

Schalmont News

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

■ 2010-11 Budget Forecast

Trimming the Budget: Schalmont May See \$1.5 Million in Cuts

School districts across New York State are bracing for significant cuts to programs and staffing as they craft budgets for the 2010-11 school year. Schalmont Central School District will likely face more than \$1.5 million in such cuts as the Schalmont Board of Education and superintendent try to shape a budget with no year-to-year increase in spending.

“We didn’t increase the tax levy last year, and that is the school board’s goal again this year,” said Superintendent Valerie Kelsey. “We know it will be a challenge because most of our costs are increasing and we’re facing more than a million in proposed state aid cuts. With costs up and revenue down, we have to look at cuts to our budget across the board.”

The largest portion of the budget has always been devoted to instruction and employee benefits because education is a field

that involves a great deal of person-to-person interaction. As a result, the largest portion of the cuts under consideration for the 2010-11 school budget is of 13.34 full-time equivalent positions. The cuts, if implemented, would impact about 20 Schalmont employees.

“While every position is of value to the education of our students, the most significant way to trim a school budget is always in the area of salaries and benefits. Our employee bargaining units are aware of these potential cuts,” said Kelsey.

Declining enrollment over the last five years will make the increased class sizes resulting from such cuts more manageable, according to Kelsey.

Several other areas are likely to see cuts. This includes all elementary summer school programs, the gifted and talented program, the DARE program, and more than \$25,000

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Phonathon April 14-15

in cuts to the athletics program. Other cuts under consideration would impact areas such as equipment, operations and maintenance, and nearly \$240,000 in cuts to miscellaneous expenses such as for paper, postage, fuel, natural gas, insurance, and telephones.

President Kevin Thompson said the school board hopes

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Afterschool Adventures:

More than 60 students at Mariaville Elementary School are participating in a PTO-sponsored afterschool program this spring. Volunteers



teach classes such as Spanish, kickball, hair braiding and styling, art, Legos and board games, and drawing cartoon characters. The students pictured above are participating in the nature and reptiles class. This enrichment program is a great way for students to stay active and continue learning after school, despite the cold weather.

New Web Tool Lets Parents Access Student Information

As a parent, have you ever wondered in the middle of the work day how your child is doing in school? Many Schalmont parents will be able to answer that question for themselves with a new online tool: Parent Portal.

This March, all high school parents/guardians were invited to enroll in the Parent Portal. Registered users, who are first verified by school personnel, are able to access the profiles of all Schalmont students for which they are a registered parent/guardian. Once enrolled, parents can view their children’s attendance information by period, schedule, report card grades, and progress reports. They also have access to important dates and announcements for each student.

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Budget Forecast

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to propose a budget with cuts that will have the least impact on core programs.

“We were able to have no increase in the tax levy last year largely because we cut about 12 positions, but many of those were through retirements or based on lower enrollment. As state aid continues to drop, we really need our community’s feedback on the budget because it will become harder and harder to make cuts without negatively affecting our students,” he said.

Since January, the school board and superintendent have been working with the Community Budget Advisory Committee to shape a 2010-11 school budget proposal. The committee has had the opportunity to review the budget, to discuss program expenses and cuts with various administrators, to ask questions about various proposals, and to make their own suggestions. Their feedback helped shape the draft proposal that was shared at the Community Budget Forum held on March 24.

If you missed the budget forum, visit www.schalmont.org and click on “Budget” for more information on the proposed cuts and draft budget.

Web Tool for Parents

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Parent Deborah Lynch was involved in the early test phase for Parent Portal and continues to use it every few weeks.

“I love the parent portal. It is so easy to access and navigate. All your child’s records are right at your fingertips. There is no longer a need to wait for the mail to arrive to receive progress reports or report cards,” she said.

Jefferson Students Raise \$1,300 for Quake Victims

“Every penny counts” never held more meaning for the students at Jefferson Elementary School than when they recently collected more than \$1,300 in coins to support children in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. The money will be donated to the American Red Cross.

