

## COMMACK PUBLIC SCHOOL- COMMACK, NEW YORK

Board of Education Budget Public hearing  
Hubbs Administration Center  
Burr Intermediate School  
Thursday, May 7th, 2009@ 8:30 p.m.  
*Attended by John Karahalidis*

Introduction: Upon entering the school I followed a group to the entrance of the school auditorium where the meeting was to take place. Printed minutes of the last meeting along with meeting agenda and copies of the “*draft*” of the 2009-2010 school budget was available on a table outside the auditorium. Unlike the previous “regular” Board of Education meeting I attended, here virtually every seat was taken. Approximate attendees were nearly 500 people as the posted capacity for the auditorium was 526. A dais was set up on stage and the Board members entered stage left at 8:40 p.m. The following observations correspond with the questions that were asked of me and cohort members relating to this budget meeting:

### 1. Who was in charge of the meeting?

The board president was clearly in charge as she introduced each member of the board by name and position and led the community in the pledge of allegiance. The meeting began with a reading of past minutes and “old business”. New business included agreements with certain vendors for different programs within the school district, and citations from local political leaders to the Commack 2009 NDA National Kickline Champions. Afterwards the 2009-2010 school budget was introduced via a PowerPoint presentation.

### 2. Was there any re-allocation of resources?

A net decrease of 55 student’s district wide was anticipated and a loss of 34.8 teacher positions (F.T.E.) was announced. Loss of resources was explained as the main cause of positions lost of and subsequent loss of some programs. To keep property taxes low, the budget increase was reported as only to be increase by 1 ½ %. To maintain the same staff and programs as present school year Board President stated would result in significant property tax increases that the community would not accept or approve when the budget is to be voted on. Specifically, some of the programs to be affected or cut included:

- Art Honor Society
- Math Club workshop
- Freshman Football
- Overall 10% reduction of after school activities
- Possible increase of school bus distance pickup (*to be decided by separate community vote*)
- Increase of class size for grades 4-6 from 25 to 28 students per class.

3. What are the initiatives the school district is doing to improve the organization?

- The district is attempting to keep costs down by cutting non-academic programs and non- core classes.
- They are also opening a new bank account and transferring State funds to a higher interest bearing account.
- All board members and administrators have agreed to a salary freeze and are hoping teachers' unions will follow suit.
- Ancillary areas of savings includes 10% reduction in materials and supplies, closing adult education classes and increasing rental costs of school buildings for non-school related activities.

Generally, the emphasis was on maintaining the same academic level of success as past school years of a 98% Regents Diploma rate.

4. What was the tone of the conversation?

The Board President was able to effectively detail the budget and appeared well organized. However, when the Board President opened the meeting up to the community to express their concerns to the Board many residents, teacher union members and students actively approached the microphones strategically placed at the ends of the two main aisles.

The consensus was one of disapproval and concern over how the cuts in staffing and programs will affect the quality of education at Commack schools. Responses to the board members ranged from distress to anger with only one community member voicing support of the Board's decisions. The Board president acknowledged the apprehension of the students, staff and parents and re-assured that the cuts were very difficult but necessary to maintain the same quality of education and keep residents cost increases low.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:55p.m.