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# SCHODACK

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



JANUARY 2013

## Continued State Aid Cuts Could Mean More Program Cuts

If New York State continues to cut state aid to public schools, Schodack CSD will have to make deeper and deeper cuts to programs over the next few years.

That was the warning at December's Community Budget Advisory Team meeting where budget projections showed the district faces another significant budget shortfall for the 2013-14 school year.

"Unfortunately this is something all public schools in upstate New York are facing," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "Albany needs to stop balancing its budget by taking money from education or we will continue to lose opportunities for our students."

For the past three years, the district has received less state aid each year. The district also has lost more than \$3.3 million over the past three years through the state's Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). The GEA was proposed by Governor David Paterson as a one-time fix to reduce the state's budget deficit.

However the state continues to use it each year to cut school districts' share of state aid.

In addition, pension costs continue to increase at double digit rates, something the district has no control over except to reduce the number of employees which would impact programs.

New York State runs both public pension systems that public school employees use. The state not only determines what employees contribute to their pensions but also what school districts contribute.

The employee contribution rates New York State established for next year will increase the district's pension costs by an estimated 32%, or \$414,473. That is on top of pension costs that increased by nearly 16% this year and 28% last year.

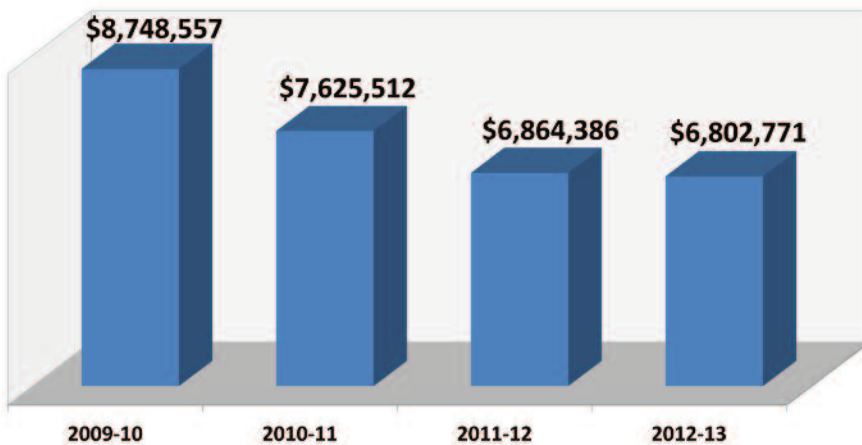
"Pension costs will be the biggest driver of our budget. Unfortunately, the only way we can reduce those costs are by cutting staff, cutting programs or using fund balance," explained Monica Kim, Director of Business and Support Services.

In an effort to stop cuts to programs and preserve student opportunities, districts across the state are working together to let New York's legislators know the impact they are having by continuing to underfund education, particularly for upstate schools.

A large part of the initiative is to engage communities so they can add their voice to the impact New York State is having on local schools.

"We met recently with our legislators to urge them to work with us to solve these challenges," Mr. Horan said. "We plan to engage our community in the upcoming months so they can help us tell Albany about the student opportunities we're losing because of their decisions."

### DISTRICT'S STATE AID



## District Seeks Community Input Through Budget Survey

As part of continued efforts to involve our community in the budget development process, the district is offering a survey where residents can provide suggestions and give guidance about what information they need to better understand the 2013-14 budget.

"Once again we are facing serious challenges next year due to New York State's continued cuts to state aid," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "We want to hear from our residents to help us make decisions and better communicate the challenges we face."

The survey is currently available on the district website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us). The survey will

continue through January 11. If residents do not have internet access, they can pick up a paper version of the survey at any school's main office or by calling the district office at 732-2297, ext. 1.

While the district would like to hear from all stakeholders in the district, Mr. Horan strongly encourages community members who typically vote "no" on the school budget to fill out the survey as well.

"We truly need to hear all types of perspectives from our community," said Mr. Horan. "Only by understanding all our community's different viewpoints can we develop a budget that reflects the values of our entire community."

# Student Teacher from China Interns at Schodack CSD

Students in all three Schodack CSD schools are learning from a student teacher from China this school year.

Narcissa Wang started student teaching at Schodack schools this year as part of her internship for her Union College's master's degree program.

Originally from Beijing, Ms. Wang traveled to the United States with the hope of teaching foreign language to American students. She's getting that opportunity, at no cost to the district, by assisting teacher Mark Hoyt with his Mandarin Chinese classes.

