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MEMORANDUM

TO: WBOE

FROM: Carl W. Lindskog

RE: WBOE Budget Reductions

DATE: 3/9/2015

I was surprised to learn from Dr. Stella about a week ago that the WBOF and the WBOS had acted to reduce the WBOE 2015-2016 general education budgetary request by about \$50,000 and the Technology budgetary request by about \$100,000. *65,000. wsl*

I had attended the session in January at which Dr. Stella presented the budget to the joint meeting of the WBOF and WBOS. The requested increase of about \$400,000 or roughly 3% of the \$14,000,000 prior budget should not have come as a surprise. For a number of years, the WBOE has deployed the very useful managerial tool of projecting each newly approved budget for 5 years to determine the direction in which we are headed. The most recent iteration of that study on the 2014-2015 budget, which had been shared with the WBOF and WBOS, indicated that an inexorable rise in costs of about 3% lay ahead. Happily, by virtue of positive interventions, that forecast is an improvement over the roughly 5% annual rates projected in the past.

The 2015-2016 budget presented by Dr. Stella had been endorsed by the WBOE unanimously. It was deemed to be eminently supportable! As Dr. Stella elaborated, 80% of the cost increase arises by virtue of contractual obligations. Those costs can only be cut by downsizing, which in the face of an expanding school population is not an option. The remaining part of the increase, roughly 20%, is fundamental to the realization of the mission. It is not discretionary. A modern Diogenes looking for fluff in this budget would find his time better spent in his traditional, so far fruitless search!

The presentation was excellent. At its conclusion, there were no questions asked of Dr. Stella. It was observed that the supporting data offered by Dr. Stella were “incontrovertible.” That is very high praise!

Happily, the impact of the current action by the WBOS and WBOF on the 2015-2016 budget will be marginal at best! The success of the recent early retirement incentive appears to offer savings in faculty costs in the next fiscal year of about \$50,000, about equal to the cut in funding. The original 2015-2016 budgetary request provided for no such savings, since the existence of an offer and the success each year of an offer, if one is made, are highly uncertain.

In addition, by the stroke of good fortune, it appears that there will be a favorable operating variance at year-end, sufficient, if the WBOE chooses to do so, to provide most of the resulting shortfall in support for technology in 2015-2016. The data from the Strategic School Profile have demonstrated historically that BRS spends no more than average in the DERG to support technology, an area at the forefront of modern education.

So what is there to worry about? If you say, “Nothing,” I believe you are mistaken!

On the day I received the news from Dr. Stella, the global stock markets hit all-time, record highs. When I asked Dr. Stella for the reason justifying the cuts, he reported he has been informed that there are “hard times” in Woodbridge.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to try to understand the source of the “hard times,” or elucidate the numbers behind the claim. Rather, it is to voice a warning. Education is the only game in town! When someone threatens to harm the goose that lays the golden eggs, it is useful to cry out and be sure that the precious bird is protected and reasonably and appropriately nourished! That is what the original 2015-2016 budgetary request attempted to accomplish. That must be our objective into the foreseeable future!

There is another aspect of uncertainty introduced by this WBOF-WBOS budgetary action in response to “hard times.” Let’s focus on Special Education. Some years ago, the charge was levelled that because of the superior quality of the Special Education program and faculty at BRS, families with children with special needs were being attracted to Woodbridge. The implication was that Woodbridge was incurring excessive costs to maintain its programs in Special Education. Happily, the data from the Strategic School Profile debunked that myth!

But the costs of mandated programs in Special Education require particular attention. There has been a longstanding agreement between the Stella administration and the Town Hall regarding the handling of these costs. When negative variances arise in Special Education by virtue of unforeseen, unanticipated and unbudgeted expenses in a given fiscal year, to the extent that there are positive variances available in the General Education budget, these negative variances will be offset internally. However, if the General Education budget is in balance at the time that the unexpected and unbudgeted costs in Special Education arise, the Town will fund the shortfall from other sources.

The General Education Budget will not be held hostage to Special Education costs. Will this policy survive in these "hard times"? It must!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long vertical stroke, positioned below the text.