



# Schalmont Plans for Possible \$1.1 Million Cut in State Aid

This December, Gov. David Paterson released his 2009-10 executive budget proposal to the New York State Legislature. That proposal would lower the current state aid amount for Schalmont Central School District by \$1,141,277 for the 2009-10 school year. Gov. Paterson's preliminary aid figure will be factored into the school budget planning process in anticipation of the Legislature's vote in March or April 2009.

Each year, the Schalmont Board of Education creates a balanced budget by turning to local taxpayers only after considering all other revenue sources. The proposed

10.76 percent cut in anticipated revenue from the state means the district must make budget cuts to balance the 2009-10 school budget. Such budget cuts are necessary to avoid shifting the burden to local taxpayers by making up for the lost revenue with the school tax levy (i.e., total amount of money the district collects from local taxpayers).

"Our residents have told us, in board meetings and on exit surveys, that they're finding it harder and harder to handle their taxes. We're going to do what we can to not add to their burden and still maintain the integrity of our educational programs,"

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Exploring the educational and economic benefits



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## PARENTS' ROLE IN STUDENT SAFETY

Student safety is a top priority for schools. Parents also value their children's safety, but a lack of awareness about school emergency procedures can lead some parents to unintentionally magnify the risks in a dangerous situation. With knowledge of such procedures, parents can help schools preserve the safety of all students.

Since 2000, New York State law has required school districts to develop a district-wide school safety plan. That plan is one of many ingredients in the Schalmont recipe for school safety. The recipe also includes a district safety committee, a school resource officer, safety training for faculty and staff, and safety drills for students. Educators also use and practice the same Incident Com-

mand System of crisis management used by police and fire officials for better communication and cooperation during an emergency.

"In light of what's happened in the last decade, safety is on a principal's mind on a daily basis," said Michael Kondratowicz, principal of Schalmont Middle School and chairperson of the Schalmont Safety Committee.

### Preparing to Stay Safe

An important part of school safety is conducting drills so that students, faculty and staff react automatically and appropriately in the event of an emergency. Schalmont schools regularly conduct drills to prepare

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## Setting Budget Priorities with Community Input

The New York economy took some big hits in 2008, so schools are likely to see major cuts in state aid. The Schalmont Board of Education will focus on core educational priorities when deciding how to adjust to those cuts. Residents are encouraged to have input on the educational priorities and annual school budget by attending any of the public meetings this spring.

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## ■ Parents and Student Safety

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for a variety of emergencies, including:

- **Lockdown Drills** – Everyone goes into the nearest room, locks the door and waits for an administrator to come unlock the room once it is deemed safe to do so. This moves students out of harm's way while a suspected threat *inside* the building is evaluated.
- **Lockout Drills** – No one may enter or leave the school building, but classes go on as usual indoors. This procedure keeps students out of harm's way while a suspected threat *outside* the building is evaluated.
- **Fire/Evacuation Drills** – As required by law, students have 12 fire drills a year. When faced with an emergency situation such as a fire or a bomb threat, administrators use school crisis plans and their evaluation of the situation to determine where to evacuate students, faculty and staff.

"We assess the success of our drills afterwards to find out what could be improved," said Kondratowicz.

### Keeping Parents Informed

In the event of an emergency situation, school administrators try to provide parents with accurate information as promptly as possible.

Parents can receive information about safety issues affecting Schalmont schools through the:

- District Web site ([www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org)),
- Schalmont School News Notifier (SNN) e-mail service ([www.schalmont.org/District/SNN/snnhome.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/District/SNN/snnhome.htm)),
- District-wide emergency phone call system,
- Letters sent home with students to parents, and
- Local TV news stations, especially for weather-related alerts.

### How Parents Can Help

Upon learning that a school is dealing with an emergency situation, a parent's first instinct may be to rush to a child's side. This is a fairly common urge according to the 2008 American Preparedness Project, which found that 63 percent of parents surveyed would ignore evacuation orders

**Practice Makes Perfect:** At right, elementary students participate in one of 12 fire drills required each year. Below, teachers participate in crisis management training during a staff development day.



during a disaster and try to pick-up their children from schools or day care. Unfortunately, this urge can have the opposite effect when it prevents safety officials and district personnel from implementing emergency protocols.

"When the police or fire department is in control of an area, they can best perform their duties if they don't have interference from people trying to come onto the scene," said Kondratowicz.