"I'm so moved how the students here are so enthusiastic to learn Chinese," Ms. Wang said. "It's very interesting. American classrooms and students are very different from Chinese classrooms and students."

For example, Ms. Wang explained she was surprised to see how friendly students

and teachers are in the classroom. In China, she said it is much more of a formal relationship.

"For Mr. Hoyt, the students are very welcoming to him," said Ms. Wang. "Not only am I learning how to teach students but also how to manage a classroom. You want students to like you but there has to be a balance."

Having Ms. Wang in the classroom is a great learning experience for students, noted Mr. Hoyt.

"She's from Beijing so she'll be able to answer questions I can't," Mr. Hoyt said. "A lot of student teachers are American so they don't know the culture. The students can ask her questions and learn a lot from her."

Ms. Wang has taught mostly High School and Middle School students but has also spoken with Castleton Elementary School students.



"We want to take full advantage of this opportunity and have her speak to students in all our schools so they can learn more about China," said Mr. Horan.

## Students Honor Community Veterans

Middle School and High School students honored the community's veterans in November with two events that thanked them for their service.

Middle School students held their 13th Annual Wall of Honor Ceremony on Nov. 8, honoring veterans, first responders and others who serve their community.

Students shared their experience visiting Castleton VFW Post 7337, read essays they wrote about people important to them and brought veterans on stage to share items they used during service or brought home from overseas.

"Teacher Chris Fowler also was presented a flag that was flown over an outpost in Afghanistan to thank her for her years of helping recognize the area's veterans," said Middle School Principal Michael Bennett. "It really was a special event, as always."



High School students held a Take a Vet to School Day on Nov. 9, inviting local veterans to speak at a panel discussion where they shared their experiences. Journalism students read bios they wrote about the vets and students asked questions about their service.

After the event, students posed for photos with veterans and faculty and staff provided a lunch for them that they purchased. Veterans also visited classrooms to speak further with students.

"I just want to thank everyone for the thoughtfulness you shared today," said Rep. Chris Gibson, an Army veteran who served in Iraq. "I will always remember this."

## Facility Needs Examined by Committee

A Facilities Committee made up of community members, students, teachers, staff, Board members and administrators is taking a look at the district's buildings and grounds this year to assess the district's facility needs.

"We have great buildings but we need to make sure we take care of them," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "We have some concerns such as a 57-year-old water main in the High School. This committee is an opportunity for community members to learn first-hand about the district's needs and help us share that information with the rest of our community."

To fill the committee, the district invited community members earlier this year to participate. The committee started meeting in October and will meet about five times.

Buildings and Grounds Superintendent Matt LaClair is leading the committee through a tour of school buildings and grounds to highlight specific areas. The committee will help identify the most pressing needs and recommend priorities for a report to the Board of Education as the district explores the possibility of a capital project.

"It has been a real eye opener for committee members to see the state of some of our facilities," said Mr. LaClair. "We have good facilities but there are areas that need to be addressed, especially things that could create a bigger and more costly problem."

## Sign Up for Continuing Education

In an effort to reduce costs and paper, Continuing Education class descriptions and registration forms are now available on the district website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us), instead of in the print newsletter. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact Continuing Education Coordinator Lisa Smith-Auer at 732-2124 ext. 1318. Registration must be made in advance for all courses.

- **Aerobic Dance and Floor Work** – Class begins Jan. 8 at 6:45 p.m.; Cost: \$60
- **Basic Painting Techniques** – Class begins Jan. 24 at 7 p.m.; Cost: \$80
- **Clinical Foundations** (Bryant & Stratton College Class) – Class begins Feb. 25 at 5:30 p.m.; Cost: \$499
- **Co-Ed Volleyball** – Program begins Jan. 6 at 6:45 p.m. Cost: \$45 plus \$2 materials
- **Comprehensive Retirement Planning** – Classes March 5 & 12 at 6:30 p.m.; Cost: Free
- **CPR** – Classes Jan. 24 & 29, Feb. 7, Mar. 26 at 7 p.m.; Cost \$60
- **Defensive Driving Course** – Classes Jan. 29 & 31 at 6:30 p.m.; Cost \$40
- **Over 30 Basketball** – Ongoing on Mon. & Wed. at 7 p.m.; Cost: \$100 for year, \$50 for half year
- **Pilates** – Class begins Jan. 8 at 6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$60
- **Yoga I** – Class begins Jan. 8 at 7 p.m.; Cost: \$60
- **Yoga II** – Class begins Jan. 10 at 7 p.m.; Cost: \$60
- **Zumba** – Class begins Jan. 10 at 7:15 p.m.; Cost \$60
- **Zumba Toning** – Class begins Jan. 7 at 7:15 p.m.; Cost \$60

## Grant Pays for New Science Equipment

Maple Hill High School received \$14,200 in new laboratory grade equipment for science classes this year at no cost to the district thanks to a Toshiba America Foundation grant.

