

the
great
plains

Shenendehowa

Central Schools

Budget challenge:

Staying focused on student success and achievement

If the district were to move the current budget forward there would be an \$8.2 million increase in spending. **THIS IS NOT BEING PROPOSED.** In times when people all around this area are tightening their belts, so must we.

What are the major contributing factors to the spending increase? The district's contribution for the teacher and employee retirement systems is projected to increase by \$2.9 million. Drug, dental and health premiums are expected to increase by \$3 million. Contractual salary increases are projected at \$1.9 million.

Revenue shortfall

It is also important to note that the governor and legislators are all talking about instituting a tax cap for school budgets. A 2% tax cap would only allow the district to increase spending by \$2 million, leaving a \$6.2 million gap. As you can see above, that doesn't even cover the increase cost of pension payments.

In the past, the district benefited from a growing tax base. This helped to offset increasing costs or decreasing state aid. That is no longer the case. Looking at a trend analysis of property valuations for the past three years, the growth of taxable assessed value has decreased from 5.67% to 1.17%.

Furthermore, revenue from state aid is expected to

...continued on page 3

21st century progress:

Starts with the curriculum

Shenendehowa has a long tradition of producing high performing students as you will see by the article on page 4. Yet good can never be good enough when talking about preparing students for the 21st century.

In January the NYS Board of Regents approved additions to the Common Core Standards for English language arts and literacy as well as mathematics.

The good news for Shenendehowa students is that the transition to these new standards will be seamless because the district's standards are already at a high level.

"The district may have to tweak some things but it is by no means a major overhaul," said Jill Bush, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, learning and instruction. "However, at Shen, our commitment to excellence has always meant reaching higher than the standards."

This year, there are many initiatives underway to do just that.

The current program of studies for middle school and high school students is under a major review to better align with college and career readiness standards and 21st century skills. Every course will be reviewed using a "curriculum lens," a tool that is used to evaluate the content based on documented evidence whether or not the course is in line with certain standards. For example: every course should provide students a global perspective; use curricula materials that help students evaluate information across a range of media and recognize how to use it effectively; require students to investigate challenging issues using real world problems; use educational technologies as an integral part of the instruction; and use assessment data to support improvements in student learning.

For 21st century skills, you need 21st century tools

Despite three years of budget shortfalls, the district continues to invest in learning technologies. The district

...continued on page 3

Dr. L. Oliver Robinson on the Tax Cap:

Localities should be allowed the opportunity to present a budget to voters, that is sound and responsible, not one that is arbitrarily fixed. The imposition of a tax cap is not only detrimental to the sustainability and viability of education across the state; it is a denial of a fundamental democratic right, the ability to vote.

Solar Panels

Environment-friendly cost savers

Who thought thousands of square feet of flat roofs would be such an asset?

Last spring, the district received a federal stimulus grant for \$243,525 from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to install solar panels on the roof at the high school.

The 50 kilowatt solar array consisting of 280 panels was mounted on the roof of the auditorium at High School East and is expected to produce up to 60,000 kilowatt hours per year saving the district \$9,000 annually. The district plans to use the solar photo voltaic array as an educational tool as well.

"This is the first significant step towards alternate energy sources, as a way to maximize emerging technologies and contain utility costs, while at the same time being environmentally friendly," said Superintendent Oliver Robinson.



Karigon kindergartners had a visit from the Scotia-Glenville Children's Museum and their program "They Lived Along the Mohawk," culmination their study of Native Americans.

Co-teaching

Benefits all students

Why are there two teachers in my child's classroom? People are starting to notice this and want to know what is going on.

Co-teaching, as it is called, is the district's new model for educating students with special needs in a more inclusive environment. The classroom teacher is a content specialist. In other words, is the expert in a math, English, etc. and knows the essential information that students need to learn.

The second teacher is typically a process specialist (i.e., a special education teacher). That teacher focuses on how students learn. For example: some student rely on auditory (voice/sound) methods of instruction while others are more visual learners.

Co-teaching allows for smaller groupings and varied teaching approaches.

"This model is a win-win for all students in the classroom," says Michele Mylod, director of student services. "Students with special needs have access to the regular curriculum and other students have access to additional support from another certified staff member."

Shen goes greener

with single stream recycling



In November, Shenendehowa began the "Single Stream Recycling" program in partnership with County Waste. This program will bring about two major changes. First is that the amount of trash the district disposes will be greatly reduced and the carbon foot print will then be less of an impact on the earth. Second, the process is much simpler since 90% of what is now disposed can be recycled including Styrofoam lunch trays thanks to a new separation facility that was just completed this year at the Port of Albany.

Shen will be practicing SSR in every building. So children coming up through the grade levels will continue to be exposed to the same process and that should lessen the confusion over time. All classrooms, copy rooms and faculty rooms have been outfitted with small plastic or cardboard boxes about the same size as a copy paper box with labels stating SSR recycling and showing the list of acceptable and non-acceptable items. All cafeterias have been outfitted with larger flip top rolling totes that are clearly labeled and posters on the walls explaining items what can and can not be placed within.