How can parents best help schools ensure students' safety? By making sure they:

- **Provide the school with accurate contact information** at the start of every school year and whenever changes occur. This includes alternate phone numbers for parents and family/friends that serve as backups.
- **Talk with children**, at all grade levels, about the importance of remaining calm and following teachers' instructions in the event of an emergency.
- **Don't go to the school or scene of an emergency** unless safety officials ask parents to do so. Parents' presence – and the extra traffic caused by their vehicles – can interfere with emergency responders.
- **Get accurate information through the various mediums listed above** and don't listen to rumors. If a parent is contacted by a student during an emergency situation, it's important to remember that students only know a small part of the much larger situation.

Visit [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org) and click on "School Safety" to learn more about the steps taken to protect Schalmont students and school personnel.

## ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN THE VALUE OF RECYCLING

Recycling isn't just good for the environment; it's good for your wallet, too. As of this January, all three Schalmont elementary schools are discovering these and other benefits of recycling through teacher-led, student-driven recycling programs.

Mariaville Elementary School recently launched a program to recycle paper products. Small recycling bins are located in each classroom and the main office, and students in Carol Kramer's fourth-grade class collect the bins and empty them into a large recycling bin for pick up.

As a result, the school will receive a couple cents for each pound of paper collected and avoid having to dispose of things like construction paper, catalogs, envelopes, and copy paper in the garbage.

"Sometimes, we get to the point where the garbage bin is too full. This will help alleviate that problem," said Principal Brian Hunt.

Jefferson Elementary School has had a similar recycling program since the 2007-08 school year. It first started in just a few classrooms, with first-grade teacher Leea Mulone and fifth-grade teacher Susan Schiavo pairing up their students to empty classroom recycling bins. This year, the program expanded school-wide.

"We started small, so we only made around \$80 last year, but we're not doing it just for the money. We're doing it for the environment and for the learning experience for the kids. It shows them



**Collecting for a Good Cause:** These two students are helping collect paper recyclables at Woestina Elementary School. Woestina launched its recycling program this fall.

that recycling is a part of their world," said Assistant Principal Beth Bini.

In addition to paper products, Woestina Elementary School also recycles juice pouches and cookie wrappers during snack and lunch times. The school earns 2 cents per pouch or wrapper given to Terracycle, a company that recycles the items into products such as fire logs and tote bags ([www.terracycle.net](http://www.terracycle.net)). First-grade teacher Jamie Pink helps coordinate the school's recycling program.

"Students have quickly developed an awareness of conservation and the need to recycle our waste. They have become wonderful ambassadors for their families as well," she said.

The schools are only recycling waste generated in classrooms, but families can visit [www.eartheasy.com/live\\_recycling.htm](http://www.eartheasy.com/live_recycling.htm) to learn how to start their own recycling programs at home.

## Transition Services Help Students with IEP Achieve Goals

What does the future hold for Schalmont students who receive special education services? Through transition support services, it may hold a college education, employment, opportunities for independent living, and much more.

The New York State Education Department requires schools to help 15- to 21-year-old students with disabilities plan for the transition to life after high school.

**"They learn that college may be a viable option."**

Transition services are woven into each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 accommodation plan. The Schalmont Committee on Special Education (CSE) works with students and parents to create and implement IEPs. This process involves speaking with students about their interests, goals, needs, and strengths among other things.

"The IEP is itself a transition tool, and our transitional services further help students. They learn that college

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## Transition Services

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may be a viable option,” said Joanne Van Genderen, director of Pupil Personnel Services. “It can also help them focus on employment goals and attain the benefits of VESID as they progress through the application process.”

(VESID stands for Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, an office of the state Education Department.)

Though actual transition services begin at age 15, Van Genderen encourages students and parents to start thinking about life after high school well before then. Once at Schalmont High School, students have access to a transition coordinator, Lin Polster, from the Capital Region BOCES Transition

Services Program as well as to teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, and other special education staff.

Polster spends one day a week helping students understand their rights and responsibilities, figure out how to access disability services, and make connections with people and organizations that can help with the transition process.

“Once students leave high school, disability services are no longer an entitlement, so they have to be able to advocate for themselves,” said Polster.

To find self-advocacy resources online, visit [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org) and click on “Special Education/Pupil Personnel Services.”

For more information on special education in Schalmont, contact the psychologist or CSE chairperson at your child’s school.

