



# The Wallingford-Swarthmore District Newsletter

A publication of the Wallingford-Swarthmore Public Schools

March 2012

## WSSD Board Confronts Harsher Realities, In 2012-13 Budget and Beyond

The Wallingford-Swarthmore School Board aims to continue the recent trend of minimal annual increases in District property taxes, adopting a preliminary balanced budget for 2012-13 which calls for a 2% increase in income and expenditures. This is the second lowest school tax increase in seven years. However, with uncertainties surrounding future state funding and mandated increases in pension costs over coming years, WSSD administrators and board members are calling for consideration of all prospects for cost reduction and revenue enhancement.

“We need to think in terms both of increasing revenue and controlling operating costs as we confront a potential budget gap,” said Dr. Lisa Palmer, Business Manager for WSSD. “The budget reflects the overarching goal of balancing our commitment to excellence with fiscal restraint, so as to protect the long-term financial stability of the District. We need to sustain the quality and range of educational and co-curricular programs, and we need to complete our school renovation projects on time and within budget.”

The proposed 2.0% local tax increase in the 2012-2013 budget is slightly above the 1.7% Act 1 Index set by the State. An increase above the index might have triggered a budget referendum, but the district is taking advantage of an allowed budget exception keyed to the sharp rise in the District’s required contribution to the Public School Employees’ Retirement System (PSERS) pension fund. WSSD’s mandatory PSERS contribution in 2012-13 will



*Dr. Lisa Palmer, WSSD Business Manager*

increase nearly 43% from the previous budget year, to a total of nearly \$4 million.

“We were allowed to exceed the index by nearly another 1% under the budget exception for PSERS, but we chose to keep it to a minimum because we want to lessen the impact on the taxpayer,” Dr. Palmer said. For a property assessed at the District median of \$177,000, school taxes would rise by \$135 under the budget for the 2012-2013 school year.

With attention to taxpayer concerns, WSSD departments were directed to submit “flat” budgets for the coming school year, and several staff positions are

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# A Growing Partnership

Strath Haven High School has a long tradition of building bridges between students at SHHS and city schools, across differences in curricula, school facilities and communities. Haven's most recent partnership links SHHS with the Science Leadership Academy (SLA) in Center City Philadelphia.

The schools both boast a wealth of talented and motivated students. Beginning in fall 2010, about 25 Strath Haven and SLA students from grades 9-12 formed a partnership, visiting each other's schools and strategizing a project that can harness their joint energies.

Superintendent Rich Noonan had visited SLA prior to his tenure with Wallingford-Swarthmore School District, and was impressed with the caliber of its students, faculty and approach. "SLA uses the city as a school, and students have internship opportunities throughout the year," Noonan says. "All SLA's classes are run seminar-style, and the tools for grading student performance are thoughtful and different from the traditional approach."

Strath Haven senior Chris Williams says: "The schools seemed so different. Our facilities are more expansive, but SLA has the culture of the city. All their curriculum is set up in a research and exploration model, with projects that are based on research and scientific method, even the humanities courses."

Katy Santa Maria, a senior at Strath Haven, says: "Almost immediately,



*SHHS senior Phil Bergman (right) met recently with Science Leadership Academy students at a leadership training session on the Penn campus.*

we decided that continuing communication was important, so we established a Facebook group for kids from both schools. Williams adds: "Facebook has been a really good way to make friends and see what they're up to. We see a different way of life and a different type of kids, but also our similarities."

The two schools most recently met in February at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Educational Leadership for a leadership training session. Students spent the day together with facilitators from Penn's Civic House and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, exploring the nature of leadership and techniques for developing their own leadership abilities.

The session continued to build the working relationship among the group – a good thing, for work is what they will be doing in their next meeting this April, when the collaborative will gather at Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia for an agricultural service day. Three acres of the historic property have been given over for vegetable gardening as part of the Netter Center's Urban Nutrition Initiative (UNI), which is designed to address poor nutrition and physical health among families in the city. The plot will be a working garden as well as a center for nutrition education, providing hands-on experiences for students to grow, cook, consume and sell healthy foods.

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# Foundation Awards First Grants

By Frannie Reilly, Foundation President

The Foundation for Wallingford-Swarthmore Schools is thrilled to have completed its first cycle of teacher grants. The caliber of the applications was impressive, and we were inspired by the diversity of the ideas, the passion and commitment of the staff and the range of the students who will benefit from these grants. The Grants Committee received 29 grant applications spanning every school and almost every area of the curriculum. After much consideration, the Grants Committee awarded 14 grants to teachers in all six schools of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District.

