

Schalmont News

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

Efficiency Study Update

District concludes efficiency study discussions; Board of Education decision likely in February

Kimberly Scannell, Schalmont parent and taxpayer, felt she had a responsibility to participate in the recent roundtable discussions about the future of Schalmont schools, given her active involvement on several school committees.

For others, concerns about closing neighborhood schools or controlling the tax levy motivated them to come out—not just once, but as many as five times since October—to wrestle with the difficult choices facing the district.

Regardless of their reasons for attending, the more than 170 district residents involved in the conversations had plenty of ideas, concerns, questions and praise to share with each other and district officials. This created a mountain of feedback that Board of Education members will consider as they make a decision about possibly changing how the district delivers its kindergarten through 12th-grade instructional programming.

“I truly attempted to go into the process with an open heart and an open mind,” Scannell said. “I appreciate that there have been open lines of communication where residents have been able to share their opinions and have their voices heard.”

The board’s decision, expected by mid-February, will be to choose one of eight scenarios for operating the schools more efficiently. Seven of those scenarios were identified in an efficiency study completed

by an independent consultant. The board requested the study a year ago in response to declining student enrollment, continually rising operating costs and decreasing state aid. An eighth scenario was added during the process based on feedback and ideas from community residents who participated in the conversations.

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New tool provides remediation services

Senior Tammy Coadney is doing a lot better in her Chemistry class thanks to NovaNET, a new portal-based course system being offered at the high school.

Students struggling to pass a Regents-level course or exam had a chance to start working with the program in late October following a referral from a teacher, guidance counselor or administrator. Currently, 27 students in ninth- through 12th-grade are enrolled in five NovaNET courses as a supplement to their regular coursework.

NovaNET classes are designed to reinforce material covered in the regular classroom setting—serving as a complement to traditional classes by providing students with the extra help they need throughout the school year.

“I like it. It’s actually helped me out and it’s easy to use—all you have to do is read and take notes,” said Tammy, who has been taking the course since October.

She willingly swapped her study hall for the course in hopes of improving her performance on classroom exams.

Students work at their own pace independently via computer in the high school’s new



The NovaNET system helps reinforce material covered in the typical classroom setting.

multimedia suite or the library while Chase Campbell, a teaching assistant and NovaNET facilitator, provides assistance as needed. Classroom teachers also have the ability to oversee a student’s NovaNET class work and progress.

Campbell works in conjunction with classroom teachers to design corresponding NovaNET modules to ensure course materials coincide to the teacher’s level of instruction and move simultaneously through the teacher’s lesson plans.

Modules feature the use of photos, videos, presentations and other interactive tools designed to engage students.

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■ Efficiency study

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Given the myriad of options on the table and the impact they would have, district officials felt it was imperative to reach out to the community early and often, before a decision was made.

“The direction we take will undoubtedly be influenced by what we heard, as it should be,” said Superintendent Dr. Valerie Kelsey.

“We listened carefully as our residents shared their priorities and what they value about this school community. Our goal is to make the best choice given these circumstances. With so many individuals with a stake in this—each with their own points of view and reasons for participating—there’s no doubt that no matter what decision is made, someone may be left unhappy. This is not an easy decision.”

For example, some residents suggested closing both smaller schools while others said they were willing to pay higher taxes to keep their neighborhood schools open.

“I was surprised at how adamant many residents were about not wanting their taxes to go up at all,” said Scannell. “But I value the education my daughter is receiving at Schalmont, and I would be willing to pay more in taxes to see this continue. The Board of Education has a very difficult decision ahead of them.”

Meanwhile, events at the state level will factor into the board’s decision as well. Among the variables on the horizon as Gov.-Elect Andrew M. Cuomo takes office are a potential property tax cap, mid-year education aid cuts and uncertainty regarding Schalmont’s state aid allotment for the 2011-12 school year.

Stay tuned to the district website and other communication vehicles, such as Facebook, School News Notifier and Twitter, for more information on the board’s decision as it becomes available. ❖

Efficiency study timeline

December 2009: Board of Education votes unanimously to approve an efficiency study in the wake of declining enrollment, rising operating costs and decreasing state aid.

