Question:
How much can we raise the school taxes? I would be willing to pay additional taxes if it meant that the District could be made stronger.
Answer:
There is no limit. Once we go over the calculated limit the state requires a 60/40 super majority to pass.

Question:
How much is budgeted for professional development for 2012-2013?
Answer:
Approximately $100,000.00. Much is offered through BOCES and we get aid back. Common Core and Student Learning objectives that the State is requiring will be the focus. If teachers do this in the summer we still have to pay them for that time but no substitutes are required.

Question:
I just heard they made Cheerleading a sport. If we are in a deficit, why would they do this? I believe sports are great for children, but for all these years, it’s been what I believe would be considered a club.
Answer:
New York State was considering making cheerleading a sport but they did not. Cheerleading is not a sport.

Question:
How much is budgeted for substitutes for 2012-2013?
Answer:
$564,624

Question:
Will a spreadsheet be provided showing the athletics budget for 2012-2013?
Answer:
Our Athletic Director is working on making any changes needed to the spread sheet from last year. We will post when completed.

Question:
I would like to know the benefit of closing Gilmore and not Drake or Ohio. It seems as though it has been the only closing that’s been discussed. Also it says my child would go to Drake yet Meadow is less than a 5 minute walk. How does that make any sense? That doesn’t have a “neighborhood feel”.
Answer:
The cost to bring Gilmore up to code was over $7 million. When the last Capital Project was discussed the committee deferred putting money into the oldest district building. Each of the remaining 4 elementary schools has the same problem due to how they are placed in the city. Distance and student distribution are all considered.

Comment:
I was at the school board meeting on March 13th and when it came for comments from the Board, I was struck by the partisanship that was clearly shown by particular board members. I am in full support of board members voicing opinions about programs that they would not like to see cut based on the good of the whole, but when I hear board members make comments about their “friends” being impacted by redistricting and related moves to new schools, I begin to believe that the interests of the few are being represented and supported, not the interests of the whole. I also believe that there is truly an unfair advantage when “friends” of particular board members can text message them during school board meetings so that their voice can be heard (which occurred during the March 13th meeting). This is both unprofessional and shows a great deal of bias. If this is a legitimate way for us to communicate with board members during meetings, then the whole should be given this contact information for all the board members. If it is not, cell phones should be turned off during board meetings and the proper
protocol of communicating concerns during meetings should be used by the whole – individual board members should not be able to break the rules for their “friends”.

Response:
The Board President will address procedural items like this with the Board of Education.

Comment:
You cannot expect the taxpayers of the NT community to continue to pay more and more school taxes. We, the taxpayers, have had major cuts in our incomes and it is time for major concessions by the unions. Enough is enough.

Response:
We are currently working to negotiate new contracts with all unions. Taxes for school districts are a Federal Government Decree that all school districts follow.

Question:
Can the district not pursue more grant/outside funding for the district? Why do we not have a grant writer who would be able to maximize other funding sources and grant programs?

Answer:
The District does have a grant writer who applies for grants that North Tonawanda would qualify for. A number of grants have poverty levels as a requirement that North Tonawanda falls above so we don’t qualify like a Niagara Falls or Buffalo does.

Question:
Why let our Middle School children sit in another study hall just so we can cut foreign language? Is it so we can protect administration positions? Are we afraid to cut administration but willing to cut teachers and programs at a drop of a hat?

Answer:
We’ve had cuts in the Director of Curriculum, an Assistant Principal at the High School, an Elementary Principal and we’ve cut the Business Official position to part-time.

Question:
Do we need a Director of Student Services?

Answer:
This position oversees State and Federal Programs in addition to central registration, CPSE (Childhood PreSchool Education), grants and residency/homeless issues.

Comment:
Clean classrooms every other day.

Response:
Alternative cleaning schedules have been looked at and will continue to be considered.

Comment:
Cut ALL travel and conference money. This will save money on conferences and subs.

Response:
We have significantly reduced travel and conference funds.

Comment:
Cut summer hours for Administration, Secretaries and Guidance.

Response:
Administrative summer days were cut. 12 month clerical work a 4-day week in the summer. Graduation and registration in July & August require Guidance Counselors to work.

Comment:
NT has 4-5 top administrators each with at least one and up to four secretaries. One or two directors should be cut and the remaining take over the duties of the cut positions. Secretaries should be shared. Special Education has a Director, Assistant Director and four secretaries. Slash the Assistant Director and share secretaries.

