

TAKING OUR RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS FROM GOOD TO GREAT!

A RATIONALE FOR SECOND QUESTION FUNDING

Most organizations rely on the *how* and the *what* rather than capitalizing on the *who*. They invest in strategies and best practices for success without building and strengthening their human resource capacity. In addition to having a great plan, **great** organizations attract and/or identify the best and the brightest and then mobilize them towards a unified purpose. Great organizations start with great people and build great results from their efforts. When schools fail to employ enough of the right people, it doesn't matter whether they discover the right direction; they will never realize their fullest potentials.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education, for the past decade, Ridgefield Public Schools have operated at an average state of inadequacy totaling \$1.2 million per year. Too many years of zero budget increases and fairly recent 2 percent caps on tax levy revenues have crippled and eroded our system, shrinking our human capacity. Against all odds, we have made significant gains and built a relatively good system. But without restoring our funding and several critical positions, we will never achieve our potential of becoming a **great** school system that serves each and every student well.

During these past two years, Ridgefield Public Schools have gone to great lengths to build solid human infrastructure, clarify roles and responsibilities, and reorganize people for optimal performance. The results have led to dramatic improvement, but there remains significant need for additional staffing and regular long-term planning dollars. Ridgefield Public Schools do not have the appropriate resources for delivering programs that provide students with a strong foundation and a competitive edge.

A second question to increase school spending during the November 2016 election would set our schools back on track. For roughly 75 cents a day per average household, Ridgefield Public Schools could do the following for students:

EXPAND AND MODERNIZE SCIENCE PROGRAMS BY ADDING A SCIENCE TEACHER

New Jersey requires implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards in September of 2016 in Grades 6-12 and September of 2017 in Grades K-5. In addition to meeting minimum basic requirements, the Ridgefield Public School District seeks to expand its science programs at the secondary level in order to serve students better in the areas of science and engineering by integrating core courses such as Geophysics in freshman year and offering practical and relevant electives such as but not limited to Forensics and Environmental Science. It looks to provide students with an opportunity to engage in a broader array of AP Science classes. It looks to engage in the multi-disciplinary cross-content areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). These are the types of experiences that lead to the pursuit of successful careers in the sciences. All of this requires the addition of one science teacher.

BUILD AND EXPAND CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION BY ADDING A BUSINESS TEACHER

New Jersey requires schools to meet rigorous College and Career Readiness Standards and better prepare students for the world beyond secondary school. The Ridgefield Public School District looks to offer students the opportunity to participate in a career and technical education program that begins with introductions to business and personal finance and culminates with senior internships in the actual workplace. The District looks to provide practical and relevant elective classes such as but not limited to Marketing, Microsoft Certification, and Business Law. All of this requires the addition of one additional teacher with NJ Standard Business Certification.

BUILD A SOLID WORLD LANGUAGE PROGRAM BY ADDING A WORLD LANGUAGE TEACHER

The Ridgefield Public School District looks to offer students a more practical and robust world language program in order to support student growth and success during and after the K-12 experience. The District hopes to do this by providing a more comprehensive and relevant program in all grades, delivered by highly qualified personnel. Many studies have demonstrated the positive impact of early second language learning not only on students' linguistic abilities but also on their cognitive and creative abilities. "Critical language" is a term used in the United States to designate languages for which there is large demand for language professionals but little supply. Among these are Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Arabic, Korean, and Hindi. This requires the addition of one world language teacher.

Research shows a crucial need for quality foreign language instruction to be available to all students throughout their PK-12 academic experience. Knowing other languages and understanding other cultures is a critical 21st century skill set for American students as they prepare to live and work in a global society. No matter what career students enter, they will be interacting with others around the world on a routine basis and doing business locally with those whose native languages are not English.

The Ridgefield Public School District currently provides programs that meet the minimum requirements for ensuring that all students learn a world language in a program designed to meet state standards. These programs are delivered by ACTFL OPI certified faculty at Grades K-2 and New Jersey licensed teachers in Grades 3-12. But second language acquisition research consistently identifies two key factors in the acquisition of other languages: *time and intensity* or length and quality of instruction. In that vein, it looks to expand its current program to address all of the aforesaid needs and world demands by providing well articulated and progressive core World Language and culture instruction to students in all grades, while offering electives at the secondary level, such as Advanced Placement and honors level experiences. Currently, the District cannot do this without the addition of one world language teacher.

