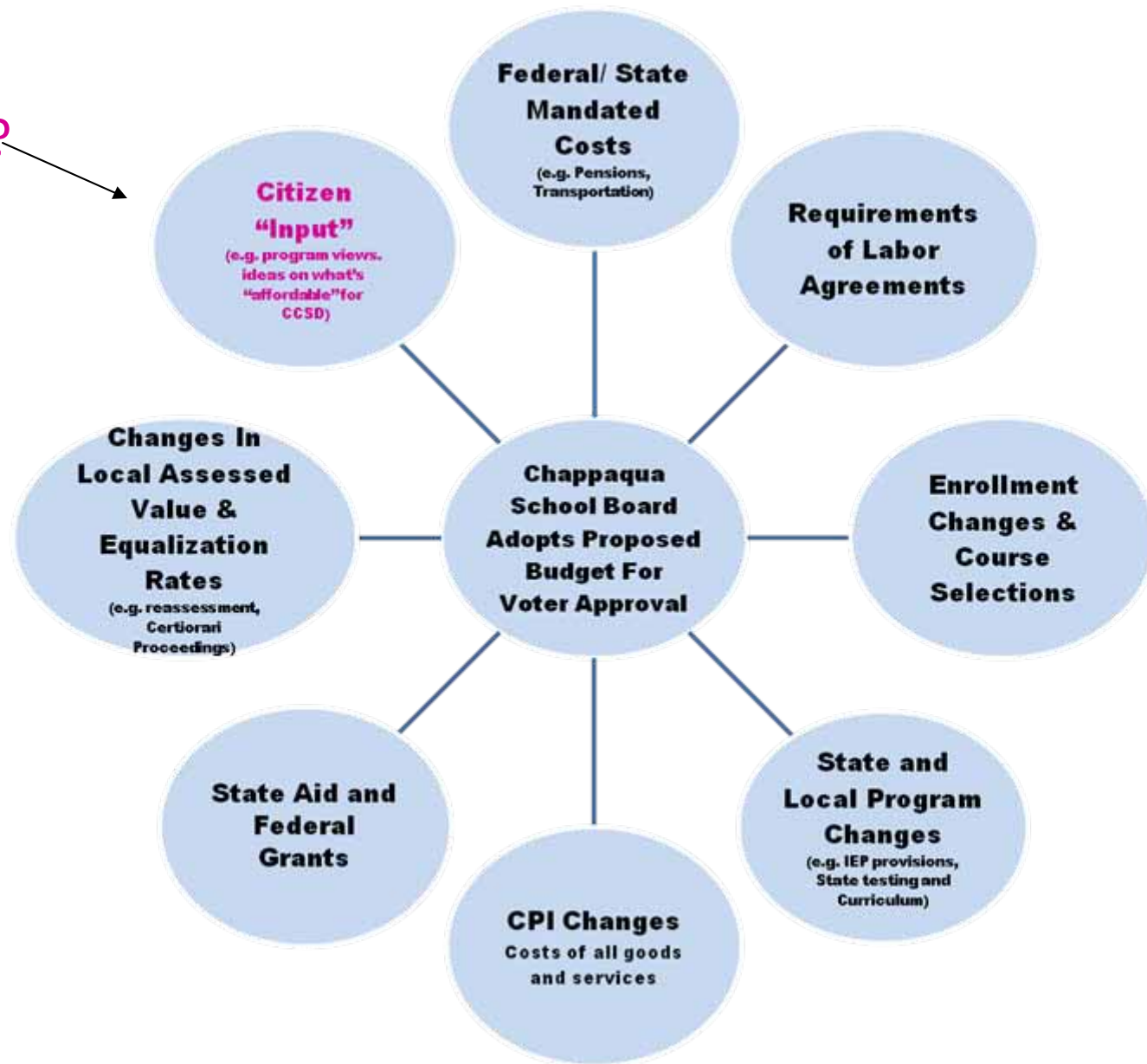


Focus Group Discussions on Budgetary Process

Summary of Responses

WHO?
HOW?
WHEN?



Background:

- Focus groups held on evening of December 2nd and 3rd.
- There were a total of 20 participants. 10 each evening. (Approximately 40 were invited.)
- Focus Groups were facilitated by Dr. Chuck Fowler (School Leadership, LLC)
- Agenda for both groups was identical.
- Full report to be posted on district website.

Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome and introductions by the Superintendent
- Overview of purpose by the facilitator
- Presentation of a basic budget overview by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent
- Response to any questions by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent
- The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent then excused themselves for the remainder of the focus group
- Participants complete questionnaire
- Focus group discussion led by the facilitator

CHAPPAQUA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Budget Information Focus Groups
Initial Response Questionnaire
December 2009

1. How much of the budget information presented in the Budget Overview this evening did you feel you already knew?

☐ **None** ☐ **A little** ☐ **Much** ☐ **All**

2. Rank in order of importance (1=most important) which of the following have been your primary sources of this information:

___ Local and regional news media [Name: _____]

___ School district publications

___ Attendance at school board meetings

___ Attendance at a "Budget Coffee"

___ Through PTA or other community organizations

___ Through personal conversations with school district staff

___ Through personal conversations with school board members

___ Through personal conversations with others in the community

___ Other: _____

3. What do you think is the single, most-important part of the Budget Overview this evening that should be communicated to the community?

4. What do you think are the three best means of communicating this information (#3 above)?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

5. What parts, if any, of the Budget Overview this evening were new information for you?

6. What questions were left unanswered for you by the Budget Overview this evening?

7. Are there aspects of the Annual Budget on which you believe the School Board should invite *specific citizen input?* (e.g. class size, administrative costs, new curriculum/course offerings, facility costs, transportation costs, funding of extracurricular activities, average property tax impact, budget-to-budget percentage increase) If so, ***what aspects and when should that information be solicited?***

What mechanism(s) do you feel might be the best means of obtaining that input?

Check ***all that apply:***

- ☐ Written and/or web-site questionnaire
- ☐ Budget Hearings
- ☐ Through school PTA's and/or Budget Coffees
- ☐ Through PTA Council
- ☐ Through student government
- ☐ Through individual letters, e-mail
- ☐ Through invitational focus groups
- ☐ Other: _____

Questionnaire Response “Highlights”:

- 75% of participants felt they were well informed on the budget data presented at the meeting’s beginning.
- Local and regional news media together with school board meetings appear to be major sources of participants’ prior knowledge.
- Additional information gleaned from PTA participation and school district publications.

Questionnaire continued:

- Suggestions on how to communicate important information about the budget to the community:
 - Favored mass written communications over communication through meetings.
 - Email blasts
 - Web site links to budget details
 - District publications
 - NCCTV recordings
 - Local media. (News 12, NCCTV, Journal News, New CastleNOW)

Questionnaire Continued:

- Suggestions in terms of receiving citizen input:
 - Budget Coffees (Identified as a good way to receive community input but not to disseminate district information.)
 - In school PTA meetings.
 - Talking to community groups.
 - Web based questionnaires and surveys.

Questionnaire Continued:

- Certain information about the budget should receive widespread distribution within the community
 - The proportion of the budget related to employee salaries and benefits (75%)
 - How little “flexibility/control” the school board has in the budget development process
 - Employee compensation 75% of budget
 - Debt service approximately 5% of budget
 - Transportation slightly less than 6% of budget

Group Discussion Summary:

- The Budget development process should:
 - Be ongoing. Through out the year, indicate what each program discussed costs.
 - Be clear to the community what the Board's directions to the administration are with respect to budget development.
 - Include multi-year look at revenues and expenditures.
 - Offer opportunities for input to multiple stakeholders. (Not just those who attend Board meetings or are PTA officers.)

Group Discussion Summary continued:

- Be resourced such that multiple levels of budget information is available to the community. Allow drill down for those who want more detail.
- Be holistic in its view. What is the district trying to accomplish with its use of resources?
 - Engage multiple levels of school district leadership (central staff, building staff, and departmental staff) in clarifying the purpose and intent in use of funds.
- Make use of large scale data development as part of the input process. On-line and printed questionnaires.
- Better use of web site, email and cable television in communicating important information to the district's multiple stakeholders.

District Reaction:

- Focus groups were not the last step or the only step, but rather they were the first step in the process. We will attempt to implement as much as we can as soon as we can and we will continue to seek ways to improve the budget process for the future too.
- Already implemented or implementing most of the suggestions.
- Support full transparency.
- Continue to provide access to detailed information on website.
 - Devote a special section to this year's budget development process.
 - Will post available background data.