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# SCHODACK

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



MAY 2009

## BUDGET VOTE

Tuesday, May 19

6 a.m. — 9 p.m.

High School Gym



*Schodack students have led a thriving recycling program that is environmentally friendly and saves money. We recycled 16,200 pounds of paper in the last year, a weight equal to a large elephant.*

## BUDGET HEARING

Tuesday, May 12

7 p.m. — HS Library

### 2009-2010 SCHOOL BUDGET:

## No Increase in Tax Levy

**O**n Tuesday, May 19, residents in the Schodack Central School District can vote on a \$21,381,275 budget for the 2009-2010 school year that reduces spending by \$4,714 and requires no increase in the tax levy.

Voting will take place from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Maple Hill High School gymnasium. Residents will also vote on a school bus proposition (see page 3) and elect four school board members (see page 6).

In response to our community's request for tax relief, the district cut spending in a number of areas and instituted changes to operate more efficiently. Spending cuts were spread out across nearly all areas to minimize the impact to any one program, as recommended by our Community Budget Advisory Committee.

The 2009-2010 budget calls for the elimination of three teaching positions, one clerical position, one part-time driver trainer position, and part-time guidance and health education positions next year. But the district expects the impact to classroom instruction to be minimal, particularly given Schodack's steadily declining enrollment (from 1,199 students five years ago to 1,093 students this year).

Some class sizes will increase next year but we anticipate the largest

classroom size for grades K-8 to be 25 students. Many are well below that, including our youngest learners – grades K-2 – which is projected to have all class sizes below 20 students (see page 3 for staffing details).

To help support instruction, the district plans to use money from the federal economic stimulus plan to restore a second grade teaching position that was scheduled to be eliminated in an earlier draft budget, create two K-12 reading teacher positions, and increase speech and social work time for students (see page 5 for federal stimulus details).

Changes in transportation next year are one example where the district expects to reduce costs by becoming more efficient. Next year, we will switch to K-12 bus runs, eliminating the current separate runs for the Middle School. This change is expected to save the district an estimated \$32,100 in fuel, maintenance, and personnel costs (see page 2 for other cost cutting measures).

"Our community has been clear, they need tax relief," said Superintendent Doug Hamlin. "By cutting spending and holding the line on the tax levy, we hope we're able to help homeowners, particularly in these difficult economic times, while providing students the excellent education our community expects."

## What Will I Be Voting on May 19?

- 1. A \$21,381,275 budget for the 2009-10 school year.**
  - This budget has a projected 0 percent tax levy increase.
  - This budget is down \$4,714 or 0.02 percent from the 2008-09 budget.
- 2. Selection of four candidates for the Board of Education, who will appear on the ballot in this order (see page 6):**
  - Benjamin Marra, Linda Underwood, Arlene McGuane, Michael Hiser, George Warner, and Kenneth Flood.
- 3. A proposition for the purchase of three school buses at a cost of \$235,859.**
  - The estimated average net cost for the three buses, after transportation aid, is \$17,439/year for five years.



*Students organized many charity events this year, including raising \$1,555 for the American Cancer Society, donating 307 pairs of used shoes to those in need, and \$1,493 for the Anchor Food Pantry along with more than 1,000 cans of soup and food.*

## Q: How is the district reducing costs?

Schodack CSD continually looks for ways to reduce costs and operate our schools more efficiently. Here are some examples of ways we reduce operating costs.

### Personnel

- Schodack CSD joins other area school districts in a health insurance trust to increase the school's purchasing power to obtain lower rates. We have worked to control costs by negotiating increased employee contribution costs, self-insuring prescription drug plans, and changing the base health insurance plan to a less costly PPO plan.
- Whenever possible, use of substitutes has been reduced.
- We participate in a cooperative trust for worker's compensation to lower our premium costs.

### Energy

- Natural gas and electricity is purchased through a municipal energy consortium to improve buying power to obtain lower rates.

- We now use an automated system to efficiently control heating in all three schools. New energy efficient boilers, pumps, and heaters were installed as part of the Capital Project.
- Faculty, staff and students participate in an energy conservation initiative. Microwaves, fridges and other appliances are being removed from classrooms. Unnecessary lights are being turned off.
- Computers are set up to automatically turn off at the end of the day to save energy.

### Recycling

- In the last year, a student-led recycling program recycled 864 yards of material, enough to fill up the old CES gym to the ceiling. We also recycled 16,200 pounds of paper, a weight equal to a large elephant.