The Impact of Recycling:

According to data
from the U.S.
Environmental

Protection Agency
(EPA), Americans

generated about

250 million tons of
trash in 2008 but

only recycled or
composted 33.2

percent of that

waste. So recycling is

making a difference,

but it's clear we could

be doing more.



Creation Station Challenge

Acadia grade 8 students in Randy Symonds technology class were challenged to create an original design for a note dispensing unit for their home or locker. Each student was responsible for: research, original design, part development, 3D modeling, material selection, assembly, manufacturing, finish, and self evaluation.

In the 3D modeling stage students used the computer program Autodesk Inventor. Autodesk Inventor is a very detailed program that creates three dimensional modeling and assists project development.

PAGE
3

Budget Challenge, continued from page 1.....

decrease or, best-case-scenario, remain flat.

What is being done?

To reduce spending the district is:

- assertively pursuing negotiated concessions with employee bargaining groups;
- hoping to mitigate staff reductions through retirements;
- evaluating efficient use of classified staff, assignment of instructional staff, and responsibilities of administrative personnel;
- restructuring provision of health and drug benefits Advantages of self-funding drug plans;
- continuing to focus on the preserving core programs while looking at the feasibility or viability of non-mandated programs; and
- looking for cost savings through the redesign of schedules at the middle and high schools and course/program consolidations.

“It is important that we don’t lose site of the fact that Shen made \$4 million dollars in reductions from the roll over budget for 2010-11 and \$4.4 million was cut from the 2009-10 roll over budget,” says Superintendent Dr. L. Oliver Robinson

In fact, in two years, budget spending has only increased by 1.12%.

“We will compromise on the means but not lose focus on the end goal and that is student success and achievement at all levels,” Robinson said.

Over the next two months, the district administration will be reviewing the budget and presenting information as it becomes available to the board of education at public meetings scheduled on Tuesday nights at 7 p.m. in the Gowana Library. Those who would like to learn more can attend these meetings and will find the schedule at www.shenet.org.

21st century progress, continued from page 1.....

invested in a digital video conferencing system that allows students to participate in virtual field trips and/or talk to people anywhere in the world. Through the use of this technology an entire class can tour various museums and historical sites and interact with an instructor at the other location.

At the high school, health teacher Nicole Holehan incorporated the essential content for the health curriculum into a blending class instruction with online independent study. She worked with 45 students during a six-week session this summer providing Shen students with the first-ever online experience. The district is considering options to expand this model. A committee is working with BOCES to review NYS guidelines for on-line instruction, credit recovery options (providing a student who has not successfully completed a course to receive instruction on-line to earn credit) and the potential for expanding advanced placement course opportunities.

The district has also been making progress in its quest to outfit classrooms with presentation stations including computers with projectors and interactive whiteboards (IWBs). By June 2011, there should be approximately 445 projectors and 120 IWBs.

IWBs have many uses. They allow teachers to:

- create videos to help teach (i.e. how to create Powerpoint presentations or navigate the Internet);
- create lessons that can be used by students when they are absent;
- help students create electronic portfolios including samples of their work with narration; and
- create digital storytelling or graphic novels.

Despite budget concerns, the commitment to improving learning through the use of 21st century technology remains a top priority.

Evaluating excellence...

Shen's dashboard used to track progress

How can you know where you are going if you don't know where you've been? The district has invested funds over the years to better track student progress and to be more transparent about results to the community. On the Web site is what we refer to as "the Dashboard." It is a snapshot of student progress on many different fronts. Listed below is an "executive summary" of the more recent version of the dashboard.

Elementary/Middle School

On the NYS science and social studies exams, the district's passing rates remain consistent. Note: this was the last administration of the social studies exam due to state budget cuts.

On the NYS math and English language arts exams the district saw a decrease of between 15% and 20% in all grade levels on both exams.

This summer, the NYS Education Department (SED) raised the scores students must earn in order to be considered "proficient" in a subject for elementary and middle school math and ELA exams.

Like many districts across the state, although the average scores earned by Shen students on these exams were roughly the same as last year there was a dip in the percentage of students considered at or above grade level because of the new standards.

'Cut scores,' as they are called by SED, are used to determine whether students are achieving at high enough levels. In the past, students had to score a 650 on the exams to score a level 3. Now, for example, a student taking the grade 6 math exam needs to score a 674 to be a level 3.

High School

- 96% of the class of 2010 graduated with a Regents diploma.
 - 59% graduated with an advanced Regents diploma.
 - The drop out rate has remained consistent at 1% for regular education and 3% for students with special needs.
 - The percentage of students scoring a 3, 4 or 5 on Advanced Placement exams has been increasing over the past three years and is at 81%.
 - Student scores on the ACT and the SAT math and writing have been steadily increasing over the past three years. ACT is 25.1, SAT math is 565 and writing is 528. The SAT reading is consistent with last year at 538. All are significantly above state and national averages.
- The passing rate on the Regents exams is:
- English is higher than in past years at 98%;
 - the math exams are consistent with past years at 93-96%;
 - the global studies is down from last year at 83%, however U.S. History is up from last year at 95%;
 - living environment remains consistent at 97%; earth science saw a big increase to 92%; chemistry has increased for the past three years to 95%; physics saw a decrease from last year to 86%; and
 - foreign language has remained consistent with past years at 97-100%.