

# Highlights

January 2009

Knowledge

Character

Value

## Inside this issue

- 2 From Page 1: A difficult budget year ahead
- 3 In Memoriam: Steven F. O'Shea
- 3 'Parent Portal' enters pilot phase
- 3 Attention parents of preschool age children
- 4 District using online technology to improve communication

## 2009-10 budget forecast

### A tough year ahead; community input needed

First of four community budget forums will be held on January 12

The grim economic news of recent months, along with the state's fiscal challenges, has district officials anticipating some difficult decisions in the months ahead as they seek to develop a budget for next year that meets the needs of students at a cost taxpayers can afford to support.

Under the budget Governor David Paterson proposed in December, the district would have to grapple with a significant state funding cut in 2009-10, including a more than \$2.2 million loss in anticipated aid. This figure is more than 9 percent of the district's total state aid package in the current year.

"School districts have limited options to make up for every dollar that is not derived from state aid — programmatic cuts

or property taxes," Superintendent Michael Tebbano said. "As always, we'll work to control costs wherever possible, but a reduction on this scale could force some very painful choices."

The Governor's proposal is now in the Legislature's hands; the state budget deadline is April 1, although the Governor is seeking an earlier budget adoption this year.

In recent years, the trend has been for state aid to increase to help offset rising school costs — many of which are mandated and beyond local control. If enacted, the Governor's proposal would leave the district facing

### Community Budget Forums

- ▼ January 12    ▼ February 2
- ▼ January 26    ▼ February 9

All forums will be held at 7 p.m. in the BCHS cafeteria.

the dual challenge of coping with a state aid loss at a time when the cost of running a school system continues to climb. The proposed budget also seeks to shift a portion of pre-school special education expenses on to school districts — costs that have been previously borne by the state and county governments.

"Our mission is to maintain a high quality program that meets the needs of every student while holding the line on taxes for our community," Dr. Tebbano said.

Continued on page 2

## District tops annual Business Review school rankings

Bethlehem Central placed No. 1 in the annual *Business Review* school rankings, published this past fall in the newspaper's September 26-October 2 edition. The rankings of all 85 school districts in the 11-country

Capital Region, are based on district performances on the New York State School Report Card for 2006-07.

"This honor is a credit to all of our faculty, staff and administrators who work tirelessly to move student achievement ahead, supporting all students and their needs," Superintendent Michael

Tebbano said. "And, it speaks highly of the community and the way it supports and values education for our children."

The same edition of the *Business Review* also features an article about the district under the headline, "**Bethlehem, spending less than state average per pupil, ranks No. 1.**"



## Community participation encouraged in upcoming budget forums

Continued from page 1

“Clearly a significant reduction in state aid or the addition of new mandated expenditures would render this task difficult.”

The district’s existing budget was carefully and conservatively crafted, meaning that areas to cut costs will not be easily identified.

“We have been carefully reviewing our budget so we are prepared to limit, to the fullest extent possible, the damage that any cuts will do to the core academic program,”

said Assistant Superintendent for Educational Programs Jody Monroe. “But, it’s difficult to imagine reducing spending on the order of what may be required without taking a hard look at areas that would affect the educational experience for students.”

“For this reason,” Dr. Tebbano added, “the community’s participation in the upcoming budget forums is essential in a year when budget priorities will help guide tough choices.”

“The Board of Education has been fully supportive of Dr. Tebbano’s efforts to communicate the fiscal challenges we face and to begin addressing them, even in advance of the adoption of the state budget,” Board of Education President James Lytle said. “We are looking forward to working with him and the community in ensuring that the district maintains its longstanding commitment to educational quality at a cost taxpayers can afford.”

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### COMMUNITY BUDGET FORUMS

The district approached the budget process differently this year than in recent years.

### Board of Education reaffirms commitment to full-day kindergarten in September 2009

Governor Paterson’s budget proposal includes “full-day conversion aid,” designed to help districts with the costs associated with starting a full-day kindergarten program. District residents — especially those approaching kindergarten age — should be looking forward to the full-day program next fall.

In June 2006, the Board of Education approved implementing the full-day program in September 2009, a commitment that Board members reaffirmed at their Dec. 17 meeting.

“In a year when state funding for education is decreasing, we are pleased to see that the Governor’s proposal includes the full-day kindergarten aid,” Board President James Lytle said. “We are, therefore, reaffirming that the district will make good on its promise to the community and begin the full-day program as scheduled, without imposing any undue burden on taxpayers in the coming budget.”

Budget presentations from various departments and programs have been held at Board of Education meetings beginning in September. The Citizens Budget Group process has been transitioned to four open budget forums that are meant to enlist the broader community in helping to guide budget decisions. The forums are also an effort to make sure the district provides as much information and answers as many questions as possible.

Results of a community survey about the budget forums, completed by more than 300 people, indicated a preference to hear about the academic program and areas of savings through presentations and question-and-answer sessions. Each forum will offer an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

The first of these forums will be held on Monday, Jan. 12, at 7 p.m. in the Bethlehem Central High School cafeteria. This forum will focus on answering the “frequently asked questions” raised in the budget survey. Subsequent forums (Jan. 26, Feb. 2 and Feb. 9) will include “School Budget Basics in 10 minutes,” a review of the state aid scenario, and look at certain budget areas and costs.