September 2010: Board of Education accepts completed efficiency study; encourages residents to read the study online and stay tuned for opportunities to provide input and advice around the study’s findings and its implementation.

Oct. 13 & 14, 2010: More than 140 district residents came together over the course of two days to learn about the district’s financial outlook and major findings of the study. Following a formal presentation, residents broke into small groups to discuss their values, priorities and sacrifices they’d be willing to make.

Nov. 3, 2010: About 50 community members heard a detailed analysis of the financial savings—or in some cases, increased costs—associated with seven potential scenarios designed to more efficiently deliver the district’s kindergarten through 12th-grade programming. Residents broke into small groups to voice their concerns about each scenario as well as discuss any benefits.

Nov. 16, 2010: More than 70 district residents came together to discuss a new enrollment scenario added in response to requests from the community as well as the possibility of moving fifth-graders to the middle school and likely budget cuts if no changes are made to current school configurations.

Late-November 2010: A districtwide Transportation Committee met for the first time. It will continue to meet monthly, through February, to review school policies for cost-saving opportunities in areas such as centralized bus stops, the length of time on buses and walking distances for students.

Dec. 13, 2010: District officials provided more than 40 residents in attendance with an overview of feedback received to date—outlining the most common concerns and benefits of each scenario, as heard from community members via roundtable discussions as well as through e-mails and at board meetings.

Jan. 1, 2011: Gov.-Elect Andrew M. Cuomo to take office.

Jan. 5, 2011: Governor’s State of the State message to be delivered.

Feb. 1, 2011: Deadline for release of the governor’s Executive Budget.

Mid-February 2011: Transportation Committee to make recommendations to the Board of Education; Board decision on the scenarios likely. ❖

When the weather outside is frightful....

Notification regarding school closings, delayed openings and early dismissals due to inclement weather or other emergencies will be made in a variety of ways. Stay tuned to the district website or sign-up to receive notification via e-mail or text message through the district’s opt-in news service, School News Notifier. In addition, information will be posted on the district’s Facebook page, Twitter account and via local television and radio news. To learn more, visit the district website. ❖



Students gain a variety of skills in Film and TV Production class

Filming Schalmont's stellar varsity football season this year was a dream come true for Dan Flower.

Surgery a few years ago left the high school senior unable to compete, so he jumped at the opportunity to film the team, despite not having any experience behind a camera.

"I just wanted to be a part of the team," he said.

Coach Joe Whipple taught Dan how to use the video camera, and he learned fundamental techniques about the entire video production process through Schalmont's new Introduction to Film and Television Production class.

This exciting, technology-based elective is one of several new courses being offered at the high school this year in a new state-of-the-art multimedia suite (see sidebar right).

"It would have been impossible to provide this course in a typical classroom setting," said teacher Ed Dignum, citing the specialized equipment and extensive collaboration required for the class.

The course involves students working on projects individually or as groups using digital video cameras, tri-pods, laptop computers, video editing software and studio lighting. For example, the footage Dan took of team practices, scrimmages and games was incorporated into a 10-minute video clip he used for a class project highlighting the team's season.

It was also used by the coaches and athletes to analyze their performance and assess areas for improvement.

"Film is such an integral part of our season, and a big part of getting us to where we wanted to be—the state championships," said Whipple.

According to Dignum, Dan's experience with the team, his natural easy-going personality, energy and motivation translated into success in the classroom where he served as a resource to his classmates.

"I like how you can be original and do

what you want in this class," Dan said. "I learned how to work as a team, capture video and analyze it piece by piece."

While originality is an important part of the class, students also agree they enjoy the hands-on experience and knowledge gained.

"It adds a twist to your day," said senior Darrian Riccio. "It's not your typical learning experience, and you get to interact more with your peers."

Senior Rebecca Stum is even considering attending SUNY Purchase in the fall because of its reputable film program.

"This class is a great outlet for creativity," she said. "I like how different angles give things a totally different perspective."

No matter what career path they choose, students are learning skills that will prepare them for a vast array of careers.