The Foundation appreciates the enthusiasm and innovation reflected in teachers' projects submitted, and our only regret is that we are not able to award funding to all of the applicants. We look forward to the next cycle of grants for the 2012-2013 school year. We also look forward to developing a better understanding of the needs of the teachers across the district to help us focus on larger funding initiatives.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation; our mission is to support innovation and excellence in the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District, and to enhance the quality of public education by engaging the support and energies of educators, parents, students, alumni and the greater community. The Foundation raises funds with various activities and events throughout the year. If you would like to learn more about the grants and the Foundation, and get involved as a supporter or a member, please visit our website at <http://supportwssd.org/>



## A Growing Partnership (continued from previous page)

Strath Haven sophomore Nicole Graves recalls that "When we first discussed an 'environmental project' I thought it would be a park cleanup or a mural, but when we heard about the UNI, I got really interested. We'll be helping to educate kids on healthy eating, and the garden will raise and sell vegetables to help fund more projects at other schools."

When the students in the Science Learning program roll up their sleeves, their work will bear fruit for the UNI, and continue to nourish the relationships that have grown up among these young leaders. Katy Santa Maria concludes: "Meeting students my age who learn in a completely different environment has really opened my eyes. I admire their focus. We've met three times, and I would call at least three SLA kids my friends."



## FWSS Grants for 2012

**The Kids Place:** \$650 for "Create a Book"; Tara Irely, Lead teacher

**Swarthmore-Rutledge School:** \$660 for iPad and apps; Renee Strehle and Liz Corson, 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers

**SRS:** \$390 for Kindles and downloads; Kimberly Aronovitz, Learning Support specialist

**Nether Providence Elementary:** \$99 for "Study Skills and Strategies" program; Karen Hirt, Special Ed. teacher

**NPE, WES and SRS:** \$1,200 for Wii gaming; Don Buscaglia, Phys. Ed. teacher

**Wallingford Elementary School:** \$500 for Pollock mural project; Sarah Ryan, Art teacher

**WES:** \$600 for "All Are Authors"; Jennifer Hole, 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, and Jeannette Kaplan, 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

**WES, NPE and SRS:** \$1,638 for six Lego Mindstorm Robotics kits; Enrichment teachers Debbie Wile, WES, Bernadette Kutufaris, NPE and Eric McElroy, SRS

**Strath Haven Middle School:** \$1,180 for 32 SMART Response XE portable devices; Brian Fili, Math teacher

**SHMS:** \$273 for ten Logitech microphone headsets; Deanna Czyszczon-McGovern, Foreign Language teacher

**SHMS:** \$400 for a classroom set of I Will Never Be Fourteen Years Old; Chris Kimball-Kelly, French teacher, and Wendy Laird, Social Studies teacher

**Strath Haven High School:** \$634 for design and construction of a Panther outdoor gathering place; Page Brown, Technology & Engineering teacher

**SHHS:** \$200 for "Strong GALS" leadership program; Laurie Bruch, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and Maria Neeson, Special Education teacher

**SHHS:** \$633 for three Kindles for CP English instruction; English teachers Jeanne Pietrzak (11<sup>th</sup> grade), Tabitha Sabatino (9<sup>th</sup> grade) and Miriam Drew (10<sup>th</sup> grade)

**SHHS:** \$306 for three Finch programmable robots; Kathleen McLead, Computer Science teacher

## High School Musical Draws Raves

Strath Haven High School's annual musical production of "Godspell" was an epic, involving a cast of more than 40 students, with a technical staff more than 60 strong.

Director and SHHS theater teacher John Shankweiler was challenged by an abundance of talent in tryouts this year. "I do the casting, and I do not choose the show unless I feel there are two or three people who can fill the demands of each role. Godspell is usually done with just ten actors, but even adding a large on-stage company, this year I had to cut approximately 20 students."

Shankweiler says there was some resistance to the choice of "Godspell", whose story line chiefly consists of New Testament parables, but the play grew on the students as they participated in development and rehearsals. Eleven soloists handled the show's 18 songs, which are accessible but complicated. "The songs, especially the high



parts, are a challenge," said senior Gib Hartley, who played the lead in his final musical during his four years at SHHS. "It all came together because Shank and Allison [Emmerich, assistant director] are great directors."

Hartley's Jesus is a gentle figure in a tumultuous modern setting inspired by the Occupy movement. Shankweiler said "The show is about the breakdown of community; for me Occupy represented that and allowed the piece to feel more in the present. And as great medieval frescos placed sacred stories in the actual landscape and townscape of the church in which they were painted, our set evokes Philadelphia."

Senior Ryan Edwards headed the lighting crew for Godspell. Edwards started in theatre in middle school. "When I got to SHHS, I

saw there was no limit to what I could do. Everything was new. And this year, Mr. Shankweiler told me 'Use your imagination and ability.' We start with a lighting design by James Murphy of Swarthmore College, but the scheme changes through rehearsals as you get a feeling for what is working."

Under head Jon Hardy, the stage crew created a set with great character and versatility, adjusted and maintained it, then had to tear it down, remove it and repaint the stage in the two days following the last performance. Motivation and inspiration may have come from a glimpse of the state of the art, Hardy said: "Mr. Shankweiler recently took us, cast and crew, to New York to see how a Broadway crew performed and produced Godspell. The experience was amazing!"



