



The Beacon



Shining a light on the Baldwinsville Central School District

Issue 76

January 2010

Challenges of the 2010-2011 Budget

The Baldwinsville Central School District is facing a potential \$5 million gap for the 2010-2011 budget, which administrators and the Board of Education are looking to close while minimizing the effects on student instruction and the average tax rate. James Rodems, Assistant Superintendent for Management Services, said that the district anticipates the gap due to a variety of factors, the most critical of which are a possible reduction in state aid and in county sales tax. As the state works to solve its financial problems, the amount of state aid it gives the district could remain flat for the next three school years, while the district's expenses will continue to increase. Major influences on the budget each year are increases in employee benefits costs (including health care and retirement), fuel, utilities, and salary increases.

A reduction in county sales tax is another scenario the district is anticipating. Currently the district receives \$1.25 million in sales tax each year from Onondaga County. The district's agreement with Onondaga County will expire in December 2010. It is uncertain whether the district will continue to receive all this sales tax after December 2010. The district must consider this possibility while developing the budget.

Planning the 2010-2011 budget is especially challenging because administrators and the Board of Education must keep in mind several other sources of revenue that may not be available or will be smaller after 2010-2011. Losing these sources of revenue will ultimately affect the budgets of the next three to five years. The district wants to create a budget for 2010-2011 which will be sustainable in the future without sacrificing programs. Besides state aid and sales tax, the sources of revenue that affect the budget are:

4 PILOTS – The district currently receives about \$2.9 million in PILOTS, \$2.3 million of which is from Anheuser-Busch.

4 Federal Stimulus – The district received \$3.4 million in stimulus money for 2009-2010 and will receive the same amount for 2010-2011, after which the federal government has no plans for distributing stimulus money.

In December 2009, the New York State Legislature voted to use some of the 2010-2011 stimulus money to ease the 2009-2010 state deficit. This will make 2010-2011 more difficult for schools.

4 State Aid - In December 2009, Governor Paterson announced delays in payments of state aid to schools. This amounts to a mid-year cut in state aid. We don't know what this will mean for the Baldwinsville Central School District.

4 Tax Levy – The current tax levy is \$46,780,000. The district is committed to keeping the tax levy as low as possible to avoid burdening taxpayers.

Closing the Gap for 2010-2011

How will the district respond to these budgetary challenges? Cutting expenses is a top priority. Mr. Rodems said administrators and the Board of Education seek to keep the tax levy low by making cuts in every area while preserving the quality of student instruction. Everything is on the table for discussion and for review. For example, to cut costs in employee benefits, the district is exploring the possibility of self-funding the pharmacy benefit. Administrators are reviewing staffing needs in all departments. As staff members resign or retire, the district will determine the necessity of filling each position. Administrators are also exploring ways to reduce staff overtime in all departments.

Mr. Rodems said that increasing efficiency in all departments will be a key element in reducing costs. Staff members continue to explore possible means for reducing energy consumption, thus reducing utility costs. The district is considering closing all district build-

ings on Sundays to reduce utility costs as well as staffing needs. Currently district buildings are available for student, staff, and community use on Sundays. Staff members are also examining methods for reducing transportation costs, including reducing the number of bus runs and increasing the number of common bus stops to cut down on "door to door" service. To keep the budget in the black, the district may have to dip into the reserves it maintains. Mr. Rodems said the district has worked hard to budget and plan for future hard times, and those times are here now. The reserves will assist the district in managing the impact of lower state aid and increasing costs over the next few years.

Although administrators and the Board of Education are scrutinizing every line of the budget to cut costs, Mr. Rodems said it might be necessary to raise the tax rate slightly.

Public Input for Solutions

Community collaboration is a vital element each year in the budget development process. This fall Superintendent Jeanne Dangle held over eleven budget input meetings for staff and community members to voice their concerns and ideas regarding the 2010-2011 budget. Superintendent Dangle was asked to review the district's transportation policy, particularly the feasibility of continuing to transport all students in kindergarten through fifth grade, regardless of the distances they live from the schools they attend. Mr. Rodems said that because every aspect of the budget must be reviewed, staff members are calculating the cost of this practice; however, the district will not make changes to this transportation policy without sound reasoning and voter approval.

Superintendent Dangle has also been asked about the possibility of reverting to a "pay to play" policy for athletics. Students wishing to participate on an athletic team would have to pay a fee to play, rather than having athletic expenses included in the district's budget.

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Because this type of policy violates New York State education laws, Rodems said the district will not consider it. Additionally, the district recognizes the benefits of athletics and extracurricular activities for students.

Opportunity for Public Comment

Residents still have an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns to Superintendent Dangle and the Board. Residents are invited to participate in budget discussions at the following Board of Education meetings, which begin at 7:00 p.m. in the cafeteria of Durgee Junior High School:

- January 25 – Transportation, facilities, and debt service;
- February 8 - Athletics, review of transportation, facilities, and debt service;
- February 22 – Special education, review of athletics;
- March 1 – Instructional, review of special education;
- March 15 – Review of instructional;
- March 29 – Administrative recommended budget; and
- April 5 – Board of Education adopts budget.

Internet Safety Presentation

On January 26, the district will hold an internet safety presentation for community members from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the cafeteria of Durgee Junior High. School resource officers Martin Knaul and Christine Weeks, along with a representative of the Onondaga County Sheriff’s Department, will provide information on how children are vulnerable on the internet as well as how to keep them safe. The presentation is free and open to adults only due to the nature of the information that will be discussed. If you have any questions, please call Kelly Cary, school information officer, at 638-6180.

Staff Awarded Grants

The OCM BOCES School Library System has awarded grants to five staff members in the district.

Lindsay Cesari, library media specialist at Durgee Junior High School, Lisa Froelick, a global studies teacher at the school, and Melissa Julian, secondary technology instructor, have been awarded \$1,100 for their project entitled, “International Blogging in a Global Studies Classroom.” The purpose of the project is for ninth-grade students to practice and demonstrate 21st century skills as they use blogging to make international connections.

Leslie Savage, library media specialist at Palmer Elementary School, was awarded \$513 to fund a project entitled, “Learning Vocabulary Power Words Through Online Book Reviews.” Savage will use the funds to purchase books of fiction. She is collaborating with Palmer’s third-grade teachers on this project, which will enable students to understand and apply key ELA power words, such as summarization and main idea, in book reviews. Students will record their reviews and upload them to voicethread.com, a website that enables students and teachers around the world to collaborate and share information.

Ray Middle School’s library media specialist, Darlene St. John, and reading teacher Cherrill Scuderi, were awarded \$1,193 for the project, “To the Zoo and Beyond,” an intense research project on animals that will incorporate video conferencing and a virtual tour of the San Diego Zoo. The purpose of the project is to provide special education and remedial students with an opportunity to improve their comprehension skills and to build on their academic strengths as they use written resources, visual media and databases, and perform internet-based research, to produce a written report.

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Postal Patron
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