tuition expense on past history rather than the Sanborn estimate (GMR) thus making the budget much tighter than in the past. When formulating this year's budget the Board was confronted with a number of costs over which we have no control: an estimated increase of Sanborn tuition of \$335,061, special education tuition increase of \$305,919, a transportation increase of \$97,926, health insurance increase of \$141,640 (despite eliminating the most costly health insurance plans and adding a high deductible plan with an HSA option), and another \$69,491 to fund the teacher and support staff contracts.

Another challenge is the physical condition of the school building. When floor tiles began peeling up and cracking it was found that the mastic adherer had asbestos in it. This had to be dealt with immediately and so the tile had to be replaced. Thankfully Aulson Company did an excellent job, including the lines in the gym. Also, the art room, the nurses' room, and the teacher's lounge were upgraded and we now have a brand new state of the art science lab. The Board has also funded regular maintenance in the building such as painting the hallways and doors and would like to have a plan of continued maintenance and upgrading of the facility.

Even so, in many ways the building is outdated with a poorly coordinated heating and cooling system, inadequate electrical system (especially to support expanded technology options), inadequate storage and office space, and a host of other issues. For that reason the Board thought to move forward with looking into renovation and hired Turner Associates to come up with the plan. The thinking was that with the retirement of the bond for the last school expansion, and the soon retirement of the Safety Complex and Library bonds, there would be money available to improve the school without placing an undue burden on taxpayers. But when the estimate came in at \$12.7 million and with the uncertainty of obtaining state building aid, the Board suggested that Turner present a plan that can be phased in over time, starting with the Board's priorities. Even though this could be more expensive in the long run, it would allow both the Board and taxpayers to consider more affordable options. The final decision though, in order to reduce next year's budget, was that the Board decided not to move forward with another \$25,000 to fund the completion of the study.

For the Board, student performance is our first priority. The Board moved forward with the hiring of a foreign language teacher and the promotion of building STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) into our curriculum. A curriculum consultant was hired to help better coordinate the curriculum and the Board has proposed offering a small stipend to a teacher to assist with assisting with intervention needs for elementary students. For next year the Board decided to not have evaluation consultants and instead extended the Assistant Principal position to full time to help with evaluations and maintain discipline.

The final budget proposed by the School Board is \$12,457,950 which is \$341, 902 less than the originally proposed budget. It is also less than the \$12,700,700 Default Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kohlhofer
Chair
Fremont School Board