The coin-drop fundraiser, called “Change for the Children of Haiti,” was the brain child of several students in Nora Guzewich’s and Carrie Fiske’s fifth-grade classes. The teachers were both approached by students who wanted to find a way to make a difference.

Guzewich said she felt it was important to honor such a generous suggestion. “Donating to those in need without the benefit of personal gain is a valuable life lesson. I am so pleased at the response we had, even without a prize,” she said.

The concerned students and their teachers organized a week-long coin drop, during which all Jefferson students and teachers were invited to bring coins into their classrooms. The fifth-graders created and posted paper thermometers in hallways to track their progress toward

Her hope is that eventually the Parent Portal can replace printing and mailing report cards so the district can save money. “I would encourage all parents to get on board and sign up,” she said.

Anthony Cassale, a technology coordinator and high school computer science teacher, helped structure and roll out the Parent Portal system. “We’re offering this service to enhance communication with parents and increase parent involvement in student

academics. Hopefully, with parents able to access student attendance on a period-by-period basis, individual students’ attendance will improve,” he said.

The Parent Portal is currently only available for parents of high school students. The system eventually will be rolled out to other grade levels, and those parents will be notified once the service becomes available. For more information, visit www.schalmont.org or call 355-6110, x4005.



Collecting for a Cause: Jefferson Elementary School students recently collected more than \$1,300 for children in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. Pictured holding a check representing their donation are, from left to right, Kayla Longo, Shugufa Majid, Savanna Liverio, and Gina Fallon.

a collection goal of \$1,000, which they flew past. They then rolled all \$1,346.23 worth of coins collected.

“This was a huge undertaking,” said Fiske. “As teachers, we hoped to have our students understand the severity of the devastation in another country and to provide them with an opportunity to help in some way. We hope they forever remember what part they played in helping the children of Haiti.”

Fifth-grader Kayla Longo was certainly moved by the experience. “It makes me feel like a little bit of a hero to know we’re helping people,” she said.



IT'S DOLLARS FOR SCHOLARS!

The Schalmont Chapter of Dollars for Scholars will conduct its annual fundraising campaign on **April 14-15** from 5-9 p.m. each night. Schalmont High School students will call to ask for tax-deductible contributions to student scholarships. Each year, Dollars for Scholars gives out several \$500 scholarships to deserving seniors bound for higher education. There will also be four named scholarships available this year. Those who don't receive a call and would like to make a donation can use the form at right to send one in by mail. Thank you for your support!

Donation Form

I would like to support the young people of Schalmont Central School District with a monetary contribution. Please accept the enclosed contribution of \$ _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code: _____

Please make checks payable to "Schalmont Dollars for Scholars."
Detach this form and mail it with your check to: **Schalmont Dollars for Scholars, P.O. Box 6119, Schenectady, NY 12306.**
This donation is tax deductible. Your check is your receipt.

Media Program Puts MS Students Behind the Video Camera

Could Schalmont have an Oscar-winning director amongst its alumni? That's becoming more of a possibility with new opportunities like the media immersion program now available to Schalmont Middle School students.

The media immersion program – a joint venture between Schalmont, Duanesburg Central School District, and Proctors, which hosts the program – lets students delve into the world of media literacy, journalism, and video production. Proctors now manages Open Stage Media, the Schenectady public access television station, so participating students are able to learn from educators with real world experience. The goal is for students to explore media in ways they have not considered and to increase the amount and quality of media being produced for the public, according to Christine Sheehan, the director of education at Proctors.

"By establishing effective partnerships with regional school districts, Proctors is able to offer reduced and free programming at a time when such programs are

being eliminated by school districts and additional opportunities for youth are sought," she said.