“It is my hope that the forums lead to two things: a greater sense on the district’s part of the community’s budget priorities, and a greater understanding on the community’s part about the district’s budget, what it accomplishes, and the pressures on it,” Dr. Tebbano said.

“We have consistently sought broad community involvement in key decisions affecting the Bethlehem Central School District,” Mr. Lytle added.

“From redistricting to the selection of a new superintendent to our budget process, we know that the decisions we make are better as a result of community input and participation.”

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### FISCAL CAUTION

Dr. Tebbano said he wants the community to understand that the district has been conservative and proactive in its fiscal approach.

For example, when the financial markets first showed signs of serious turmoil this fall, the district implemented a non-essential spending freeze, affecting areas such as hiring, equipment and supplies, conferences and professional development that would require substitute teachers, and field trips.

Dr. Tebbano said such a freeze was a precautionary measure designed to allow the district to maintain existing programs and services to the greatest extent possible in the event of a significant loss of state aid.

In addition, the district continues to investigate ways that it can build on cost effectiveness strategies in areas such as special education, transportation and energy.

## BC@Home

### Pilot phase of online home-school communications systems begins

This month the district begins piloting a Web-based tool that promises to strengthen communication between home and school by offering anytime online access to personalized information about a student's academic program and progress.

Parents received a letter in January with detailed instructions about how to register and log-in to the new system, known as *BC@Home*.

The program has the capability for teachers to post a class calendar, upcoming assignments and assignment grades, 5-week reports and report cards, and an assortment of study materials. However, in the pilot phase, parents of students in grades 6-12 can only expect that 5-week reports and report cards will be available through *BC@Home*. Elementary students will, at this time, receive report cards as they

have in the past.

Some teachers, both in grades 6-12 and at the elementary level, may make use immediately of the more advanced capabilities of the system.

"It is our hope that through the pilot phase, teachers, parents and students will familiarize themselves with *BC@Home* and explore what it has to offer," said Assistant Superintendent for Educational Programs Jody Monroe. "And, we'd like feedback from everyone so we can make sure it is as effective as possible when the system is used more broadly across the district in the future."

Superintendent Michael Tebbano noted that by having the expertise in-house to undertake such a project, the district saved money compared with purchasing a commercially available parent portal system, and is able to more easily customize the program to BC's needs.

## Attention parents of pre-school age children

*Have you registered your children who are younger than school age with the district? The district needs this "census" information to plan for the future.*

- If you have not registered your pre-school age child (any child who lives in the district and has not yet reached kindergarten age) with the district, please call Central Registrar Melissa Haas at 439-7481 or e-mail her at [haasmco@bcسد.neric.org](mailto:haasmco@bcسد.neric.org). **This information is essential to the district's long-range projections used in class configuration planning.**
- Children who will be entering kindergarten next year (September 2009) and have already registered with the district should receive an initial kindergarten enrollment packet this month. (If you do not receive this by the end of January, please call the Registrar's Office). If you have not previously made the Registrar's Office aware of your incoming kindergarten student, please contact the registrar immediately via the phone number or e-mail address above.

## In memoriam

### Steven F. O'Shea, 1955-2008

The district lost a steady leader, a superb financial steward, and a friend with an infectious smile on Oct. 23, 2008, when Assistant Superintendent for Business Steven O'Shea died after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Mr. O'Shea had been with the district since 1997, providing leadership during a time of great growth and

transformation.

"Anyone who knew Steve knows that the district is not the same without him," Dr. Tebbano said. "Steve was an incredibly committed and talented guardian of the community's tax dollars. His sense of humor, calm presence, leadership and knowledge of school finance are all greatly missed."

The official appointment of the district's next top business official is expected in early January. Please visit <http://bcسد.k12.ny.us> for more information about this appointment.



Steve O'Shea



## Communicating in a digital age

### Looking for district information? Have you checked your e-mail or our Web site?

*BC@Home* (see story, page 3) is just one example of an area where the district believes it can best meet the needs of parents, students and the community by using the World Wide Web — and eventually save money as a result of reduced printing, postage and paper products.

There are others: Beginning this month, district schools will start debuting newly-designed online newsletters to replace paper newsletters. This past summer, first-year Superintendent Michael Tebbano established a page on the Web site where he writes regular “Superintendent's Notes” on topics that have ranged from the issue of field trips to 21st Century Learning. The district's School News Notifier e-mail alert system (SNN) recently topped 3,000 total e-mail address of subscribers requesting electronic notifications for district and school news and emergency closings. And, community members can expect to follow along with the budget develop-

ment process — beginning with the community forum on Jan. 12 — with near-weekly dispatches on the district's Web site.

Community members are encouraged to also sign-up for the SNN system's e-mail notifications, particularly for “District News” at <https://snn.neric.org/bcsd/>.

Additionally, a new design for the district's Web site (<http://bcsd.k12.ny.us>)

is expected to debut as early as right before the opening of school next September.

“Using online means to communicate is about a few things,” explained Superintendent Michael Tebbano. “First, we want to make it as convenient as possible for people to get the information they

need, and we know they can access the Internet almost anytime. We also want to reduce the use of paper and ink whenever possible to control costs, and from an environmental standpoint. Finally, we want to get information to the people who need it as quickly as possible. An article on the Web site or a School News

Notifier e-mail message reaches the community faster than a letter or publication sent via mail.”



The newly designed “BC High Flyer” electronic newsletter, which will debut this winter.

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