### Transportation

- Consolidated K-12 bus runs will save an estimated \$32,100 in reduced fuel, maintenance and personnel costs next year.

### Supplies

- We're using less paper and purchasing 30 percent less next year. General supplies will be cut by 5 percent.
- We purchase items such as buses, fuel, technology, office and classroom supplies, equipment, and waste management services on state contract which is often considerably cheaper.

### Grants

- The district secured nearly \$160,000 in state grants over four years for a student mentoring program. Other grants include \$5,000 to purchase computer equipment and \$10,000 for MHHS students to conduct a science research project.



Castleton Elementary School students are right at home in their new CES classrooms.

## Q: If the tax levy stays the same, will my tax bill be the same as last year?

**Not necessarily.** Because your tax bill is based on a number of things outside the control of the school district – such as your home's assessment, equalization rates, the total assessment base and STAR savings – your tax bill could increase, decrease, or stay the same.

For example, this year's STAR exemption amount, as determined by the State Office of Real Property Services, is less than last year's amount. As a result, residents with a STAR exemption will pay taxes on a larger portion of the assessed value of their home.

The biggest potential impact on Schodack homeowners' tax rates is the possible reduction of the town's assessment base. Four commercial businesses in Schodack are challenging their assessments by a total of \$50 million. It is unclear when these challenges will be resolved but a reduction in the town's overall assessment base would mean tax rates for homeowners would increase to offset the loss. The school district has monitored the situation closely but has no control over how these challenges are resolved.

## Bus Purchase on Ballot

A proposition on the May 19 ballot will ask voters to approve the purchase of two 66-passenger buses and one 30-passenger bus at a cost not to exceed \$235,859.

Because the state reimburses the district for 73 percent of bus purchases, the local taxpayers' share of the total cost would be an average of \$17,439 for all three buses in each of the next five years of financing.

### Why does the district purchase buses on a regular basis?

This proposition is part of an ongoing bus replacement plan designed to keep the district's fleet in safe, working order. New bus purchases replace old buses based on the vehicle's mileage, age, repair history and condition.

Once buses exceed 130,000 miles, they become more costly to maintain and less efficient to run. Older engines can average only about six miles per gallon; new buses should average nine miles a gallon. That difference can add up to considerable savings given the number of miles our school buses travel each year.



*Althea Codamon was one of many MHHS students to have their artwork selected for the 10th Annual High School Regional Juried Art Exhibition. Student artwork was also featured in numerous other exhibits this year.*

## Q: What staffing changes are proposed?

With enrollment at Schodack schools continuing to steadily decline, losing more than 100 students over the last five years, the district has eliminated three teaching positions in the 2009-2010 school year budget. Here are details of those staffing changes.

### Castleton Elementary School

One teaching position at Castleton Elementary school is scheduled to be reduced next year; as a result, third grade will be reduced to three sections. Second grade was scheduled to be reduced to three sections but was kept to four to provide additional help for those students, after an evaluation of student needs.

While third grade will be reduced to three sections, the projected class size ranges from 21 to 24 students. K-2 will range from 16 to 19 students; fourth grade will range from 20 to 23 students.

Principal Jason Chevrier said he believes the quality of education at CES will continue to be strong, particularly with the addition of two K-12 reading teachers (funded by federal stimulus money) that can provide reading support.

"It's not going to look the same next year but with the extra reading support I think we'll be able to better respond to

the need of our kids as well as the needs of our taxpayers," Chevrier said.

### Maple Hill Middle School

Two teaching positions at Maple Hill Middle School are proposed to be eliminated next year. Due to schedule changes, teaching assignments will be rearranged. The biggest impact is in grade six, where class size will increase to a projected 22 to 25 students. This is the biggest class size we expect in the Middle School next year.

Principal Michael Bennett agreed that the additional K-12 reading teachers will help provide additional support to the Middle School in a critical area. Additionally, federal stimulus dollars will allow the Middle School not only to maintain its successful Wildcat Pride program but improve it.

"We'll be able to continue the excellent progress we've made," Bennett said. "No student programs will be adversely

affected and we'll be able to offer more support in areas of need."

### Maple Hill High School

With enrollment projected to increase at the High School for the next two years, there will be no teaching positions reduced next year. But Principal Robert Horan noted he's already preparing for three years from now when enrollment is expected to drop significantly.