In Schalmont, middle school students were told about the extracurricular program during their English classes and invited to apply. Students were



Calling the Shots: Several Schalmont Middle School students, like the one pictured, are stepping behind the video camera thanks to a new media immersion program. (Photo by Richard Lovrich, Proctors art director)

then selected based on their interest, academic performance, behavior and teacher recommendations. The program consists of two six-week sessions, and each session is held after school twice a week for two hours.

Matthew Morgan, the assistant principal at Schalmont Middle School, was happy to encourage students' interest in such an exciting and promising field.

"Controlled studies reveal a powerful relationship between study in the arts and other academic, social and behavioral achievements. Students involved in arts experiences have increased motivation to learn, improved multicultural understanding, and the development of a higher order of thinking skills, creativity and problem solving abilities," he said.

Media educator Jon Burns' instruction is helping nurture those traits in Schalmont students. "They show a large interest in the media, and I was surprised how much knowledge they had on the first day of class. I was so impressed when we started storyboarding; they came up with the most creative ideas! They have endless energy to learn everything in this program."

Students are working toward a final goal of writing, directing, producing and broadcasting a quality digital video project. According to Sheehan, "They are active and engaged, exploring rather than replicating, and that is the key to arts in education programming."



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Schalmont

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

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WHAT'S INSIDE? 2010-11 Budget Forecast, New Web Tool for Parents, Media Program for MS Students, and More!

School Board Calendar

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

Monday, April 12

Jefferson Elementary School
100 Princetown Rd.

Monday, April 26

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, May 10

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Reunion Calendar

All Classes

June 5, 2010, at 5 p.m.
Maple Ski Ridge
2725 Mariaville Rd.
pamula00@hotmail.com

Class of 1985

Nov. 27, 2010, at 7 p.m.
Mallozzi's Restaurant
1930 Curry Rd. (location change)
rbikowicz2000@yahoo.com
jsquires11@aol.com

Class of 2000

Nov. 27, 2010
Settles Hill Tree Farm
1123 Settles Hill Rd.
Altamont
cney9501@hotmail.com

Budget Vote Exit Poll Recap Part IV

The annual budget vote exit poll is an opportunity for voters to share their concerns with the Schalmont Board of Education and administrators. Almost 61 percent of those who voted last May chose to complete an exit poll. While reviewing the results, the school board discovered some common concerns and misperceptions. Following is some clarification on issues raised in last year's exit polls.

Q. Why was the tax rate not set prior to the vote?

A. Tax rates are set in August because district officials don't receive certain key pieces of data from local towns until June and August.

The Schalmont Board of Education sets a tax levy (i.e., total amount of money the district collects from local taxpayers) for the coming school year before the budget vote in May. Schalmont encompasses parts of Rotterdam, Guilderland, Duanesburg, Florida, and Princetown. In the spring, each town prepares an assessment roll for that year listing all parcels of property and the assessed value of each. Information from these rolls is shared with the school district in June. The New York State Office of Real Property Services compares properties in each town, looks at how they are currently assessed and calculates an equalization rate for each town. The equalization rate represents the state's judgment of how closely assessed values in that town match true market values of the properties. Equalization rates are sent to the school district by late August. The school district then uses the total assessed value of properties in each town and the state equalization rates to calculate the percentage of the school tax

levy that must be paid by property owners in that town that year. Each town's portion of the school tax levy is then divided by the total assessed value of properties in that town to determine the school tax rate (i.e., amount of tax residents pay per \$1,000 of home value) for that town. Since August 2007, Schalmont has utilized the Homestead Tax Option to set a dual tax rate for homeowners (residential property owners) and non-residential property owners, with property designations determined by each town's assessor.

Q. Where can I get more information about the school board?

A. You can get more information about the school board online, in the district calendar or at school board meetings. Visit www.schalmont.org and click on "Board of Education" for the most extensive information. District calendars are mailed home only to students' households, but all district residents may stop by the district office to pick up a copy. School board meeting dates, times and locations are included on the back of every district newsletter (see column at left).