Science teacher Leonard Bacon wrote the winning proposal for the grant which required initiatives that increase student engagement and improve student learning. Mr. Bacon also secured a similar grant last year.

One of the two major objectives of the grant is the development of a 10-week lab skills course that will be required for all 9th grade students beginning next year. The course is the first step in the development of a three-year sequence in laboratory-based instruction.

"The skills developed in this class will better prepare our students for future high school courses and for science courses in college," explained Mr. Bacon. "It will help guide students towards pursuing a college and/or career in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) related discipline."

The sequence will also address the state-mandated changes in instruction and assessment that are currently being developed by the NYS Education Department.

"The second major objective of the grant is to instill confidence in students who do not think they are capable of 'doing science' so that they may consider pursuing an advanced degree in science as an option," added Mr. Bacon.



## District Awarded \$300,000 State Efficiency Grant

Schodack CSD has been awarded a state efficiency grant that will total nearly \$300,000 over the next three years to make improvements such as bringing wireless internet to school buildings and the installation of energy efficient lighting.

"While the state requires us to use this money in very specific ways, it will help us make investments in our buildings that will help students learn and make us more efficient," said Superintendent Bob Horan.

The funding, which totals \$99,587 for this school year, is part of New York State's competitive grant program that the district applied for last school year.

Much of the funding for the first year will be used to provide wireless internet in all three school buildings. In an effort to prepare students for college and the real world, Mr. Horan explained the district wants students to be able to utilize their laptops or wireless devices to help them learn. Just like wired internet access at school buildings, wireless internet will go through a filter to ensure students use it properly.

"We don't want kids to power down when they come to school, we want them to power up," said Mr. Horan.

The community will also be able to access wireless internet in school buildings, including in gyms and auditoriums.

Funding will also be used to purchase energy-efficient lights for the High School and Middle School gyms (the Elementary School gym already has them). The lights also will qualify for a NYSERDA grant refund, providing additional revenue for the district.

"These lights will help us lower our electricity bill. We can then use the savings to offset other expenses," Mr. Horan said.

To qualify for the grant, the district had to show improvements in the overall efficiency of management operations that resulted in sustainable savings in future years. The district detailed actions such as eliminating an administrator, secretaries and other support personnel with duties now shared by others.

Mr. Horan credited the work of Director of Business and Support Services Monica Kim and Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Pupil Personnel Services Donna Watson for putting together the 28-page proposal.

"Monica and Donna put in a lot of hours detailing the efficiency efforts we've made over the past few years and how we would use this funding to help our students," Mr. Horan said.

## Postal Customer

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# Distance Learning Connects Students with Other Schools



**K**indergarteners had an opportunity to practice reading, speaking, listening and math while learning about other students' schools across New York during a videoconference project in December.

Using the High School's Distance Learning Lab, kindergartners connected with schools such as East Syracuse. Students from each school talked with each other and shared photos and pictures they drew of their community.

The project was based on the book "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" which students first had to read. The book encourages children to look at their surroundings and describe it.

"Each class first took a field trip around their community to learn about it and share what they saw," explained Principal Jason Chevrier. "Students talked about their communities and learned what was similar or different from other schools' communities. They also asked students from other schools questions and practiced counting together."

## Comptroller's Audit Reports Sound Purchasing Policies

**T**he NYS Comptroller's Office recently issued its audit report for Schodack Central School District's purchasing policies, reporting that sound policies were in place.

"District officials have established comprehensive purchasing policies and procedures that provide guidance as to when items must be competitively bid by law and when quotes should be obtained for pur-

chases not required to be competitively bid," the audit report states.

"We also determined that the District has an adequate purchase order system in place that ensures purchases are properly initiated, approved, documented, verified as received, and audited prior to payment," the report continued.

To see a full copy of the audit report, visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).