Horan is examining potential retirements, course electives where enrollment is waning, and encouraging teachers to get involved in distance learning because if they can teach a class section to another school, it will bring money into the district and hopefully allow Schodack to keep more teachers.

"The enrollment decline hasn't hit the High School yet," Horan said. "Nothing will change next year as far as classes for students."

# Questions from Our Community

Over the course of the six Community Budget Advisory Committee meetings, our residents asked many excellent questions about our schools. Here are some commonly asked questions from our community with answers.

## What is a fund balance?

### Why doesn't the district use it all?

A fund balance is reserve funds used for stabilizing the tax rate and paying for unexpected expenses. Each year, the district uses part of its fund balance as a revenue in the budget to maintain consistency in the tax rate and avoid spikes. Using all the fund balance in one year would create a funding deficit for the following year that would have to be made up by program cuts and/or tax rate increases.

### Are there studies on the impact of class size on test scores?

When class sizes are above 30 students, there is supportive research that shows improvement in test scores when class size is lowered. But Schodack does not have class sizes that large. There is no definitive research showing improved test scores for students in class sizes that Schodack has.

### Has the district offered retirement incentives?

Schodack has looked into retirement incentives but our faculty and staff are relatively young. The few employees we have who are close to retirement age are in positions that we would have to replace so savings would be minimal.

### How much does the district spend on sports?

Sports cost the district approximately

\$200,000 year, or less than 1 percent of the total budget. Neither sports nor other extracurricular activities for students were reduced in the 2009-2010 budget.

### Why doesn't the superintendent and other administrators forgo salary increases next year?

The school Superintendent and other administrators – including the Business Administrator, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds and Transportation Supervisor – have all agreed to not take a raise for the 2009-2010 school year.

### Why doesn't the district freeze teacher and staff salaries?

Schools operate in a collective bargaining environment. Current salaries or benefits cannot be changed without employees agreeing to reopen contracts.

### Is there any additional financial help available from the state?

District officials and Board of Education members have met with state legislators about additional funding. But given the state's economic crisis, this does not appear to be on the horizon.

### How will the \$50 million in potential commercial assessment challenges affect our taxes?

While the district is monitoring the assessment challenges of four businesses in

town, it has no control over how they're resolved. If those companies successfully reduce their assessed values, the drop in the town's assessment base would mean tax rates for home owners would increase to make up the difference.

### When will the assessment challenges be resolved?

We check with the town often on the status of the assessment challenges. But it is unclear when they will be resolved. When they are resolved, the district may be responsible for tax refunds going back to the year the challenges were filed.

### Are we providing special education in the most cost effective way?

Special education students attend out-of-district BOCES programs when the services they require make it cost prohibitive to offer those services in Schodack schools. However, Schodack is looking to bring a few special education students back into the district next year because they have similar needs and it would be less costly and more desirable to have them in Schodack schools.

### Do groups such as the Church Youth Organization use school facilities for free?

No, groups that use our schools are charged a fee to offset costs to provide such facilities, such as maintenance and energy.

## Student Achievement

The best measure of the education Schodack CSD offers is the success of our students.

Here are some examples:

- In 2007-08, 93% of MHHS graduates earned a Regents diploma; 60% earned a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation.
- 93% of the class of 2008 went on to a two-year or four-year college or other post-secondary institution.
- MHHS seniors have been accepted this year into such colleges as Cornell, Colgate, Tufts University, Brown University, RPI, University of Rochester, and University at Buffalo.
- MHHS seniors have earned \$1,630,788 in scholarships and awards this year. Last year, seniors earned \$1,403,475 in scholarships and awards.
- Fifth grader Joey Rocchio won the New York State Arbor Day 2009 School Poster contest for his drawing. This is the second year in a row a MHMS student has won the contest, which includes 5,000 submissions from students across the state.
- 92% of eighth grade students scored at or above state standards on the 2007-2008 grade 8 science test.
- MHHS Senior Ian Walling was one of 8,200 students nationwide to receive a National Merit Scholarship. A total of 1.5 million students were eligible for the scholarship which is based on test scores from the PSAT. Junior Hannah Schockmel qualified for the program based on her test scores. She is one of 50,000 highest-scoring students to qualify, competing against some 1.5 million students.

