



# Wissahickon School District

## *Bleeding Blue with a Heart of Gold*

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May 3, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians:

I would like to take this opportunity to provide an update on two important topics.

### 1. The K-5 Capacity Conversation

After several months of meetings, presentations and deliberations, we are now at the point of considering a specific course of action to create more capacity at the K-5 level. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback and ideas, helped us consider various options and enabled us to arrive at the point where we are now.

This past Monday night, I presented to the Board of School Directors the following recommendation for meeting the capacity challenge:

- A construction project at Stony Creek, providing six classrooms (with an option for three additional classrooms), thereby increasing the capacity at that school by 133-200 students (the latter figure if the option is taken, which will depend on interim enrollment developments).
- Our autistic support program will be moved into new, specially designed spaces at Stony, thereby increasing the capacity at Shady Grove (where the program is now) by 67 (three classrooms).
- A new all-purpose room is in the plan for Stony, mirroring the one at Lower Gwynedd now and providing not only an expansion of the school's core spaces, but a valuable, new after-hours/weekend community-use asset as well (think: gym space). The existing gym and cafeteria will be converted to classrooms as part of the construction.

Estimated cost of the projected is roughly \$20 million (in the form of new debt) and target completion is in the 2022-23 timeframe. Funds to service the debt are in the budget now, so there is no supplemental tax burden associated with the project. The Board will welcome additional input on the plan during the two public meetings in May, leading up to the public board meeting on 6/3/19, when a vote will take place as to whether or not to authorize the next step (designing the details of the project, seeking various approvals/permits, etc.).

## 2. 2019-20 School Budget

I am happy to report that the final draft of the 2019-20 school budget is now being reviewed by the state (as of this past Monday night) and, more importantly, is in balance. The Board's vote on the final version will take place on 6/3/19. In the end, we managed to add teachers at the K-5 level (reflecting the growth that is at the root of the above capacity challenge) as well as increase the district's annual commitment to capital project funding by another \$200K (which is consistent with the long-term plan to rebuild the district's debt capacity).

While we did find some cost savings here and there (e.g., as we did last year, we cut another central office position this year, and we also conducted a new transportation bid, itself saving \$80K), there is a tax increase associated with this budget. We just cannot avoid the fact that prices of things go up every year, and if we wanted to maintain the level of excellence that the community expects, we needed more revenue. The tax increase of 2.85% will result in an additional annual tax impact of \$118 for the median household. That decision was not made lightly, and only after much deliberation, but it is felt that it strikes a good, reasonable balance between tax burden and high quality schools. Further, we feel this budget will maintain the community's commitment to high quality education for all, and will enable us to keep true to our professional development belief that we can always get better at what is already done well.

Thank you for sticking with the above update, and as always, please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions that may arise.

Sincerely,

*James A. Crisfield*

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