

- Future City Competition
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## PROPOSED 2009-2010 BUDGET:

# Spending Cut by \$400,000 in First Draft

Development of the 2009-2010 school budget comes at a time of great uncertainty in New York and across the nation. Recognizing this challenge, Schodack officials began budget deliberations in November and convened District and Community Budget Advisory Committees to incorporate as much community participation into the process as possible.

The first budget draft was presented March 19, a \$20,986,525 spending plan that cuts spending by nearly \$400,000 from the current year budget. Two additional drafts will be presented before the Board of Education adopts a budget April 23. Budget drafts are made available on the school website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).

Superintendent Doug Hamlin explained that Schodack has been looking for ways to cut spending as the district grapples with rising costs, uncertain revenue projections from the state and federal government, and declining enrollment. These considerations include reducing staffing.

"Our taxpayers have been clear: they need tax relief," Hamlin said. "We made difficult decisions to cut as much as we did. To the greatest extent possible, reductions in staffing take advantage of retirements and other natural attrition and remain separate from student programs."

The district cut spending through improved efficiencies such as energy savings and changes to bus routes as well as cuts in programs and staffing. Due to declining enrollment,

four teaching positions were eliminated. Other reductions include three clerical positions (two through retirement), a half-time guidance counselor, a part-time health education teacher, and a part-time school bus driver-trainer.

The proposed budget also includes a \$235,859 proposition for two 66-passenger buses and one 30-passenger bus, which would be financed over five years. Because the state reimburses schools for bus purchases, the district's average net cost would be \$17,439 for all three buses for each of the five years.

Sherri Fisher, Director of Business and Support Services, said the \$631,000 in state aid that was restored is critical to the district. But Fisher stressed the district is still facing a significant long term budget difficulty from four Schodack commercial businesses challenging their assessment by a total of \$50 million.

"At some point we'll have to pay the piper," Fisher said. "We need to be prepared for the possibility of significant multi-year tax refunds and deal with the permanent loss of assessment."

That uncertainty makes it difficult to project a tax rate at this point. However, the district will include a projected tax rate after the budget is adopted on April 23, which will be detailed in the May budget newsletter.

Residents who have questions are encouraged to contact the District Office at 732-2297 or submit questions via the "Have You Heard?" feature on the school website (see back page for details).

## Students Follow "Live From the Field" Research

This spring, Maple Hill's eighth grade science classes are learning about live research in Louisiana as they follow their teacher's work on a grant-funded research project.

In April, science teacher Maureen Carreau is joining other teachers and scientists from across the country for 11 days as they collect data on caterpillars in New Orleans in an effort to monitor the effects of climate change.

Maple Hill students will follow Carreau's field work as she speaks with them via Internet video conferences in their classroom. The cost of the research project, including funding for a substitute teacher while Carreau is in the field, is funded by an Earthwatch Institute Fellowship Grant.

"I'm thrilled to bring a current scientific research project to my students," Carreau said. "Getting students involved like this helps



motivate and excite them about science."

Students will be able to ask Carreau questions and follow her experiences in the field on a blog she'll maintain. "They'll be able to use the technology they are familiar with to enhance learning," Carreau said.

Carreau explained she and other researchers will collect data on caterpillar populations that will later be studied at Tulane University to determine how climate change is impacting ecosystems as well as weather.

When Carreau comes back to Schodack, she plans to involve students in their own research project outside

their classroom. "I plan to take my students out in the field right here at Maple Hill to begin looking at local bird and insect populations as ways to inspire appreciation and understanding of their local ecosystems."

# Students Excel in Future City Competition

Designing a self-sustaining city on the moon that could be home to 50,000 people, Maple Hill Middle School students took third place in this year's Future City Competition.

Competing against dozens of area schools, Maple Hill's Future City team also took first place in four individual awards, including "Best City Model" and "Best Essay."

"These students did a great job. Finishing third overall is a tremendous accomplishment," said Middle School teacher Ken Malloy, who worked with students. "These kids put in an average of 63 hours of their own time outside of school."

The Future City Competition challenges 7th and 8th grade students to design a city of the future, using math, science, engineering, and technology. Students create both a computer simulation of their city and a model using recycled

materials that can cost no more than \$100 to build. Students also work with an engineer for the competition; community member George Walling assisted this year's team.