## Q: How was the budget developed?

**In November, the district began preparing for next year's budget by initiating a spending freeze to cut costs in light of New York's economic crisis. In response to community concerns about taxes, the Board of Education in December instructed the district to hold the line on spending in the first draft of the budget.**

To provide an opportunity for the public to get involved in the budget process, the district invited any community member or school employee to join a Community or District Budget Advisory Committee. Each group met six times, learning about the budget process and providing advice to the Board of Education to consider as it developed the budget. Summaries of each meeting and budget presentations were posted to the school website.

After consulting with building principals, other administrators and union representatives, the district presented the first of three budget drafts in March. In early April, the district was

informed of restrictions on federal funding that did not allow it to reduce the tax levy. A final budget was adopted by the Board of Education on April 23 that reduced spending by \$4,714 and held the tax levy at the same level as the previous year.

Drafts of each budget, budget presentations and other resources were posted on the school website. The district held two Town Hall Community Forums on the budget before it was adopted. Residents were also encouraged to send in questions through the school website. A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12 at 7 p.m. in the High School library.

## Q: How will STAR savings affect school taxes?

**Residents enrolled in the state's School Tax Relief (STAR) program will receive a reduction on their 2009-10 school tax bills. STAR works by exempting a certain amount of a taxpayer's assessed value from being taxed. While the state eliminated the Middle Class STAR Rebate check, the rest of the program still applies.**

The Basic STAR exemption is available for owner-occupied, primary residences regardless of the owners' ages or incomes. The Enhanced STAR exemption is available for primary residents ages 65 and older with yearly household incomes below the state standard. Applications for STAR should be filed with your local assessor.

The state has set the Basic STAR exemption for the town of Schodack at \$33,290 next year. The Enhanced Exemption has been set at \$62,990. For the town of Stuyvesant, the exemptions are \$32,800 and \$65,710, respectively.



*MHMS students work in the school's new library.*

## Q: How much money did the federal stimulus provide the district?

**Funding from the federal economic stimulus plan allowed New York State to restore proposed cuts to education funding. As a result, Schodack CSD will receive \$633,321 in federal dollars next year. We expect to receive a similar amount the following year.**

Because the federal funding is only for two years, the district was careful to use the money in ways that would minimize long-term funding commitments. Otherwise, local taxpayers would have to pick up the cost when the funding runs out in two years.

Due to the timing of the federal economic stimulus plan and the approval of the state budget, we did not find out until early April that restrictions on the funding did not allow the district to reduce its tax levy. If we reduced the tax levy from last year, it could jeopardize our ability to receive the federal funding.

Additional restrictions prevented the district from using the federal money to lower taxes, instead requiring these

funds be used to create and save jobs and improve student performance. As a result, the funding was used to add two K-12 reading teacher positions, a part-time social worker, a part-time speech and language teacher, and restore a second grade teaching position that was eliminated in an earlier draft of the budget. Grant funding will also help expand the successful Middle School Wildcat Pride program.

The federal economic stimulus plan also provides an additional \$344,764 over the next two years for grants which the district must apply for. The district is exploring all possible uses for those funds.

# Board of Education Candidates

This year there are six people running for four open Board of Education seats. The candidates will appear on the ballot in the following order (left to right) as determined by a random drawing. A meet the Candidates Night will be held Tuesday, May 12 at 7 p.m. in the MHMS library.

## Benjamin Marra

My wife, Shana, and I are ten year residents of the district. Shana and I share two sons, Ben, 5, and Luc, 2. I am a Senior Engineer for NYS. Additionally, I own a local consulting firm incorporated in the Town of Schodack. As a parent, professional, business owner and resident, I am invested in the success of our school district and town. I am running for school board to address the challenges of balancing a first-rate education with the strain that taxes put on a middle-class budget. I would be honored to receive your vote for Schodack School Board.

## Michael Hiser

My wife, Janet, and I've lived in Schodack since 1990, when I began working as an attorney for the NYS Health Department. Our son graduated in 2007 and our daughter will in 2011. I've volunteered on two District Facilities Planning Committees and MHMS and MHHS Planning Teams. I've been active in Boy Scouts, youth coaching, and church activities. I recently chaired the Castleton/Schodack Local Development Commission. The main issues I see facing Schodack are funding basic educational needs through community supported budgets, keeping the community well informed about our schools, and continuing to strive for excellence while meeting standardized assessments.

## Linda Underwood

My involvement with Schodack CSD began in the 1980s as fundraising and public relations chair for the playground committee. I began working for the District in 1990, retiring last year as Director of Community Education/Highly Able Learner Services Coordinator. I also coached MHHS drama club and Odyssey of the Mind Teams. I'm the mother of two Maple Hill graduates. My experience as a longtime employee gives me a unique perspective that would be valuable to have on the Board. If elected, I pledge to bring more transparency and accountability, greater respect, and a focus on fiscal prudence to the District.