## Special Education Contacts at Schalmont Schools

### Schalmont High School

Carrie Shapiro, Psychologist  
355-6110, x3202

### Schalmont Middle School

Julie Pendt, Psychologist (until 4/09)  
Rebecca Danforth, Psychologist  
355-6255, x2122

### Jefferson Elementary School

Jeff Lustick, Psychologist  
Danielle Zogby, Psychologist  
355-1342

### Mariaville and Woestina Elementary Schools

Jeff Lustick, Psychologist  
Shari Lontrato, CSE Chairperson  
887-5600

## HS ALUMNI OF DISTINCTION

*District seeks nominations for 2009*

The Schalmont High School Alumni Wall of Distinction was established in 2007 to honor those alumni who have made significant contributions to their school, community and/or country. **Nominations for this year’s group of inductees are due by March 16, 2009.**

Wall of Distinction honorees serve as role models for students and as symbols of the high caliber of graduates produced by the HS. Their examples are intended to inspire and motivate students to excel, both in academics and in life.

The Wall of Distinction, which is located in the HS lobby, now includes eight honorees: Margaret (Ryan) Anderton, class of 1978; Alfred DeCarlo, class of 1961; Thomas P. Eichler, class of 1962; Dr. Valerie Gaus, class of 1982; Leonard Parker, class of 1971; Christine Patne-aude-Krahulik, class of 1983; Michael Piotrowski, class of 1970; and Michael Saccocio, class of 1979.



**Honored Alumni:** Schalmont Board of Education member Michael DellaVilla (right) watches as 2008 honorees (pictured from left to right) Thomas Eichler, Dr. Valerie Gaus and Margaret Anderton unveil their new plaques.

Visit [www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm) or call 355-9200, x4006 to find out how to nominate someone for the 2009 Wall of Distinction. Selected nominees, or their representatives if they were nominated posthumously, will be asked to attend an induction ceremony in May.



## See It With Your Own Eyes: Woestina Serenades Seniors

This December, Woestina Elementary School fifth-graders sang and danced for seniors at the Church of St. Margaret of Cortona in Rotterdam Junction. Visit [www.schalmont.org/seeitwithyourowneyes.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/seeitwithyourowneyes.htm) to watch their performance. Throughout the school year, the district will add new content to this Web site to help residents become more familiar with Schalmont and 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

## ■ Gov. Proposes Aid Cuts – continued from pg. 1

said Robert Sheehan, president of the school board.

Schalmont educational programs have seen a lot of growth in recent years. For example, Schalmont High School is in its fourth year of the Project Lead the Way pre-engineering program, Schalmont Middle School is in its second year of Gateway to Technology, and all three elementary schools have rolled out the Everyday Mathematics program to grades K-3.

These and other such programs are helping improve student achievement. According to an annual ranking of 85 Capital Region school districts in *The Business Review*, Schalmont rose from a rank of 49 in 2005 to a rank of 21 this fall (based on state Education Department data).

“We’re looking at all budget areas for ways to cut back without impacting our students’ education,” said Superintendent Valerie Kelsey. “Legally, some things can’t be touched, but I think everyone in the district is aware that the state’s budget crisis will mean getting by with less.”

This fall, early symptoms of economic troubles prompted the school board to consider budget cuts and other ways to reduce the cost of education well

before the typical start of the budget planning process.

In anticipation of a reduction in state aid, the district has already implemented a budget freeze for the current year so that no purchasing takes place in the district without justification for immediate need and prior approval from the superintendent and business administrator. Two positions included in this year’s annual budget remain unfilled: a part-time position with the business office and a full-time secretarial position at the high school.

**“We’re  
looking at all  
budget areas for  
ways to cut back  
without impacting  
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education.”**

The district also currently engages in a variety of cost-saving measures, including:

- Participating in a BOCES energy consortium for savings on natural gas and electricity.
- Participating in a Schenectady County schools buying consortium for savings on bus parts, cafeteria food and supplies, paper, trash removal, etc.
- Implemented an energy savings plan at all five school buildings.
- Appointed an energy educator/manager to help implement a comprehensive energy conservation and management program.
- Reviewed bus routes for efficiency, and as a result, cut over 360 miles from daily bus travel in the 2008-09 school year.
- Cut 1 full-time equivalent (FTE) position at the MS and 1.2 FTE positions at the HS in the 2008-09 budget.
- Merged the supervisor of transportation and supervisor of buildings/grounds positions in 2007-08.