Participating this year were Adrian Barber, Seema Bhaskar, Caliber Bolt, Jesse Bonin, Carla Dortic, Abby Fink, Conor Flanagan, Alex Hays, Jordan Healy, Kelly Healy, Micaela Kayser, Oteria Ludwig, David Sherman, Lee Soja, Nick Timmons, and Patrick Warren.

"The competition sounded really interesting," said Conor Flanagan. "I liked the fact it was rooted in science."

Students worked on different aspects of the project individually and as a team. Lee Soja, for example, designed a transportation system using airline tubing and a plastic syringe to create air pressure to power it. "What I liked most was building it and thinking about what you wanted to include in your city," Lee explained.

Students had to focus on 100 percent water sustainability, which was a challenge given the city was built on the moon. Students decided on an ultraviolet system that purified recycled water.

Oteria Ludwig was one of three presenters who explained the city's design through a skit that defended it against possible NASA funding cuts. "It was difficult, particularly answering the judges' questions," Oteria said. "But it was fun, too."



## Budget Advisory Committee Provides Options

After six well-attended meetings, the Community Budget Advisory Committee finished its work in March, providing a list of options for the Board of Education to consider as it develops a final draft of the 2009-2010 budget.

"We feel like we came up with some good advice and provided an opportunity for the community to be involved in the budget process," said Committee Spokesman John Nicholas. "We wanted to learn about the budget process and we realized how difficult it is and what it costs to run a school district."

Nicholas noted that as many as 50 people attended many of the meetings. Residents also brought concerns from the community to the meetings and shared information they learned with the community.

During the meetings, residents heard presentations about different areas of the school budget. They then provided their

thoughts on where to make possible cuts and what was important to keep.

The Committee's report to the Board included consensus on issues such as the importance of keeping elective courses and switching to a K-12 bus routing system. Other issues, such as eliminating faculty positions and cutting some sports programs, drew both strong support and opposition. The Committee told the Board it should consider such issues carefully given the differences of opinion.

The Committee's report to the Board is available on the school's website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us). Summaries of each meeting and the presentations are also available.

"We really appreciate the time and effort you put in," Board member Andrew Fleck told the Committee at its last meeting. "You helped us understand better what the community's expectation is for the education of our children."

## Continuing Education Classes

Three new Continuing Education classes will start in April and May.

- **Dog Obedience starts on April 23, meeting seven Thursdays from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in the MHMS Cafeteria. Tuition is \$50 with a \$10 materials fee.**
- **Ballroom Dancing II and Latin and Swing Dancing II start on May 5, meeting five Tuesdays from 7 to 8 p.m. and 8 to 9 p.m., respectively, in the CES gym. Tuition is \$32 for each class, or \$48 for both classes. Classes are for those who completed session I or have previous dance instruction.**

To register, please visit the school website at [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us) or call Continuing Education Director Theresa Hovish at 732-7708 between 8 a.m. and noon.

# Students and Staff at Home at New CES

After all the excitement of the February 25 reopening of the Castleton Elementary School, students and staff are making the most of their new school.

“Our students have really settled in, they love the space and the building,” said Principal Jason Chevrier. “It’s a tremendous building and we’re all happy to be back home.”

Chevrier noted the school’s larger classrooms, breakout rooms for small group instruction, full-size gym, and other amenities are working just as school officials had planned. The separate bus and parent drop off areas have also improved safety for students.

Chevrier thanked the community for its support, particularly with help moving into the building. Parents, the local Boys and Girls Scouts troops, and other community members all volunteered to unpack boxes, hang up artwork, and other helpful tasks. High School freshmen Kayla Belschwinder, Kristina Muller and Taylor Wood even earned Girl Scout Silver Awards for working every day over the Mid-Winter Recess to organize and stock library book shelves.

“It truly was a community effort,” Chevrier said. “I can’t thank everyone enough.”



## How to Run for Board of Education

### Are you interested in running for the Board of Education?

The Board has four seats that will expire June 30. Petitions to run are available on the school website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us) or by calling 732-2297. The deadline to submit petitions is April 20.