Response:
Clerical positions are not necessarily assigned to Administrators. The 4-5 in the Special Education Department work to ensure the over 700 Special Education IEPs are in compliance for all seven District buildings.

**Comment:**
The Director of Curriculum should be cut completely until things improve.

**Response:**
The .5 Director of Curriculum position is aided through BOCES and the amount of State changes that need to be put in place in Curriculum warrants this half time position.

**Comment:**
Close the administration building. Sell or rent it out. Move the staff to empty classrooms without remodeling.

**Response:**
The Administration Building will be marketed this summer with Gilmore.

**Comment:**
Have GED students come back to NT.

**Response:**
The GED Program is no cost to the NT School District.

**Comment:**
Cut team leaders in the Middle School and Department Heads in the High School.

**Response:**
This is a contractual obligation that would need to be negotiated.

**Question:**
Why is it the only cuts I see are in people who have contact with students everyday?

**Answer:**
We have reduced administration. We share clerical staff and have reduced it by 1.0 to 1.5 FTE in the past year.

**Comment:**
Do not run air conditioning in the summer.

**Response:**
The Administration Building is the only building that is completely air conditioned. That building was designed in the 1970s with windows that won’t open.

**Comment:**
Cut Special Education funding. Fewer students sent to BOCES. This department is too large and serves too few.

**Response:**
We are mandated by the State to service students who need it.

**Comment:**
Cut stipends to do extracurricular clubs and activities. Let staff volunteer.

**Response:**
That is a negotiated item.

**Comment:**
Lower coaching stipends.

**Response:**
That is a negotiated item.

**Comment:**
Report cards should be done on parent portal.

**Response:**
Not every parent has access to a computer.
**Comment:**
Cut supplies for next year. Make do with what we have.

**Response:**
We have reduced the number of stand alone printers and will continue to review these items. We also plan on continuing to expand our email data base so that we can reduce the amount of paper used in our District.

**Comment:**
Look into transportation costs and see if this can be improved.

**Response:**
Any change in transportation limits would require a public vote. We are looking to do this for the 2013-2014 school year.

**Comment:**
Last year the teachers and students took a big hit. This year it should be administration.

**Response:**
Proportionately teachers and administrators were cut at the same level last year. There will be a cut in administration due to the closing of Gilmore School (to plan ahead a teacher on special assignment was placed at Spruce for this current year rather than hire).

**Comment:**
The majority of students will be affected by the current budget, we must find other means.

**Response:**
In respect to the employee unions we have requested concessions. We are hopeful this will result in savings to the District which will save positions.

**Comment:**
Lower funding to libraries. Most students use the computer now for research.

**Response:**
Besides Librarian salaries they get very little new supplies.

**Comment:**
Keep music but stop individual lessons. If students want individual lessons, have the parents pay for them.

**Response:**
We are reviewing music and other specials.

**Comment:**
Cut some sports programs like modified and intramurals.

**Response:**
We are reviewing sports and other specials.

**Comment:**
Charge for each sport like private schools do.

**Response:**
That is against the free public school law.

**Comment:**
Lower electric cost by conservation. Staff should make sure lights and computers are shut off when not in use.

**Response:**
During the last Capital Project we installed a lot of automatic on/off lights to help with this.

**Comment:**
Printing should be done at central locations to eliminate individual printers.

**Response:**
We have reduced the number of stand alone printers and will continue to review these items. We also plan on continuing to expand our email data base so that we can reduce the amount of paper used in our District.

**Comment:**
Unions need to contribute with a step freeze or by contributing to health insurance.

**Response:**
In respect to the employee unions we have requested concessions. We are hopeful this will result in savings to the District which will save positions.

**Comment:**
Our students must be able to compete with other districts and we are making that harder because of the slash and burn mentality of the Superintendent and the yes man attitude of the Board. We must stand up to the administration and find cuts elsewhere.

**Comment:**
This budget will lead to an exodus of the middle class from NT.

**Question:**
How about varsity football over $50,000. Really don’t know anything about the Indiana Football preseason camp. How much does it cost? What is involved? Is it necessary?

**Answer:**
The Booster Club pays for the Indiana Football Camp. The Board is looking at what other Niagara County schools do. If a sport is cut and there are no other teams to play, it will be a natural phase out of some sports.

**Question:**
The question has been asked several times but you have not answered it yet. What do you plan to do with the top students when you eliminate MPP and/or GT programming? You are not challenging these children and they will not achieve their full potential. You refuse to group by skill level because it is not approved by the State. Our children are being punished because they are smart and work hard. If they required “extra” help or special ed, they would have all kinds of services available. So again, what will you do to educate these students as they need to be?