Photos by Renee Tallman



## Facing Harsher Budget Realities

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being reorganized or eliminated to contain costs. Besides increased PSERS contributions, other areas of the budget increased, including salary increases under collective bargaining agreements, insurance costs, and debt service for the Nether Providence Elementary School project.

The proposed 2012-13 budget of just over \$67 million will be 80% funded by local taxes, 17% by state contributions, and less than 1% by federal funds. The remaining 2.3% of the revenue budget (\$1,564,000) will be drawn from the budgetary reserve (although an offsetting contribution will be made to the fund during the year.)

### Working to Defuse Pension Time Bomb

The biggest budget concern for the District going forward is the escalation of costs associated with the pension fund which benefits Pennsylvania public school employees.

WSSD is currently projecting that PSERS employer contribution rates will increase annually for the foreseeable future, more than doubling to 26% by 2017.

“We don’t want to dramatically increase class sizes or eliminate programs. However, the continuing uncertainty of state funding and the scheduled escalation in pension costs forces the district to increasingly draw from its fund balance – in effect, our savings account -- in order to balance the budget,” said WSSD Superintendent Rich Noonan. “Continuing to use these funds for several more years will exhaust that fund balance; many of our peer districts are already nearing that point. If and when that occurs, we’ll either have to eliminate various programs, or ask the community to support a supplementary budget referendum. Whichever option the School Board pursues will involve extensive public dialogue, outreach and education of community members.”



*Strath Haven Middle School Math Social Studies teacher Dan Shaffer (left), principal George King (right), students Daron Russell (#12) and Matt Restrepo (#11) geared up for the annual SHMS teachers vs. students basketball game on February 16. Who won? Peter’s Place, whose executive director Carrie Miluski (center) thanked the Haven community for raising more than \$2,100 on behalf of this resource for bereaved children and families.*

## School Board

### Administration

Dr. Richard Noonan,

*Superintendent of Schools*

Dr. Lisa Palmer, *Business Administrator*

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Mr. Vincent J. Marriott III, *President*

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## Haven Runners Sprint Home with State Titles

Running is all about timing – just ask Strath Haven boys' track coach Bob Jesson. "This is my best group ever, which is great timing, since I'm retiring this year after 21 years at Strath Haven," Jesson said. Haven runners tallied a string of remarkable performances during the 2011-12 indoor track season, culminating with a state championship at the PTFCA Indoor States.

Winning the States was a team effort, without a single event victory but with a strong effort across the board for the Haven boys. Chris Williams, Jordan Smith, James Griffin and Wellington Zaza finished third statewide in the 4 x 200 meter relay, and Williams, Taron Howie, Smith and Lincoln Daniel finished fourth in a 4 x 400 performance that clinched the title. Earlier, Dan Stewart, Jeff Seelaus, Dylan Butera and Jack Huemmler had finished third in the 4 x 800. Huemmler was third in the mile at 4:16.50; Williams (in 7.90 seconds) and Zaza (in 7.98) came second and fourth in the 60 meter high hurdles, and Zaza was second in the triple jump at 48 feet.

Strath Haven girls finished second in the state, narrowly missing a meet record in winning the 4 x 800 in 9:11.71, and running to a strong second place finish in the 4 x 400 in 3:56.78. Senior Hannah Grossman was third in the 1,600 meters in 4:59.52.

The PTFCA Indoor Track Carnival two weeks prior to the state Championships was a characteristically fine tuneup for the boys. Senior Chris Williams set meet records in winning the 60 yard high hurdles in 7.95 seconds and the pole vault at 15 feet, 9 inches. Williams also ran a leg for Haven in the 4 x 200 meter relay, which brought home another win in 1:32.98. The University of Washington recruit own the fastest high school time in the US this year in the high hurdles, tying the Strath Haven record at 7.87, and his vault of 15' 9" ranks ninth in the nation this year.

*Strath Haven's state champion boys track team with coaches Bob Jesson and Ed Baghdasarian.*

Zaza, a Liberian native who recently moved to Swarthmore from Upper Darby, posted several of PA's top ten times this season in the high hurdles, as well as two of the top six triple jumps. He has posted a time of 22.45 in the 200 meters.

On the same mid-February weekend as the indoor carnival, Strath Haven boys ran the Metropolitan 4 x 800 meters at the legendary Millrose Games in New York City, finishing third overall among an elite field in 7:54.31 – the fastest time of the year for a Pennsylvania team, and the tenth fastest in the US. Jesson and distance coach Edwin Baghdasarian were quick to point out that the girls' 800 relay team also set a PA best for the year (and fourth fastest US time) with a second place Metropolitan finish in 9:10.59.

The end of the indoor season is just a punctuation mark in Jesson's final stanza at Strath Haven, the coach says. "I'm really looking forward to seeing these sprinters and distance runners perform in the outdoor season."