More cuts and cost-saving measures are anticipated as the school board prepares a 2009-10 school budget proposal. “We take a critical look at the budget every year, but our community is really feeling the pinch this year. It calls for some belt tightening all around,” said Sheehan.

Residents are encouraged to have input on the school budget and education priorities by attending any of the public meetings throughout the 2009-10 school budget planning process.

Visit [www.schalmont.org/District/boardofed/Budget0910home.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/District/boardofed/Budget0910home.htm) or call (518) 355-9200, x4001, for more information.

## ■ Setting Budget Priorities

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### Budget Priorities

The school board generally builds an annual school budget with five focus areas: maintaining and expanding existing instructional programs, taking cost-saving measures and making cuts where appropriate, increasing fiscal responsibility, maintaining and updating facilities, and continuing to improve school security.

This year, the board is prioritizing district spending within those focus areas as follows, with the top priority being #1.

#### **#1 Health and Safety Issues**

The health and safety of students, faculty and staff must be preserved even in troubling economic times.

#### **#2 Program Continuation**

Existing programs that have helped improve student achievement should be preserved, but some programs may be open to changes based on decreasing student interest/enrollment. Cuts cannot be made to mandated programs, but elements of certain non-mandated programs and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities may not be sustainable at current levels.

#### **#3 Infrastructure**

While some infrastructure work and facilities maintenance can be deferred for a time, others cannot be deferred without risking expensive repair costs due to unanticipated emergency situations. Gov. David Paterson's executive budget proposal preserved building aid, so work will continue on the capital project that was approved by voters in October 2007. Several projects have been completed already, including work on the Schalmont High School student parking lot and lighting in the old gym. Visit [www.schalmont.org/District/homepagenews/0708/bond2007capproj.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/District/homepagenews/0708/bond2007capproj.htm) for a refresher on the Bond 2007 capital project.

#### **#4 Program Enhancement**

Schalmont educational programs have seen a lot of growth in recent years, and these programs (e.g., Project Lead the Way at Schalmont High School, Everyday Mathematics in grades K-3) are helping

improve student achievement. According to an annual ranking of 85 Capital Region school districts in *The Business Review*, Schalmont rose from a rank of 49 in 2005 to a rank of 21 this fall (based on state Education Department data). The school board would like to continue to see improvements in student achievement and offer students a variety of educational opportunities, but some program enhancements may have to be postponed.

### You Can Help Shape the Budget

District residents can help shape the annual school budget proposal by sharing their opinions on the four priorities.

There are several ways to do so, including attending Budget Advisory Committee meetings. The BAC generally consists of 10-12 district residents who help the school board move the budget from the draft stage to a final proposal. Refer to the calendar on the top of page 7 for meeting dates, times and locations.

Residents also can e-mail [superintendent@sabrenet.net](mailto:superintendent@sabrenet.net) or call 355-9200, x4001, for more information.

### Confused or Curious?

The school board is conducting a survey to discover the school budget issues that residents would like to learn more about. Survey responses will help guide future budget forum presentations and discussions. To complete the survey, visit [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org) for an online version or turn to page 7 of this newsletter for a print version. **Completed surveys should be submitted by Wednesday, March 18.**

### **Parents, did you take the cell phone survey?**

This fall, the Schalmont Board of Education invited parents to complete an online survey designed to assess their thoughts regarding students' use of cell phones during the school day. Almost 180 people completed the survey. Their responses revealed that:

- 50.3 percent have children aged 14-18 years, 40.9 percent have children aged 10-13 years, and 10.6 percent have children aged 5-10 years who own cell phones.
- 90.8 percent of the parents with children who own cell phones allow their children to take the cell phones to school.

This is just a sampling of the results. Parents' feedback will help inform the board as they review existing policies related to electronic devices.