REINSTATE AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING (ELL) TEACHER FOR OPTIMAL PROGRAMMING

The Ridgefield Public School District recognizes that schools with high levels of ELL proficiency tend to have well-trained staff able to address the unique needs of ELL students; consistent, ongoing language support services across all grade levels; and meaningful curriculum aligned with state standards and assessments. In order to achieve this, the District looks to restore one ELL teaching position.

Under our current ELL programming, students at the primary level receive initial instruction in a bilingual Kindergarten classroom. This does not provide our wonderfully diverse student population with the opportunity to truly be immersed in school with their English-speaking peers. The reinstatement of one ELL teacher will allow the District to provide students with an intensive ELL program with both pullout and push-in instruction and expansion of our ELL program at middle school and secondary levels to assist students in better understanding content based classes, including Science and Social Studies. The additional position will allow the Ridgefield School District to implement a cooperative teaching model between ELL and content area teachers.

BUILD A STRONGER AND MORE RELEVANT MATH PROGRAM BY ADDING A MATH TEACHER

The Ridgefield Public School District recognizes that for more than a decade, research studies of mathematics education in high-performing countries have concluded that mathematics education in the United States must become substantially more focused and coherent in order to improve mathematics achievement in this country. A high-quality school mathematics program emphasizes the need for well-

prepared and well-supported teachers and administrators, and it acknowledges the importance of a carefully organized system for assessing students' learning and a program's effectiveness. A high-quality school mathematics program promotes interdisciplinary connections between mathematics and science, technology, and business as a means of preparing students for college and 21st century careers.

Currently, Ridgefield Public Schools can offer only the core requisite math classes at the middle and high school levels. The addition of one math teacher will allow the District to offer a more robust program of high school and middle school electives, including such classes as Probability and Statistics, Trigonometry, Business Math, and more electives in the state-required area of personal finance. It will provide greater flexibility in scheduling. This position will allow our schools to implement our integrated studies initiative between the math and science departments, allowing students to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving across content disciplines and providing a foundation for a math-based physics class.

BUILD A MORE PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAM BY ADDING A SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." The last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first have seen a marginalization of social studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment at all grade levels. In many state houses, in departments of education, and in school districts across the United States, education for citizenship has taken a back seat to education for career and college. Powerful social studies teaching helps students develop enduring understandings in the core content areas of civics, economics, geography, and history, and assures their readiness and willingness to assume citizenship responsibilities. Powerful social studies learning leads to a well-informed and civic-minded citizenry that can sustain and build on democratic traditions.

Currently, the Ridgefield Public School District can only offer requisite Social Studies classes at the middle and high school levels. The addition of one new position will allow the District to not only sustain but rather increase the number of relevant electives offered at both levels to include classes such as History through Film, Psychology, Political Science, Crimes Against Humanity, and Sociology; it will also provide greater flexibility in scheduling, providing students with a greater likelihood of being able to take the courses that are most appropriate for them. This position will allow Ridgefield Memorial High School to increase its much-needed integrated studies initiative and provide students with the opportunity to explore English and History in a cooperative environment with a teacher from each discipline. This type of class provides students with the ability to engage in the 21st century practice of thinking critically and solving problems across content disciplines.

PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE K-12 SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM BY ADDING TWO COUNSELORS

Gone are the days of guidance counselors sitting in their offices, simply handing out college applications, making schedule changes for students who want to drop a class, and meeting with both challenging and challenged individuals in the school. Today's school counselors are vital members of the education team. They are charged with providing whole programs in three critical areas: academic, personal/social, and career. Their comprehensive and proactive services and programs help students resolve emotional, social or behavioral problems, and help them develop a clearer focus and/or sense of direction. Effective counseling programs are important to the school climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement in all grades, K-12. They ensure that today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow.

