



DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Instead of doing “less with less” during these fiscally challenging times, school districts can seize the moment to usher in school transformation by thinking outside of established cost and program structures to better align their use of people, time, and dollars with a vision for the future. However, change is never easy and will require confronting tradition and moving away from “emotional thinking” and towards “data-driven thinking.” Do you think that the community is ready for this shift? If not, what can the district do to better inform and prepare school community members for the pressing need to transform and use resources more effectively?

Additional information

Within the last two years, the district has made significant reductions to try and close budget gaps resulting from increasing costs and declining revenues:

2010-11 School Year

- Reduction of 56 full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing positions
- Elimination of Foreign Language Early Start (FLES) program in grades K – 3
- Elimination of a majority of freshman sports
- Reductions in equipment and supplies, BOCES services

2011-12 School Year

- Reduction of 39.75 FTE staffing positions
- Increased class size K-12
- Reductions in GHS English language arts/social studies Integrated Sections
- Reduction in elementary enrichment to 1 day/week
- Elimination of FLES program in grades 4 – 5
- Elimination of funding for field trips; partial funding of freshman sports and stipend for club advisors
- Late bus runs reduced to three days per week

It is inevitable that the district will need to reduce FTEs, but we need to ensure that we have the right FTEs to meet student needs and fulfill our mission. We will need to look for more innovative ways to utilize available resources to meet the changing needs of our students and community.

What is data-driven budgeting?

Data-driven budgeting calls for the direct alignment of district resources—primarily staffing/FTEs—to identified student needs. Data-driven budgeting includes reviewing items such as:

- Aligning reading and math support to benchmark assessments
- Assigning social work support to meet predicted student needs based on historical trends (i.e., fulfillment of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the need for crisis intervention, etc.)
- Aligning extracurricular opportunities and activities to participation rates

Work to date

Throughout the fall, district leaders have been collecting data-driven information to help inform their budget decisions. Administrators were asked to look at all existing student needs and to make explicit links between those needs and the number of staff members required to effectively address them. At all educational levels, district leaders have increased their collection and analysis of data to better align the resources that we need to the resources that we currently have available to us. This includes tasks such as evaluating IEPs and state/local assessment results. District leaders have also analyzed potential positive and negative effects of staffing and programmatic changes based on their data-collection.



DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Powerful transformation in tough fiscal times results from linking important priorities to restructuring available resources. Keeping in mind that the success of our students remains GCSD's primary mission in all economic climates, the district is looking at the following areas of change in the upcoming school year in order to foster continued student achievement:

- Use of time and scheduling at all educational levels
- Technology investments
- Administration

Do you feel that the community could support changes in these areas? What questions or concerns do you have about potential changes in these areas?

Additional information

Use of time and scheduling at all educational levels:

Why is the district looking at our use of time and schedules?

In a recent article published in the education journal *Kappan Magazine* entitled, "Transformation or decline? Using tough times to create higher-performing schools,"

a key strategy for creating high-performing schools is to optimize existing time to meet student and teacher needs and extend time only where needed. This is a contrast from the traditional thought that adding more time for students is the only solution to scheduling improvement. Studies show that high-performing schools create schedules where the time allocation matches the needs of students as well as the lesson. High-performing schools are also able to prioritize time by using time and resources outside of the school day to engage students.

Work to date

On Dec. 13, the GCSD leadership team presented a program report on the use of time and scheduling to the Board of Education. The report outlines several areas of potential change for the upcoming school year that may help the district maximize its use of time and realize savings through better allocation of the resource at all three educational levels.

One option for change at the high school level involves the elimination of advisory period. As a result of this, educational support staff (i.e., reading and learning workshop teachers) would have more access to students throughout the entire school day versus access solely during advisory. Another potential outcome of this change would be increased library utilization throughout the school day. However, without advisory students would no longer be guaranteed a time to see their individual teachers for extra help during the school day and may have to seek assistance from another teacher in the subject area via "learning centers" or stay after-school for additional assistance.

At the middle school level, one option for change includes moving to an 8-period school day and as such, eliminating the tutorial period. Tutorial is an academically-based period where all students on a team meet with their team teachers for extra help, enrichment, expanded lessons, or to learn new topics. As a result of this option, instructional periods would be extended throughout the school day and class sizes would likely be reduced. However, teachers would either have to incorporate the benefits of tutorial into the regular classroom or else students would need to seek out those opportunities after-school.

At the elementary level, the district is required to work more within existing structures and so no fundamental scheduling changes are being proposed. However, district leaders are exploring the deployment of special area teachers to maximize contact time for students and looking at options for expanding the amount of common instructional time available for grade level teachers to collaborate on the presentation of material throughout the day.

Technology investments

Why do we need to invest in technology?

In a climate of diminishing resources, schools are turning towards technology as a way to provide effective and engaging instruction in a cost-effective manner. The availability of wireless access, distance learning classrooms, cloud-based computing, and new technology tools enable students and teachers to learn and connect in ways unlike ever before. However, there is often a significant up-front investment in order to introduce these technologies into the classroom.

