

# The Patriot

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Washington Township High School,  
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## State cuts deep District budget calls for cuts, causes controversy

Kevin Whitehead '10

Putting every school district statewide in a bind, newly elected Republican governor Chris Christie is making his presence felt within New Jersey's education system and especially the pockets of the tax payer. With New Jersey's seemingly insurmountable debt, Christie is seeking solutions to a 10.7 billion dollar deficit.

The first area he has cited his fiscal agenda is in education. He has introduced a 1.5 billion dollar cut in state aid to public school districts. For the Washington Twp. school district, state aid has been reduced by 6.4 million dollars, 12 percent less than last year's budget.

"[Governor Christie] is trying to fix 20 years of mistakes in one year," Washington Twp. Education Association (WTEA) first year president Mr. Gerry Taraschi said. "You can't do that without severe hardship."

Christie's proposition and timing have severely hindered the negotiations of the district's unions thus creating a quandary for administration, the Board of Education, and union leaders.

The district will bear extensive cuts that may put up to 270 people out of work if the proposed budget is voted down on April 20. This year's budget will affect the lives of many.

"Even with all these personnel cuts and to save their career and the jobs of others. The



JULIA HAHN '10/The Patriot

**Cuts in state aid to school districts will impact instruction in Twp schools.**

program cuts, their taxes are going up at least 170 dollars [\$179.65 for the average home of an assessed value of \$129,126]," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Cheryl Simone said. "That's a lot of money especially in these times."

Many people such as the Washington Twp. Schools Support Staff Association (WTSSSA) are taking the hit in order

WTSSSA's 260 staff members voted unanimously to take a "freeze as a contribution to help benefit all employees" Their decision included a one dollar per hour pay cut to food service workers, custodians, and bus drivers. Employees such as bus mechanics, assistants, security, individual positions, and warehouse and technology assistants are in the WTSSSA.

The Board of Education held a public meeting on March 31 to inform the public of what had transpired through the days since Christie's proposed budget on March 17 and also what the budget entailed. WTSSSA spokesperson Mrs. Carol Schwartz was disappointed by the

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**[Governor Christie] is trying to fix 20 years of mistakes in one year. You can't do that without severe hardship.**

**-WTEA president  
Mr. Gerry Taraschi**

### Some of the expected cuts if the budget passes:

- 4 Administrators (district wide)
- 17 High School Teachers
- 10 Middle School Teachers
- 14 Elementary School Teachers
- 4 Guidance Counselors (district wide)
- Elementary Intramurals
- Middle School Intramurals
- Middle School Field Hockey and Wrestling
- Freshman Sports

**If the budget fails, more cuts will need to be made.**

### VOTE!

**School Board elections and budget vote.**

**Today!**

Noon to 9 P.M.

W.T.H.S. Gymnasium

# Budget cuts hit programs, jobs

**BUDGET** from p.1

meeting's progress.

"I'm very disheartened by our board," Schwartz said. "They want to be able to fire 54 people. If the budget goes through, they'll eat their words."

"The board doesn't want to fire anyone," Simone said. "After all, 82 percent of the school budget is teacher salaries."

In these hard economic times, the cuts will be affecting the middle class and ultimately the common person will be footing the bill.

"If you are going to pursue a means by which you are going to save money, why are you hurting the people at the lowest end of the economic spectrum?" Taraschi asked.

Also, principals and supervisors will be exercising various decisions in order to uphold a district wide predicament. The Washington Twp. Principals Association (WTPA) and the Washington Twp. Supervisor Association (WTA) have taken similar acts. They voted to a take a salary freeze that is effective until their expiring contract as of June 2011.

The WTEA have a unique situation since their contracts expire June 30. Governor Christie is suggesting teachers to be frozen on their step in the salary guide. The salary guide is formulated based on the negotiated contract and their collective bargaining agreement.

The WTEA contract is set to expire June

30. Christie believes that this will save districts money by freezing income.

Taraschi doesn't buy it.

"If you allow a contract that's already in place to be broken, then what's stopping them from demanding a pay freeze five years from now?" Taraschi said. "You would be setting a precedent."

The budget hasn't been approved since 2007. This year's budget contains some of the deepest cuts in the district's history. The WTEA, however according to Taraschi, has little input into the creation of the budget. The Board follows advice of the Administration, Superintendents, and all building administrators. They make the budget and present it to the Board of Education which then makes any amendments they feel are appropriate. They can only keep programs if there is enough funding by local tax payer's property tax and state funding.

Although Washington Twp. has the 21<sup>st</sup> highest proposed budget in New Jersey, the district will be faced with cutting programs and classes that have upheld the township's slogan as "a premier community."

"Classes that we had before for student won't be available," eight year WTEA Secretary of Treasury Mr. Paul Spadafora said. "[Class] sizes will go up and the students are going to suffer. All because of this quick fix."

In the effort to compensate for the loss of

state funding, the district has placed some programs on the chopping block with the potential for more unless the budget is passed.

All elementary and middle school intramurals, middle school sports and freshmen sports will be cut. The budget was outlined in detail by district business administrator Mrs. Peggy Meehan at the March 31 Budget hearing. Many aspects of the school system that the Washington Twp. community have been accustomed to will be eliminated putting the students at the disadvantage.

"It was very difficult to put the elimination of those programs on the list," Meehan said at the public meeting. "Keeping our students involved in after school activities helps to keep them on the straight and narrow."

Students will be experiencing a new environment and a varied educational path.

"The biggest negative is that not only the WTEA, but other organizations have presented to the Administration and the Board of Education ways in which money could be saved," Taraschi said. "So that jobs do not have to be cut, so that programs do not have to be cut, so that kids do not have to hurt."

"The WTEA had no substantial ideas that would save the budget money," Simone said, "There is no guarantee on the money being saved. When you look at a budget, you can't cut based on money that may not exist."

## Staff and students speak out on budgetary cuts

Photos and interviews by Dianna Lombardo '10 and Jess McFadden '10



It's not fair to my younger friends if the budget doesn't pass because a lot will be cut and they won't get the same experience.

- Darrel Cowen '10



Kids will be deprived of what seniors had when we were younger, it's not fair.

- Jeff Wicks '10



It should pass because there are so many programs that shouldn't end. My daughter should have the same opportunities my other daughters had.

- Mrs. Marianne Kiernan, Hall Monitor



Our parents can not afford the extra money [ in taxes].

- Julia Manno '11



It should be passed because my younger sisters should be able to take AP language classes.

- Paul Kelly '10