



Financial Health Update:

State Aid Cuts Mean More Challenges

Schalmon district officials are bracing for difficult choices as development of the 2010-11 budget begins, given Governor Paterson's \$1.2 million proposed cut to Schalmon's state aid for the 2010-11 school year, coupled with the steadily increasing costs of running the school district and the already bare-bones budget adopted last year.

The board of education will continue its deliberations on the 2010-11 budget at a series of community budget forums, the first of which will take place on March 24 at 7 p.m. at the high school.

The proposed \$1.2 million cut represents a 10% percent reduction in the district's total state aid package from the current year. State legislators will now take up the governor's proposal, with a final state budget due by April 1. In years past, the legislature has found ways to restore some, if not all, of the governor's

proposed cuts. But superintendents across the state, including Dr. Kelsey, doubt that will happen this year in light of the state's severe economic crisis.

"We understand that good schools are an important part of attracting and retaining residents in our community," said Dr. Kelsey. "We also know that everyone is going through hard financial times now. That said, the gap between the costs of our programs and the revenue we have to pay for them means that we need to work with our community to decide what's most important."

Aid cuts, rising costs create budget gap

In addition to the proposed \$1.2 million drop in state aid, the district again faces higher costs for health insurance, higher retirement costs for teachers and other

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employees, and mandated increases in salaries. The goal is to focus on the preservation of core programs and services and continue to prepare students to compete in the 21st century, *continued on page 3* ----▶



Standing Up For Diversity: Congratulations to Schalmon High School senior Karra Mancini (seen here at right with school psychologist and Diversity Club advisor Carrie Shapiro) for winning a 2010 Student Courage Award from the Martin Luther King, Jr., & Coretta Scott King Lecture Series On Race And Nonviolent Social Change At Siena College. See www.schalmon.org for details.

Board Approves Study On Delivery Of K-12 Program

In December, the Schalmon Board of Education unanimously voted to approve a professional study of the district that is designed to help with strategic planning for a healthy financial future.

Advisory Solutions, a school district consultant service created by the New York State School Boards Association, will analyze the capacity levels of each school building, gather demographic and enrollment projections, and identify opportunities for, and the challenges of, various options to organize the delivery of the K-12 program. The goal of the study is to look for more efficient ways to implement and/or deliver the district's educational programs over the next five

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Little Voters Are Tops At Jefferson



Top Voters: Jefferson Elementary School took first place in the Schenectady County Take Me to Vote contest this year. Teacher Alicia Gorski's fifth-graders are pictured with a plaque honoring all students who participated in the contest.

Congratulations to Jefferson Elementary School on taking first place in the Schenectady County Take Me to Vote contest. The school recently held a brief assembly during which third-, fourth- and fifth-graders were presented with a special plaque honoring the students' achievement.

This November, students were asked to accompany their parents to the polls by contest sponsors the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. Fifth-grader Zach Ericson participated in the contest when he placed his name and the name of his elementary school on a pink slip of paper outside the voting booth where his parents voted.

"I think it's pretty important for them

to vote because it helps the people who have to count out the winners," said Ericson, who has accompanied his parents to vote several times. "Sometimes you have to wait for other people to come out of the voting booth, but it doesn't really take a long time."

He and other Jefferson students had an opportunity to place their own votes on actual voting machines this fall. The local board of elections brought in some new machines, and students voted for their favorite ice cream flavor. In the end, chocolate was the winner.

According to Principal Joby Gifford, "Our students have had great experiences with the voting process."

He said older students study elections and government in their social studies

Study

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years, according to Kevin Thompson, president of the school board.

"New York schools are facing many fiscal challenges," said Thompson. "As a CFO and CPA, I personally know the value of strategic planning when it comes to finances. This study will help us craft budget proposals and set policies with a long-term outlook on factors that could have a significant influence on our educational programs and the financial future of this district."

Upon completion, the study results will be made available to the public.

curriculum, but even kindergartners spend a little time discussing the electoral process. This may have a lot to do with the high level of participation at Jefferson.

"We've placed within the top three spots for the last four or five years," said Gifford.

HS ALUMNI WALL OF DISTINCTION

District seeking nominations

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 15, 2010.

Visit www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm to download a 2010 Wall of Distinction nomination form or call 355-9200, x4006, to receive one by mail. Selected nominees, or their representatives if they were nominated posthumously, will be asked to attend an induction ceremony in May.



Hoops For Haiti Raises Nearly \$5,000 For Quake Victims: Two teams of teachers, administrators, and support staff played basketball to raise money for Haiti. Jefferson teacher Stephanie Bush and her fiance, Michael Lazzari, a National Guardsman who had just returned from Haiti, spearheaded the event. See www.schalmont.org for details and photos.

Financial Health

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Dr. Kelsey explained.

Board of Education President Kevin Thompson said the board is committed to not passing the entire burden on to taxpayers, but he noted that will likely require making some significant cuts to the budget, including eliminating some teacher and support staff positions.