## School Budget Development Calendar: Spring 2009

DATE & TIME	MEETING	LOCATION
Wednesday, Jan. 28 @ 6 p.m.	Budget Advisory Committee Meeting	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Tuesday, Feb.10 @ 6 p.m.	Budget Advisory Committee Meeting	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Thursday, March 5 @ 6 p.m.	Budget Advisory Committee Meeting	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Thursday, March 19 @ 6 p.m.	Budget Advisory Committee Meeting	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Wednesday, March 25 @ 7 p.m.	Community Budget Forum #1	Schalmont High School Auditorium, 1 Sabre Dr.
Monday, April 6 @ 7 p.m.	School Board Meeting, Community Budget Forum #2	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Monday, May 11 @ 7 p.m.	School Board Meeting, Official Budget Hearing	Schalmont Middle School LGI Room, 2 Sabre Dr.
Tuesday, May 19 @ 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.	Annual School Budget Vote, School Board Election	Schalmont High School New Gym Foyer, 1 Sabre Dr.

## Community Budget Forum Survey

*Pre-forum Survey: Attendance and Discussion Topics*

- Do you plan on attending one or more of the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) meetings?      Yes      No
- Do you plan on attending the Community Budget Forum on Wednesday, March 25?      Yes      No
- Which of the following areas of the annual school budget and budget planning process would you like to hear about or discuss at the Community Budget Forum? (Please check all that apply.)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Results (e.g., NYS School Report Card)	<input type="checkbox"/> Employee Contracts
<input type="checkbox"/> Areas of Savings or Increased Efficiency	<input type="checkbox"/> Field Trips
<input type="checkbox"/> BOCES Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Food Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Bond 2007 Capital Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Impact of Schools on Seniors
<input type="checkbox"/> Class Sizes and Impact on Student Performance	<input type="checkbox"/> School Budget Basics (e.g., how it's created, what's included)
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Technology	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Education Programs (core, elective)	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Education Programs: Special Area (e.g., sports, music, art)	
- Is there anything else that you would like to hear about or discuss at the forum?

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To complete this survey, visit [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org) for an online version or mail this printed survey in to:  
 Community Budget Forum Survey, c/o Dr. Valerie Kelsey, Superintendent  
 Schalmont Central School District, 401 Duaneburg Rd., Schenectady, NY 12306



### School Board Calendar

Schalmont Board of Education public meetings are held at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

**Monday, Jan. 26**

Middle School LGI Room  
2 Sabre Dr.

**Monday, Feb. 9**

Mariaville Elementary School  
9210 Mariaville Rd.  
Pattersonville

**Monday, Feb. 23**

Middle School LGI Room  
2 Sabre Dr.

**Monday, March 9**

Woestina Elementary School  
1292 Main St.  
Rotterdam Junction

**Monday, March 23**

Middle School LGI Room  
2 Sabre Dr.

### Reunion Calendar

Planning a Schalmont High School class reunion? Visit [www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm) to share the details.

# Budget Vote Exit Poll Recap Part II

The annual budget vote exit poll gives voters another opportunity to share their concerns with the Schalmont Board of Education. Almost 60 percent of those who voted in May 2008 chose to complete an exit poll. While reviewing the results, the school board discovered some common concerns and misunderstandings. Following is some clarification on issues addressed in voters' comments on last year's exit polls.

**Q. With increased revenue from the reevaluation, how could you in good conscience increase taxes at all?**

**A. The Rotterdam reassessment did not raise any additional funds for the school district.** Property reassessments are designed to bring properties up to full market value. In 2007, the Town of Rotterdam completed a reassessment of all properties within the town for the first time in more than 50 years. The reassessment did not change the total amount of money that the school district collected from local taxpayers (i.e., school tax levy), but it did change how the school tax levy was distributed. While some residents saw an increase in their taxes, others saw a decrease in their taxes, so the overall amount of the school tax levy remained unchanged.

**Q. I do not have children. Why should I have to pay for everyone else's children to attend school?**

**A. Historically, the funding of public schools has been the responsibility of all U.S. citizens.** There have been compulsory education laws in all 50 states since the early 1900s. New York State in particular has required free, public schooling for all students aged 6 to 16 since 1874. In Schalmont Central School District, revenue from state and federal aid, interest earnings and facility rental fees covers approximately 1/3 of the cost of schooling for local children. The Schalmont community shares the responsibility for the remainder.

Visit [www.schalmont.org/District/boardofed/budget\\_ep.htm](http://www.schalmont.org/District/boardofed/budget_ep.htm) for more exit poll Q&A.



Visit [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org) to register for Schalmont School News Notifier and receive e-mail updates on school news, emergency closings and delays.



Produced in cooperation with the Capital Region BOCES Communications Service.

# Schalmont CENTRAL SCHOOLS

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