

# Franklin Township School Spring Update

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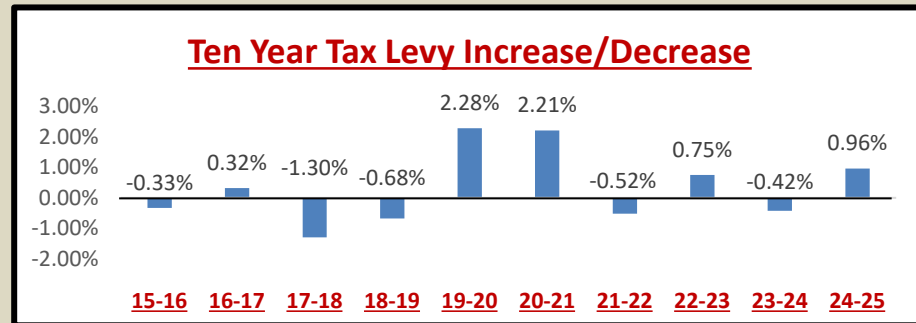
April, 2024



## Tax Levy Increase Less than 1%!

Recent inflationary spikes have had a distinct impact upon our budget, but we still have good news. The annual inflation rate for 2023 was 3.4%. The consumer price index issued by the State of NJ for student transportation contracts for the upcoming year is 5.81%. Our health insurance premiums are projected to increase between 7%-9%, upon renewal. These are all very demanding increases that we needed to address in preparing our 2024-2025 budget for the Franklin Township School. Fortunately, even with

these challenging demands, we were still able to cap our 2024-2025 tax levy increase to just under 1%, without cutting any regular school programs. How? Even though we did make budgetary cuts in some contingency areas, our primary response to these inflationary hits were addressed on the revenue side of the equation. After six years of regular State School Aid reductions, we finally saw an increase of approximately \$19,000 for



2024-2025. Also, we have been setting aside surplus funds in our capital reserve, maintenance reserve, and emergency reserve accounts, over the years, and are now able to draw out a portion of those funds to assist with our budget. Maintenance Reserve funds will be used to cover the cost of required maintenance expenses that are recurring each year, as well as several one-time projects. After this withdrawal, we will still have sufficient funds to cover the annual, required maintenance items for another 7-8 years, without additional contributions of surplus funds. Emergency Reserve funds will be used for one-time projects, as this account has a very narrow scope of uses. In the area of special education, the number of students requiring intensive special education accommodations has increased over the last year. Fortunately, a generous portion of those costs will be covered by Extraordinary Aid that is provided by the State for students that cost school districts more than the State-established threshold of expenses. All of this is contingent upon the State approving our proposed budget and use of reserve funds.

## "A" For Effort



Every three years, public schools in the State of New Jersey must go through a review by the Department of Education, to assure that each school is adhering to all standards, statutes, and guidelines established by the State. The review covers areas of: instruction/program, governance, operations, personnel, and finance. This year, Franklin Township was required to go through this review and, although we did not yet receive our official results, it appears as if we did very well. Three years ago, we were designated as a high-performing district. This year, we were one of only a few districts in the county being reviewed that exceeded the student test score benchmarks. Many thanks to all those in the district that contributed to this school-wide success.

## A Growing Preschool Program

As many of you know, we received a preschool expansion grant during the 2022-2023 school year that provided us with the ability to open up a **free**, full-day preschool program for resident students. In the first year of this program, we started with 26 students in two classrooms. Now in our second year of operation, we have 3 classrooms and 43 students. Next year, we are anticipating that number to grow into the 50s, requiring us to increase our number of classrooms to 4. The State of New Jersey has provided us with funding that will be sufficient to cover the cost of teachers, classroom aides, bus aides, supplies, equipment, furniture, support functions, and all employee benefits related to the employees being paid through this program. This is a substantial investment by the State of New Jersey and a tremendous benefit to the families of small children in our community. Please spread the word about this phenomenal benefit for Franklin Township residents, as we would like to see as many families as possible avail themselves of this free program. Enrollment information can be found on our school website ([www.franklinschool.org](http://www.franklinschool.org)) or by calling the main office.



## Amazing Summer Opportunities for Students

The summer of 2024 will be the last summer that we will be able to take advantage of funds provided through many of the COVID-related federal grants. We still plan on having some great summer offerings, moving forward, but the summer of 2024 will be a bit more special. On the academic side of the equation, we will have a large team of teachers at the school for five weeks over the summer, providing a “Beyond the School Year Accelerated Learning Program”. Students will be able to come to the school for 3 hours per day/4 days per week, to get assistance from our staff in making progress toward proficiency in our primary academic disciplines. In the social/emotional/mental health portion of our summer programs, we are utilizing a portion of our ESSER grant that focuses on mental health to provide the opportunity for approximately 50 of our students to attend a week-long summer day-camp experience at a local venue. We were able to provide this on a smaller scale, last summer, and it was received very well.