- Wireless access
 - Provides teachers and students with flexibility and options as to how they use technology going forward
 - Makes the district less depended on hardware (i.e., moving away from traditional computer labs and towards utilizing laptops, iPads, smart phones, and other mobile devices)
 - Enables students to develop the skills necessary to manage, create, and publish information in today's digital society
 - Could result in cost savings for the district (i.e., encouraging students to use their own personal electronic devices to enhance learning in the classroom)
- Distance learning classrooms
 - Provide students with access to coursework not currently offered in-district or in other typical school settings
 - Connect students to people and places they might not otherwise have access to
- Cloud-based computing
 - Does not rely on a network to provide access and are therefore less dependent on hardware constraints
 - Access points for students and staff are available from multiple locations (i.e., school, home, public libraries, etc.)
 - Could result in cost savings for the district. Traditional hardware-based networks require significant upgrades and maintenance over time; cloud-based computing does not.

Work to date

At this time, all GCSD elementary schools have wireless access. An option for next year would be to convert the high school to wireless, as well, at a cost of approximately \$250,000 for hardware and cabling.

The district currently does not have a distance learning classroom. The estimated cost to install such a facility (i.e., at the high school) would be approximately \$100,000.

Administration

Why do we need administrators?

Time and again, research has shown that there is a statistically significant relationship between district and school leadership and student achievement. GCSD is a complex organization with more than 5,100 students and nearly 1,000 faculty and staff in nine buildings. The 30 administrative leaders currently in the district are responsible for ensuring the safety of all; setting rigorous educational goals; increasing expectations for student achievement; addressing numerous time-consuming state and federal mandates; adhering to stringent auditing standards in all areas of operation; and addressing student, parent, staff, and community issues and concerns in a timely and thorough manner. In short, administrative leaders make it possible for teachers to focus on teaching, while they work as problem solvers, planners, and quality controllers.

How the district leadership structure has changed:

TITLES	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06	2004-05	2003-04
Total Certified Administrators	29.40	31.00	30.40	31.40	30.80	30.13	32.08	32.08	31.75
Year-to-Year Change	-1.60	0.60	-1.00	0.60	0.68	-1.96	0.00	0.33	
Cumulative Change	-2.35	-0.75	-1.35	-0.35	-0.95	-1.63	0.33	0.33	

POSITIONS ADDED		
0.50	GHS Assistant Principal	2007-08
1.00	Career & Tech	2007-08
0.60	Director of Guidance	2008-09
1.00	Instructional Admin. Elementary Curriculum & Instruction	2010-11
Total: 3.10		
POSITIONS REDUCED		
2.00	Elementary Assistant Principal	2006-07
0.45	GHS Social Studies Supervisor	2007-08
1.00	Career & Tech	2009-10
0.40	Asst. Dir. for PE/Health/Athletics	2010-11
1.00	Special Education Administrator	2011-12
0.60	Director of Guidance	2011-12
Total: 5.45		

Work to date

A series of studies of the organizational structure of the district have been done over the last several years; most recently by the Capital Area School Development Association (2009). Since 1997, leadership reviews have been completed every two to three years by superintendent and/or consultants. Data from these studies, along with current and projected student enrollment, help guide decisions about how best to deploy district leadership resources in order to achieve mission, vision, and goals in the Guilderland Central School District at this particular time.

On Jan. 10, the GCSO superintendent presented a review of the current district leadership structure to the Board of Education. The report made several recommendations for the upcoming school year:

- Eliminate the assistant director of health, physical education, and interscholastic athletics
- Eliminate the elementary special education administrative position and reassign duties to a non-administratively certified individual with requisite skills
- Re-focus duties of the coordinator for elementary programs and professional development towards Response to Intervention and support for classroom teachers in literacy instruction.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Earlier this evening, you learned about the new property tax levy cap which is currently estimated to limit the district’s tax levy for the upcoming year to 2.54% unless a super-majority of district voters approved the budget. For the past three years, GCSD has not reached a 60% approval margin for its budget—the percentage of “yes” votes that would be needed to go above the tax levy limit going forward. Why do you think the district has not reached that voter approval threshold?



Additional information

Historical data for GCSD budget votes

Year	Projected Tax Levy Increase	Projected Tax Rate Increase	Yes Votes	No Votes	Total Votes	% of Yes	% of No
2011-2012	3.90%	3.48%	2059	1650	3709	55.5%	44.5%
2010-2011	4.22%	3.59%	2183	1784	3967	55.0%	45.0%
2009-2010	0.58%	0.58%	1994	1423	3417	58.4%	41.6%
2008-2009	1.76%	1.43%	2084	1101	3185	65.4%	34.6%
2007-2008	2.44%	2.48%	2010	1136	3146	63.9%	36.1%
2006-2007	4.46%	4.18%	1898	1515	3413	55.6%	44.4%
2005-2006	10.12%	*	2091	1788	3879	53.9%	46.1%
2004-2005	4.91%	4.94%	1732	990	2722	63.6%	36.4%
2003-2004	5.02%	3.84%	2300	1219	3519	65.4%	34.6%
2002-2003	6.30%	4.89%	2122	1097	3219	65.9%	34.1%

* Due to the Town of Guiderland reassessment that year, a percent change in the tax rate for residents had to be calculated on an individual basis.

- **Tax Levy:** The total sum to be raised by a tax, or the legislative measure by which an annual or general tax is imposed. The levy is apportioned by town to determine tax rates.
- **Tax Rate:** The amount of tax paid for each increment (usually \$1,000) of assessed value of property; varies by town depending on assessment changes and equalization rates. The tax rate is used to calculate tax impact by individual property owners.

To provide context, in order for GCSD to have reached a 60% approval rating for its budget vote in the 2011-12 school year, the district would have needed an additional 167 “yes” votes from the community (given no change in the number of “no” votes).

Percentage of "YES" votes from sample school district budget votes (2006-07 to 2011-12)

Rounded to the nearest whole number