**Answer:**
MPP is not being eliminated. The GT Program if cut would be a loss of pull-out classes “40” minutes once a cycle. Teachers and computer classes would be trained to differentiate their instruction to provide more rigor on a daily basis.
Question:
Looking at the suggestion box I see administrative cuts have been suggested, yet I do not see any on the presentations. Does a district need a Superintendent, as well as an Assistant? A Director of Special Education as well as an Assistant Director, and so on. It seems to me we have room to reduce at the top.

Answer:
There are ten building administrators. With the closing of Gilmore, there will be nine. The Assistant Superintendent of Business has been cut back to part-time. The Director of Curriculum has been cut to part-time as well. This position also gives back in that we get 80% back in aide through BOCES.

Comment:
Make a percent cut to the sports budget even after modified sports are cut (there is virtually no other teams to play at this level) so it was just done for this reason. This area has not seen cuts like every other area in the District has or will see this year.

Response:
In addition to the Modified Baseball and Softball, we are getting three options ready for the Board of Education to consider.

Comment:
Half day kindergarten – put it above the budget line shown at the April 3rd Board Meeting. Include it in cuts not only if the budget is voted down. This could possibly save the reading and math help that was shown to be cut.

Response:
If the budget gets a NO vote, we will have to cut over $600,000 more from the budget. The Board of Education will decide what they place above or below the 2% line.

Question:
Why is school district consolidation not a topic for discussion for controlling cost? If Niagara County was one school district the administrative cost savings would be huge. Making staff cuts does not address the real issue. We need to consolidate and keep the teachers who have the most impact on student learning in the classroom.

Answer:
In areas where this has happened it is a one year savings. The State recalculates the aide the following year and the “new” larger district gets a new reduced aide ratio. This could happen state-wide in a few years.

Question:
Do you think a better retirement incentive would help since no teachers took advantage of it? In the end wouldn’t this save the District money? It seems to me that if no one took the incentive it must not have been an incentive at all.

Answer:
The fact of the matter is we have a bulk of the teaching staff who is 40 something. The few who could go have to make that decision when they are ready.
Question:
Will the money the union gave back be used to replace programs, like the foreign language at the middle school? I don't want my 7th grader sitting in a study hall.

Answer:
The Board of Education is committed to keeping as much program as possible. What gets put back will be decided this month (April).

Comment:
Get rid of the High School Guidance Counselor who is making $103,000 while doing absolutely nothing at Gilmore Elementary. Must be nice to continuously be reprimanded, come into work late and get paid a substantial salary.

Question:
Why is it that three other districts were able to close the budget gap this past week without so many teacher cuts? They looked out of the box for cuts and kept the cuts to student programs to a minimal. Even Kenmore and Niagara Wheatfield did not cut programs like North Tonawanda. Some cuts I read about in Williamsville, like team leaders and department chairs, which were suggested on this web site were cut, but are not cut in this budget.

Answer:
Not sure how Williamsville’s contract reads but North Tonawanda’s requires this. Also in North Tonawanda there is no money for department chairs. They just get that rather than a study hall or some other duty. Kenmore is attempting to raise the bussing limit and sell a building, both of which North Tonawanda will be doing next year.

Question:
Have you looked at cutting field trips? For the Buffalo Zoo field trip, do parents have to pay for that or does the school district? Make it an optional field trip and if kids want to go, parents just need to pay the entrance fees, etc.

Answer:
As a public school, if you go on a field trip everyone has to have that opportunity. Nobody can be denied because of money. Here in North Tonawanda, each building has a small amount allocated for field trips. Home schools pay a good portion of them.

Comment:
Someone previously asked a question about report cards being online and the response was that some people don’t have access to a computer. Make it simple – at the beginning of the year, let parents decide if they want a paper copy of the report card mailed to their home and notify them that all report cards will also be made available online. So, those parents without a computer can still select that they want it mailed home. My son is going to kindergarten next year and I prefer to just access things online; I don’t need anything mailed.

Response:
We are looking to do this at the Middle and High School level through E-school. This will save on postage and printing. The system is still developing an elementary version that we could use in the future.
Question:
Would any local businesses want to sponsor copy costs? For example: it costs $1,000 a month in copy costs. If a local business sponsored that, their name could be highlighted in a newspaper article to help draw other business to them, and it would be a tax write-off for the company. Just trying to think outside the box.

Answer:
We are trying to develop a list of local business partners. Times are tough for many of them as well. We hope to find bigger corporate sponsors as well.