

Citizens for Accountability

Presentation to the Board of Education Community Consolidated School District 15 February 8, 2012

Citizens for Accountability is a group of District 15 residents whose children benefit from our District's fine teachers and staff. We've worked diligently to bring about the awareness of District issues where there is imbalance, or poor planning. In working to avoid these pitfalls, everyone benefits – Especially the children.

The reason we're here to today is because **our finances are out of balance with expenditures exceeding revenues at an alarming pace.** Make no mistake, the rate of the rise in EXPENDITURES is the root of the great divide in our budget. Specifically, since salaries comprise 82% of our expenditures let's examine it further in this illustration of two wage earners:

Assume it is year 2000 and the average District 15 career teacher, as well as a private sector employee both make \$48,000. When compounding an average of 6.49% per year raise for the average D15 career teacher, by year 2011 their salary has rocketed to \$95,000. Contrast this to the private sector employee using the Private Sector Wage Index, and this person's salary rises only to about \$66,000 by 2011. The magnitude of difference between these wage earners is sobering. Here, the average District 15 career teacher's salary grew 99% compared to an average private sector person's salary that grew only 38%. The spread in income gets even greater if calculated on number of days worked, or the value of other benefits such as health insurance or retirement are added. In light of this large, system-wide problem, it is ridiculous to consider individual teacher and program cuts such as band and orchestra. And we applaud Superintendent Thompson for taking them off the table as possible cuts.

The exponential growth began long ago but continued unbridled through past negotiations. Back in 2006, after steep raises had been granted by a board majority, the Pioneer Press reported that the three dissenting board members said, "they value teachers, but the total increases in the contract didn't reflect the economic realities in the District." The increases continued through the 2009 contract when a deal was signed in a small room at the district office with the minimum notice, before any public discussion took place, and with dissenting board members warning this would put us on a path of deficit spending.

As these teacher's salaries climbed unchecked by the changing, often harsh economic realities within the private sector, the community grew frustrated. However, through the 7,000 bond petition signatures, they expressed their desire to have a say in District 15 finances. Subsequently, thousands turned out to vote, by a 2:1 margin, that they wanted District 15 to live within its means by voting "NO" to the bond proposal. And in the most recent public directive, contrary to what the papers even endorsed, voters chose by a 3:1 margin School Board candidates running on a platform of balancing the budget.

In sum, while the community has been forced to tighten their belts the District has been increasing spending. In

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order to solve this problem we must look at our largest expense, salaries and benefits. The rate of rise in salary of the average D15 teacher has far outpaced that of the public struggling to support it. This divergence is unsustainable and creates a destructive imbalance that in the long run won't benefit kids, teachers, or the community. The process of making necessary corrections will not be easy. In the short term there will be discomfort, but this is something we must bear in order to return to focusing on educational programs --Not digging ourselves out of a deep hole.

To the Board who is looking for direction this evening: ***The community's voting record is your mandate*** to get this budget into line by curbing expenditures. For too long our citizens have had to wrestle between their rising tax bills and their paychecks, or fixed incomes. The District must live within its means by reducing spending, now.

We respectfully ask that you keep proper perspective in this dilemma. This community has stated plainly through the ballot box ***you need not look for more revenue***. Instead, curb the rate of expenditures to align with what our backs can bear.

Citizens for Accountability in District 15