

Budgeting
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Ms. Resident and her three year old daughter live in the Anywhere School District. She graduated from college last year and has an entry level position in a local business, but her salary is not enough to cover all her current expenses and college loans. Ms. Resident's Dad has been helping with some financial support. She has the usual expenses; heating fuel, taxes, car payment, gasoline, various insurances, food, utilities, mortgage, etc. Most of her expenses are unavoidable and she has no control over the increased costs associated with such things as the gas to operate the car which she needs for transportation or the fuel to keep the house warm.

In order to cut expenses, Ms. Resident uses a local day care instead of a private baby-sitter, buys food in bulk, and has eliminated all expenses but the bare necessities. Although struggling, Ms. Resident did manage to stay within her budget until several things happen all at once.

The first problem surfaced when her car developed multiple problems. The mechanic deemed it unsafe to operate until the new brakes were installed and the exhaust system replaced. Then her daughter developed a chronic respiratory infection which necessitates ongoing care. The child's insurance covers some of the expenses, but not all of them and the time to go to the doctor means less time at work. Of course, the day care won't take the little girl when she is sick, so another sitter had to be found at an additional cost. Besides the increase in all costs, the car problems and an ill child, Ms. Resident's father finds he is no longer able to provide financial support at the same level, so Ms. Resident has lost some income she had depended upon.

My hope is this brief scenario helps folks to relate to school budgeting. Just like any family, schools have budgets which include revenues and expenses. Most of the expenditures are unavoidable; districts must use fuel, buy insurances, pay for utilities, and pay people's salaries. Many times these costs increase beyond what was budgeted, but they still have to be paid.

Often, children move into the district who need special help in order to access their appropriate educational program. Ms. Resident's daughter needs additional medical care which is costly. Special education students also need additional services, which may cost the district more money, but the children cannot be educated without the services. This may increase the costs of operating the school, but the help cannot be denied so it is paid for and the expense side of the budget increases.

Just as Ms. Resident received some financial help from her father, so the schools receive some financial help from the State. When some of that help is withdrawn, then, like Ms. Resident, the school has to come up with another way to replace that revenue.

This is overly simplified, but the point is school districts and district residents have similar problems when it comes to revenues and expenditures. Just as individuals work to keep expenses down, so do school districts, but sometimes we cannot escape what must be done and the consequences are an increase in expenses with less help from outside revenue sources.

Residents can learn more about the school budgets by attending open budget meetings, asking questions, and listening to the answers. All districts share some of the same issues, but each district has its own unique set of circumstances. Unless residents participate in the budget discussions and get specific information from school personnel familiar with school finances and local budgets, decisions may be based on incorrect information. Schools provide opportunities to learn more about their budgets; taking advantage of those opportunities is the responsibility of everyone.