Board members serve three-year terms; one of the open seats, however, is a partial, one-year term. These are unpaid positions. Candidates must be at least 18-years-old, a U.S. citizen, and a resident of the district for at least one year prior to election. This year’s school budget and Board election are set for Tuesday, May 19 from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the High School gymnasium.

Board members Paula Noll and Beth Nichols Hesse announced with regret at the March 19 Board meeting they will not run for another term. Both Noll and Hesse said they were honored to serve the school district but would not seek another term because they could no longer give the positions the time they require.

## Events for Senior Citizens

The month of April and May are filled with events for our community’s senior citizens to visit all three Schodack schools.

On April 23 at 1 p.m., the Middle School will hold a Senior Citizen’s Tea featuring coffee, tea and baked goods. The Student Council will greet visitors and the Jazz Band will perform. Call 732-7736 for information.

On April 29 at 1 p.m., the High School will hold a Senior Citizen’s Luncheon in the cafeteria. Students will prepare hot lunches, desserts and beverages. Student musicians will also perform. Please call

732-7701 if possible so we have an idea how many people will attend.

On May 1 at 8 a.m., Castleton Elementary School will host Grandparents’ Day. There will be a special morning program for grandparents of students and an opportunity to visit classrooms. Information will be sent home with students.

On May 8, the High School will hold its Senior Citizen Prom at 6 p.m. The popular event is put on by students featuring music, dancing, food, and a king and queen of the prom. Call 732-7701 for information.

## Changes to Bus Routes Planned

Next year, the district plans to combine bus routes to allow students in all three schools to ride together, saving an estimated \$32,100 in fuel, maintenance, and personnel costs.

The switch to K-12 bus runs allows Middle School students to start and end their days at about the same time as High School and Elementary students. As a result, Middle School students will start and end school about an hour earlier.

Parents will receive information about the changes before the end of the school year, including details about pick up and drop off times which may be different,

particularly for Middle School students.

“Our bus service will be as good as it is now. But it will be different and it will require some adjustment,” said Transportation Supervisor Mary Mabb.

Currently, High School and Elementary students ride together; Middle School students are bused separately. The time that Elementary students spend on the bus isn’t expected to change significantly. High School

students will have a slightly longer ride home. Middle School students will have slightly longer rides to and from school. Late buses should get all students home earlier.



## Student Wins Statewide Art Contest

For the second year in a row, a Maple Hill Middle School student has won New York State's Arbor Day Poster contest.

Fifth grader Joey Rocchio won this year's contest, which included approximately 1,600 entries from across the state. His drawing will be entered into the national contest and be used as the New York State Arbor Day Bookmark, which is distributed



to schools and libraries across the state.

Middle School Principal Michael Bennett noted that Joey was also presented a framed picture of his poster during a state ceremony.

"He's a great student and his artwork certainly deserves the praise," Bennett said. "Joey worked really hard on this. It's another fine example of Wildcat Pride."

### Ask a Question at "Have You Heard?"

Do you have a question about Schodack schools?  
Wondering if a rumor you heard is true?

Then visit "Have You Heard?" on the school district's website, where residents can submit questions with answers posted for the entire community to read.

"Have You Heard?" was modeled after similar services offered by school districts such as Shenendehowa and Averill Park, which have proved popular with residents looking for answers to common questions.

Just visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us) and click on the "Have You Heard?" logo. Please note, for individual or private concerns, residents are encouraged to contact the school or district office directly by phone.



## Congratulations to MHHS Basketball Teams

Everyone at Schodack schools would like to congratulate Maple Hill's boys' and girls' basketball teams for their tremendous seasons.

The boys' team won its first Section II championship in more than 50 years, advancing to the state Class C championship game. The team finished with a 26-2 record.

The girls' team won the Class C title after a dominating season, advancing to the Section II Class CC-C championship game. The team finished with a 22-2 record.



"I'm so proud of our student athletes," said High School Principal Robert Horan. "They excelled not only on the court but off it as well. I'd also like to thank our community for their support."

Horan noted that the district received numerous e-mails about how respectful and positive the teams, coaches and fans were at the games, including the Superintendent of the school that defeated the boys' team in the championship game, writing how "gracious and classy" everyone was "in the face of a very difficult defeat."

**Schodack Central School District**  
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