## School Library to be Named for Paul Rinaldi

If you are a long-time resident to Franklin Township, you are probably familiar with the name Paul Rinaldi. Mr. Rinaldi worked at the Franklin Township School for 38 years, starting as a teacher and finishing his tenure here as the Chief School Administrator. He also volunteered in myriad non-profit organizations, such as the Warren County PTA, Boy Scouts of America, Warren County Farmers Fair, and his local church. His passion, energy, and commitment to his causes were unwavering. Unfortunately, Mr. Rinaldi left this earth almost two years ago. In honor of his life and commitment to our community and students of this school, the Franklin Township Board of Education wanted to recognize his contributions in a tangible way. On April 25, 2024, at 4pm, we will be holding a ceremony to officially name our school library after Mr. Rinaldi. Community members and friends are invited to attend this special event, as we officially dedicate the “Paul Rinaldi Memorial Library”.



## Taking Care of Our Own

Franklin Township has had a long and envied reputation of being a tight-knit community that has been able to sustain its small-town character. People that live here actively give back to their community and care for one another. Here in the elementary school, we do our best to reinforce these cherished character traits through events that go beyond the regular academic programs. This year, we had a Winter Food Drive that solicited donations from students and their families to help some of our community members who were experiencing some financial challenges. It was a great event, resulting in enough donations to provide 7 families with a generous supply of food. We followed that event up with a Staff Spring Food Drive. Staff members donated requested food items that amounted to 30 large boxes of food that were also distributed to 7 families. One staff member also donated 8 Shop Rite gift cards, as an added blessing. These donations are particularly important in helping families through times when school is on breaks and the school nutrition programs are not available to students.



## New Staff

We always like to take the opportunity in our budget mailer to introduce you to new staff in the district. This year we welcome two new dynamic individuals to our Child Study Team, Maggie Hutchins, who is our new Assistant Principal/Director of Special Services and Carissa Roe, our new Child Study Team Secretary. In our preschool classrooms, we are blessed to have Lara Smith rejoin us as a full time paraprofessional, plus the addition of Lisa Vasko (one of Franklin's own) as a paraprofessional. The energetic Taylor Hajcak rounds out our new preschool staff as our newest preschool teacher. Creative Kim Zagaja has been a nice addition to our Resource/Basic Skills program and Jacque Smith has been very busy brightening up the hallway walls with student projects, as our new art teacher. Hopefully, you will get the opportunity to meet some of our new staff. We think that you will find that each one embodies the professionalism and compassion that we value so much in our staff members.



## Improving Security!!!

Over the past ten years, we have initiated many new procedures and made substantial improvements in our physical plant, in an effort to provide a safer environment for our students. In 2024-2025 we will be taking another big step forward by contracting with the Washington Township Police Department to provide us with a full-time SRO officer. It is always our hope and prayer that we will never find ourselves in a position where a law enforcement officer is called into action, but much like buying insurance, we feel that we need to be prepared for a challenge of this type, should it arise. Often, the presence of law enforcement is sufficient to deter criminal activity. An added benefit is the positive daily engagement that our students will have with a law enforcement officer, building familiarity and trust.



## Our Amazing Students

If you didn't catch the recent performance by our after-school drama club, you really missed out. Our troop of 29 talented students presented an outstanding production of Annie Junior, under the direction of Mrs. DaSilva and Mrs. Trumpy. The production, which included singing and dancing, provided our students with a great opportunity to showcase their awesome performance abilities.

Our Student Council coordinated another great Veteran's Day program this year, honoring students' family members who have stepped forward to serve our nation in the military (active and former). The program was followed by a delicious brunch. A nice added feature, this year, was the presentation of a donation, collected from staff and matched by one of our veterans, for Patriot Square, a home for disabled veterans being constructed by the Slate Belt Veteran's Association.



## Technology Upgrades

During the summer of 2024 we will be completing three technology initiatives. The first is the replacement of our school-wide telephone system. Our current system has served us tremendously well over the last 22 years, greatly exceeding its projected life expectancy. Unfortunately, it has outlived the availability of new replacement parts. If approved by the State, funds for this project will come from our Emergency Reserve Account, so this upgrade would have no impact on the district tax levy. We will also be replacing the firewall for our computer network. Approximately 50% of this project will be paid for through the E-rate program, leaving us with a very modest investment for this necessary upgrade. We will also be purchasing approximately 40 Chromebooks with ESSER grant funds (COVID-related grant) and two Promethean interactive screens/displays via our Preschool Expansion Aid funds. Last, but not least, we will be installing a small array of internal security cameras that will give law enforcement better optics, should they need to enter our building during an active shooter situation. We would like to extend our thanks to the Hunterdon County Educational Services Commission for the tremendous technology support that they provide us. Since we began utilizing their contracted services, we have experienced a dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of our technology systems. Thank you, Nancy, Jon, and Edwin.



## Board of Education Members

Rudolph DiGilio, **President** - Donna Sbriscia, **Vice President** - Elizabeth Ames - Jason Banghart - Scott Hansen - Kristen Herzer - John McGinnis - David Sbriscia - Kelly Truszkowski

**Public Budget Hearing – May 7, 2024 at 7pm – Franklin Twp School All-Purpose Room**

## Message from the Board of Education President

To the Residents and Taxpayers of Franklin Township:

The Franklin Township School District has completed its budget for the '24-'25 school year and is now waiting for its approval from the Department of Education. Should you have an interest in hearing details about that budget, we will be holding our public budget hearing on May 7th at 7pm at the elementary school. We will be posting a copy of the presentation from that evening on our website, should you not be able to attend. We are very proud of the work being done at the Franklin Township Elementary School and are anxious for you to hear about our budget and programs. Thank you very much for your support of our local school district.

Sincerely,  
Rudolph DiGilio, Board President