## George Warner

As a community, the challenges before us are: preparing our children for their future balanced by needs of taxpayers while addressing a taxbase with long-term growth is significantly less than rate of inflation or now potentially negative. A lifelong resident and MH graduate, I found myself to be well-prepared by this community. As my family's sons (David, Peter, Michael, Paul) graduated MH, entered college and now the workplace, the value of a MH education, guided by this community's values, is demonstrated everyday. In these uncertain times, I ask for your vote as we seek the same opportunities for today's children.

## Arlene McGuane

I've been a community member since 1999, involved in PTO, the Castleton Kids Board and Budget Advisory Committee. I have two children in Schodack schools. I want community members to know I'm someone representing them and I'm personally invested in the commitment for quality education for our children. I'm not afraid to ask questions and believe in making informed decisions. I have a bachelor's degree in nursing, working for St. Peter's Hospital. As a taxpayer, I share the same burdens my neighbors face each year. I hope you can support me in my efforts by providing me with your vote.

## Kenneth Flood

I believe that education of our children is the foundation upon which our communities' future lies. Having been appointed to the school board late last year, I voted to adopt a budget that decreases spending resulting in a 0% tax increase. I have lived in the school district for 15 years with my wife and two children. My wife Valerie Flood teaches at Maple Hill Middle School and I'm Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development for Columbia County. If elected, I will work with town officials to responsibly grow the district's tax base to hold the line on school taxes.

# Budget Advisory Committee Members

We would like to thank the members of this year's Community and District Budget Advisory Committees. Each group attended six, two-hour meetings, learning about the school's finances and offering advice for the Board of Education to help develop this year's budget. We thank them all for their time and valuable input.

## Community Budget Advisory Committee

Gail Amento  
Jodi Ancin  
Pat Canestro  
Laura Cook  
Nancy Daoust  
Maria Eastwood  
Kolby Flach  
Val Flood  
Michael Hiser  
Michael Kennedy

Melanie Lyte-Peterson  
Arlene McGuane  
Joseph McInerney  
Scott Mocerine  
John Nicholas  
Richard Noll  
Patrick O'Hagerty  
Laura and Keith Palmer  
Suzanne Paziienza  
Robin Perry

Faith Schottenfeld  
Scott Schulz  
Beth Secor  
David Sherwood  
Cathy Smith  
John Sober  
Eliot Stiles  
Lisa Stiles-Roy  
Deb Walling  
Fred Wolff

## District Budget Advisory Committee

Val Camper  
Lori Colistra  
Laura Cook  
Laura Crotty  
Kandace Eaton  
Val Flood  
Clarence Lebrecht  
Wendy Nolan  
Suzanne Paziienza

Patricia Racz  
Leah Rich  
Marcia Rossetti  
Tim Ryan  
Dianne Topple  
Lisa Warren  
Donna Watson  
Linda Wemple  
Jim Yox

## Q: What happens if the budget is defeated?

If voters do not approve the budget on May 19, the district has three choices: put the same budget up for a second vote, put a revised budget up for a second vote or adopt a contingency budget.

If the budget is defeated twice, the Board is required to adopt a contingency budget, which caps spending based on a state formula. Schodack's proposed budget is \$995,270 below the contingency budget spending cap. If the district adopted a contingency budget, certain expenses would need to be removed from the proposed budget to lower the contingency budget by \$128,187 to \$21,253,088.

However, the tax levy would have to remain at the same level as the proposed budget due to the federal economic stimulus funding requirements. The stimulus funding has restrictions that specifically prevent school districts from using the money to lower their tax levy.

Under a contingency budget, New York State places restrictions on how schools operate including the elimination of some field trips, requiring the district to charge groups for the use of school buildings, and restricting spending on items such as equipment.

