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IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Challenge of Stimulus Funds

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Many of you are aware that the Board of Education decided to reinstate busing within 2 miles of our schools. This decision was a tough one for the Board of Education given all of the controversy that surrounded it when it was originally eliminated last May. I have received many questions through email, phone calls and even as I walked through the grocery store in the evening about their decision. I thought going through the most common questions would be beneficial to everyone.

When did you find out about these funds and when did you get them?

Like every other entity that has received stimulus funds, we were originally at the mercy of the Federal government and then the State government. If you followed the state budget through the summer, they struggled to balance their budget and they held districts hostage by not letting us know what to expect. For that fact, the original money we got as stimulus money was not an increase to our budget at all, rather they reduced the amount of money they send to us out of the state funds. In turn, this means the money that was earmarked for education was actually used to plug the holes in the state budget. The nuts and bolts of this are we were aware after school started that we may get additional funds during the school year. That amount went up and down through September and when we finally got the funds October 5th, the Board of Education moved swiftly to reinstate busing.

Why don't you reinstate busing right away?

When we reduced busing we laid off 14 of our trained drivers. Although some of them have stayed on as substitutes, some of them moved on to other districts. We now need to attract and train 8 new drivers prior to reinstating busing. In addition to that, routes will need to be rebid to all of our drivers and once that process is complete, post cards will need to be mailed to the households that have changes. All of this takes a significant amount of time.

Won't this be perceived as a political move to help the two returning Board members?

Sure there will be people that think this, but if the Board had held the funds and waited until after the election because of their fear of the perception, that would have called their

judgment into question also. In this case they aired on the side of student safety at the expense of being criticized for it looking like a political move. If they had held their decision until after the election, busing would not have been reinstated until February 1st. This delay would have suspended busing through one of the toughest walking months of the year.

Won't returning busing hurt our chances of passing a future levy?

Busing was reduced in an effort to protect the classroom. The Board made it clear that it was held as one of the last cuts in over 6 million dollars that have been reduced from the budget. Our future levies will be dependent on our ability to demonstrate to our community fiscal responsibility and communicate effectively the decisions that are made. This decision was made in an effort to demonstrate they were not making decisions based on the potential of a future levy, rather it was returned to demonstrate the fiscal responsibility that is expected of them.

Why haven't they returned all of the cuts that were made including high school busing?

This one time infusion of funds to the district is not enough to right the ship completely. The administration and Board of Education are trying to find the right balance between the appropriate level of service and the financial longevity of the school's finances. There are different constituency groups that are affected by all of the cuts. If I were to ask the secretaries and principals how vital the receptionists are, the parent that is getting ready to pay for their student to play basketball, or the teacher who has 6 to 7 more students in their room, each of them would tell me their need is the greatest. At this time the Board of Education is aware of the needs of the district and currently the funds do not meet all of those needs. Over the coming weeks the Board of Education will continue to monitor the district learning environment and its' operations to find the right balance of services while being fiscally prudent. To the original question, 2 mile radius busing was reinstated because it was the last thing cut. Using the same priority order high school busing is further down the list.

Will the Board of Education cut busing again?

It would not be practical to make that prediction right now. Of course the potential is there as this Board and future Boards of Education try to balance the budget. The priority list of services that may have to be reduced will be debated in the future taking into consideration input from the community.

I am sure I have not covered all of the questions you have and I am hoping to get more from you. Over the next few weeks I am going to try to open up and provide information more in this format. I welcome your feedback and will try to get back with everyone that reaches out to us. That said, please continue to stop me in the grocery, email or call as I am looking forward to hearing from you.