“Our commitment to preparing our students for the future hasn’t changed and won’t change,” said Dr. Kelsey. “However, in this economic climate, and given the extremely lean budget we adopted last year, nothing is off the table. Cutting supplies and field trips won’t close the gap. Recognizing that we cannot solve this by simply raising taxes, we have to consider making cuts to the major portion of our budget, and that’s staffing.”

District following sound business and energy policies

Next year’s budget development aside, district officials continue exploring ways to control costs and reduce spending. The district is keeping energy costs under control through an energy conservation plan that is estimated to have saved more than \$180,000 in its first school year (2008-09) and is expected to continue saving that much or more in the years ahead. Schalmont has also

signed a multi-year contract with its energy suppliers so that its energy costs are remaining relatively stable during the 2010-11 school year. The district saved money in the 2009-10 budget season through a variety of measures, including cutting staff, freezing the bus replacement plan, reducing the amount of supplies used, and joining with other Schenectady County schools to purchase food, supplies, bus parts and other items. All told, the district’s spending reductions resulted in a 0% increase in the tax levy last year.

The district has managed its funds responsibly, and currently has a fund balance that meets state mandates. Both Dr. Kelsey and Business Administrator Mark Kellett said the district’s fund balance may help bridge the budget gap, but they disagree with those who argue that this is the year to put off hard choices by depleting the fund balance.

“That would be irresponsible,” Kellett said. “If we use up our fund balance, we won’t have it going forward, and we don’t expect things to get better for several more years. We also want to be clear that you can’t use a one-time payment to solve problems that are going to come back year after year.”

Dr. Kelsey reiterated the need for members of the community to work with the district during the planning process. “I encourage everyone to come to our first budget forum on March 24 and to stay connected via our Web site,” she said.



Visit www.schalmont.org and click on “See It with Your Own Eyes” throughout the year to view videos about Schalmont students and 21st century education.

BUDGET CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 9

Budget Advisory Committee Meeting #1
6 p.m. @ MS Library

MARCH 4

Budget Advisory Committee Meeting #2
6 p.m. @ MS Library

MARCH 18

Budget Advisory Committee Meeting #3
6 p.m. @ MS Library

MARCH 24

Budget Forum #1
7 p.m. @ HS

APRIL 12

Board of Education meeting & Budget Forum #2 - Board will adopt budget for submission to voters
7 p.m. @ Jefferson

APRIL 19

Deadline for submission of petitions for Board of Education candidates

MAY 10

Budget Hearing at Board of Education Meeting
7 p.m. @ MS

MAY 18

Election & Budget Vote
6 a.m. - 9 p.m. @ HS gym foyer



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Schalmont

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WHAT'S INSIDE? Update on District's Financial Health, Efficiency Study, HS Alumni of Distinction, Jefferson's Little Voters

School Board Calendar

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

Monday, March 8

Woestina Elementary School
1292 Main St.
Rotterdam Junction

Monday, March 22

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, April 12

Jefferson Elementary School
100 Princetown Rd.
Schenectady

Reunion Calendar

Planning a high school class reunion? If so, please visit www.schalmont.org/alumni/alumni.htm to share the details. All events listed below will be held in Schenectady unless otherwise noted.

Class of 1985

Nov. 27, 2010, at 7 p.m.
Rotterdam Elks Club
1152 Curry Rd.
rbikowicz2000@yahoo.com

Class of 1986

May 28, 2011
Mallozzi's Restaurant
1930 Curry Rd.

Budget Vote Exit Poll Recap Part III

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 do costs keep rising whether or not enrollment does?

A. The costs to operate a school district do not generally correspond with shifts in enrollment because of factors such as state and federal requirements for student services, contract commitments, minimum operational costs and community priorities. Education laws require public schools to provide a variety of services – from academic intervention personnel to teachers for grading students' state exams during school hours – in addition to the personnel necessary to offer a basic core curriculum. A change in enrollment does not necessarily change these requirements. Contracts entered into by the school board – such as with employee unions or vendors – are binding during the length agreed upon and cannot be changed without agreement on both sides, despite any changes in enrollment. Operational costs for the district tend to rise more than the rate of inflation and to be relatively unaffected by enrollment fluctuations.

Q. We have no say in the budget, do we? Everything is mandated.

A. Eligible district residents can have a "say" in the school budget every year by sharing their input at school board meetings and budget workshops, voting on the budget, and electing board members. State and federal mandates, such as No Child Left Behind, have a significant impact on the cost of education and must be factored into the budget. Voters can have a "say" on those mandates by contacting their local representatives to discuss mandate relief. For Schalmont residents, those representatives include Assemblyman George Amedore (105th Assembly District, 1170 Riverfront Center, Amsterdam, NY 12010), Assemblyman John J. McEnery (104th Assembly District, Legislative Office Building, Room 648, Albany, NY 12247), State Senator Hugh Farley (44th Senate District, Legislative Office Building, Room 412, Albany, NY 12247), and Congressman Paul Tonko (21st Congressional District, 105 Jay Street, Room 15, Schenectady, NY 12305).