Currently, the Ridgefield Public School District employs three school (guidance) counselors that serve the 550 students at RMHS, one school counselor who serves the 760 students at Slocum Skewes School, and no school counselors to serve the 410 students at Bergen Boulevard School and Shaler Academy.

Counseling programs at the elementary level exist in the form of character education components (i.e., Character Counts—The Six Pillars of Character and Positive School Climate) delivered by teachers in classroom lessons, curriculum infused character lessons through the Being a Writer program, career and character focused assemblies, I&RS identification and services, building-based anti-bullying specialists, and as-needed counseling services by licensed social workers. Nevertheless, the District needs to enhance these services and take them beyond their current limitations.

The addition of two counseling positions will allow the District to build a well articulated school counseling program that will extend from high school to primary and upper elementary levels and include school counseling and social skills groups as well as build a systemic character education program into the curriculum to be incorporated by school counselors. Additionally, these counselors will be able to work proactively with the Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team, Section 504 Team, and individual students who require assistance within their education environment.

EXPAND LIBRARY MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY, AND INFORMATION LITERACY BY ADDING TWO SPECIALISTS

Currently, the Ridgefield School District has no operating library media centers. It has only one Library Media Specialist for all students in Grades K-12 who delivers part of a newly developed information literacy program. Information literacy is important for today's learners; it promotes problem solving approaches and thinking skills—asking questions and seeking answers, finding information, forming opinions, evaluating sources and making decisions—fostering successful learners, effective contributors, confident individuals, and responsible citizens. Other educational goals, including traditional literacy, computer literacy, and library skills are related to information literacy and are important foundations for its development.

At this point, students receive instruction in the one area of information literacy—the research protocol, which is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Only one Library Media Specialist delivers the newly developed research protocol to the entire district for only six-week periods per building during the school year. The effort has been well received by teachers and impactful on students. Additional staffing is needed to expand the information literacy program and provide students with a more comprehensive experience and the much needed and valuable instruction in the abovementioned goal areas, giving students the tools to compete in the 21st century. New staff will work with classroom teachers as they model effective research, media, and technology practices and help to facilitate and support systemic skills acquisition.

SUPPORT HIGH LEVEL PROGRAMMING THROUGH REGULAR CURRICULUM RESOURCE FUNDING

The Ridgefield School District does not have a history of intermediate or long-range planning in the area of curriculum and instruction. During these past two years, the District has invested in programs such as but not limited to writing, word study, Response to Intervention (RTI), engineering, and blended learning. It is currently in the process of investing in such programs as reading, updated common core math, and Next Generation Science such as geophysics in freshman year. The District's new programs provide and will continue to provide students with great skills acquisition and success. All programs benefit from the integration of educational technologies such as laptop carts, online subscriptions, and

eventual 1:1 access. The latter allows for students to work in independent, creative, self-paced ways. In order to plan effectively, the District needs to allocate funding that supports sustainable program planning and implementation.

MAINTAIN SAFE AND CONDUCTIVE FACILITIES BY ADDING BACK ONE MAINTENANCE WORKER

Due to past budgetary challenges and subsequent cuts, the Ridgefield Public School District only employs two full time maintenance workers to cover five buildings and one configuration of modular units, each with its own plumbing, HVAC, interior lighting and campus grounds. With buildings nearing the hundred-year mark and a planned addition of a second set of modular units, the District desperately needs a third maintenance worker to not only maintain buildings and grounds but to keep them safe and beautiful.

DEVELOP AN EVERGREEN PLAN FOR MAINTENANCE AND FACILITIES CARE WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDS

In addition to restoring one maintenance worker, the Ridgefield Public School District is in need of more consistent repair and replacement cycles. Studies show that students thrive in clean, comfortable, and safe environments. We need to better sustain our educational environments. Building wear-and-tear increases with each passing year. Classrooms share increasing fundamental needs such as but not limited to replacement desks and chairs and carpeting repairs.

IN SUMMARY

The Borough of Ridgefield is a residential community that has been widely recognized by a variety of sources as exceptionally safe and affordable and as a generally desirable place to live. It's only natural that its schools should not only reflect but also drive community worth and success. We have an opportunity to make a world of difference. **Please support our public schools on Tuesday, November 8, 2016 and help to take them from good to great.**