"They're gaining important skills in problem-solving, understanding and managing complex systems as well as producing a unique and creative art," said Dignum.

To learn more about each of the exciting new electives being offered in the multimedia suite, visit the district website throughout the new year. ❖

State-of-the-art multimedia suite enhances learning

From Current Affairs in the 21st Century to Sports and the Media, Digital Photography and Astronomy, students are engaging in a variety of new technology-based high school electives thanks to a new state-of-the-art multimedia suite.

"Now, more than ever, we need to provide students with the technological resources and skills necessary to be successful in college and in tomorrow's workforce," said Superintendent Dr. Valerie Kelsey.

That's why last spring, district officials encouraged high school teachers to propose 21st century courses that integrate technology in a project-based learning environment. Student feedback on the proposed courses was also sought.

Three classrooms in the 1957 wing were converted this summer to create the multimedia suite, which was completed as part of the district's \$9.7 million capital project, approved by voters in October 2007.

"It's providing students with a wonderful opportunity to be creative and learn to communicate in a way that was never offered before," said Kelsey.

The space was designed with the elective courses in mind using assistance from NERIC's Model Schools Consulting Service.

Rooms feature interactive whiteboards, laptop computers, high-speed Internet, cable



Students embrace the use of e-readers during the Current Affairs in the 21st Century course.

television and DVR technology. Students also have access to digital cameras, professional software, video cameras and e-readers, depending on the course. Tables are grouped together so students can collaborate with each other easily on class projects.

"Our students could not possibly achieve what they are doing now without this level of technology available," said Kelsey. "They are discovering and gaining hands-on experience in some exciting new career possibilities with the technology used by professionals in the real world."

The space may also be used in the future to offer or receive additional distance learning courses. ❖



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Schalmont

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

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STAY CONNECTED! Follow Schalmont news and announcements via Facebook, Twitter, SNN and www.schalmont.org.

Board Calendar

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

Monday, Jan. 24

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, Feb. 14

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, Feb. 28

Middle School LGI Room
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, March 14

Mariaville Elementary School
9210 Mariaville Rd.
Pattersonville

Monday, March 28

Middle School LGI
2 Sabre Dr.

Monday, April 11

Woestina Elementary School
1292 Main St.
Rotterdam Junction

Reunion Calendar

Planning a class reunion? If so, please visit www.schalmont.org to share the details.

Class of 1986

May 28, 2011
Mallozzi's Restaurant
1930 Curry Rd.
schalmont1986@aol.com

Do you know some impressive alumni?

Nominations sought for Wall of Distinction

Nominations for the next group of inductees on the Schalmont High School Alumni Wall of Distinction are due by March 14, 2011.

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

The Wall of Distinction now includes: Margaret (Ryan) Anderton, class of 1978; Gail DeAngelo, class of 1988; Alfred DeCarlo, class of 1961; Thomas P. Eichler, class of 1962; Dr. Valerie Gaus, class of 1982; Cheryl Ann Isles, class of 1970; Leonard Parker, class of 1971; Christine Patne-aude-Krahulik, class of 1983; Michael James Mugits, class of 1971; Michael Piotrowski, class of 1970; Angelo Santabarbara, class of 1990;

Michael Saccocio, class of 1979; and David Van Patten, class of 1972.

Visit www.schalmont.org/HS/alumni/alumniwall.htm to download a nomination form or call 355-9200, ext. 4006, to receive one by mail.

Selected nominees, or their representatives if they were nominated posthumously, will be asked to attend an induction ceremony in early June. ❖

Remediation

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Students are expected to listen attentively as they would during a typical class, taking notes as they go. At the completion of each module, students must take and pass a quiz with a grade of at least 80 percent.

This summer, the system will be upgraded so that students may access NovaNET courses from any computer with an Internet connection—at school or home. ❖



'Tis the season: A group of third-graders at Jefferson Elementary School are pictured decorating place mats for the City Mission of Schenectady's annual Christmas dinner. Visit the district website to learn about some of the other things students, teachers and staff did to help others this holiday season.