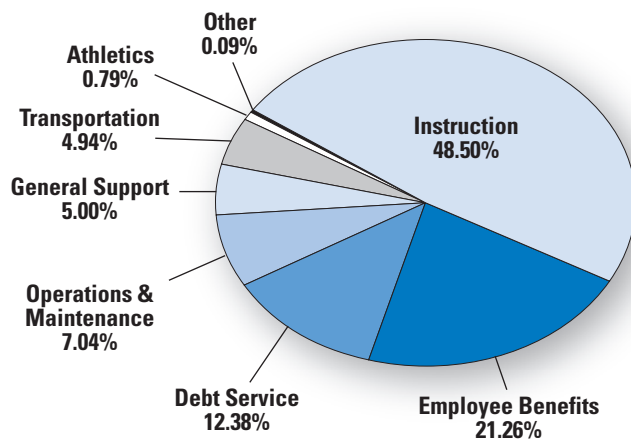
## Expenditures

Category	2008-2009	Proposed 2009-2010	% Change from 2008-2009
Instruction	\$10,621,032	\$10,370,060	-2.36%
Employee Benefits	\$4,349,757	\$4,546,700	4.53%
Debt Service	\$2,417,554	\$2,646,050	9.45%
Operations & Maintenance	\$1,587,102	\$1,505,171	-5.16%
General Support	\$1,079,636	\$1,070,051	-0.89%
Transportation	\$1,135,423	\$1,056,248	-6.97%
Athletics	\$179,232	\$168,733	-5.86%
Interfund Transfers	\$14,333	\$16,448	14.76%
Community Services	\$1,920	\$1,814	-5.52%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$21,385,989</b>	<b>\$21,381,275</b>	<b>-0.02%</b>

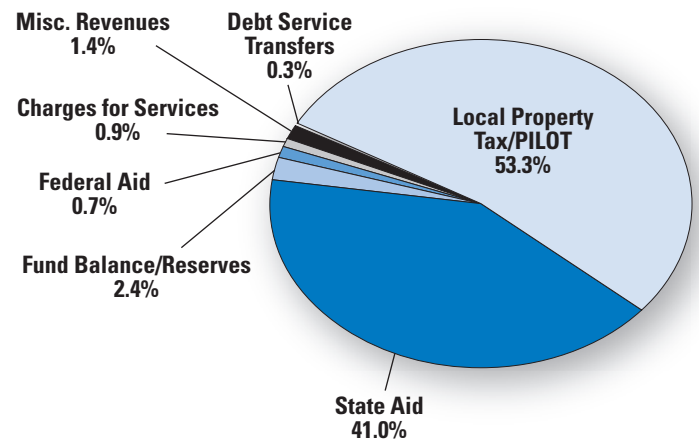
## Revenues

Category	2008-2009	Proposed 2009-2010	% Change from 2008-2009
Local Property Tax/PILOT Revenue	\$11,385,647	\$11,385,647	0%
State Aid	\$8,336,104	\$8,777,995	5.30%
Fund Balance/Reserves	\$725,000	\$520,000	-28.28%
Charges for Services	\$168,541	\$198,138	17.56%
Federal Aid	\$155,000	\$155,000	0.00%
Debt Service Transfers	\$220,000	\$50,000	-77.27%
Misc. Revenues	\$395,697	\$294,495	-25.58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$21,385,989</b>	<b>\$21,381,275</b>	<b>-0.02%</b>

### Expenditure Summary



### Revenue Summary





*MHMS students competed against dozens of other area schools in this year's Odyssey of the Mind regional competition, creating skits and solving problems with creative solutions.*

## Poll Watchers Needed

### ***Are you interested in being a poll watcher for this year's school vote?***

The district is currently in need of poll watchers to work on Tuesday, May 19. Voting takes place from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Maple Hill High School gymnasium. If interested, please contact Schodack Central School District Clerk Liz Chipman at 281-2676.

## Voter Information

### **What am I voting on?**

A \$21,381,275 budget for the 2009-10 school year, a proposition to purchase three school buses, and candidates for the school board.

### **When and where is the vote?**

Tuesday, May 19 from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Maple Hill High School gymnasium.

### **Who is eligible to vote?**

Anyone who is a U.S. citizen, 18 years or older, and a resident of the Schodack Central School District for at least 30 days prior to the vote.

### **How can I vote by absentee ballot?**

Qualified district residents who are unable to go to the polls on May 19 can cast their votes by absentee ballot. For an application, call the district office at 732-2297. If the ballot is to be mailed, the application for the ballot must be received by May 12. If the ballot is to be delivered in person, the application must be received by May 18. All completed ballots must be received by the district clerk no later than 5 p.m. on May 19.

### **What if I have questions?**

For further information, please call the District Office at 732-2297 or submit questions on "Have You Heard?" on our school website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).

**Schodack Central School District**  
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Castleton-on-Hudson, NY 12033

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