



## District Explores Multiple Paths to Efficiency

Current economic conditions, declining state aid and new property tax cap legislation have created unprecedented financial challenges for school districts across New York State. As yet, this trend toward fewer resources for education shows no signs of reversal. Schools are tasked with finding new ways to rein in costs or risk losing valuable programs for students. While Chatham Central School District has significantly reduced spending in recent years through a number of efficiency measures, more steps may be needed to preserve Chatham's educational program in the future.

"We are very thoughtfully and responsibly gathering information on all possible ways the District may gain efficiencies and control costs," explained Superintendent of Schools Cheryl Nuciforo.

During the 2011-2012 school year and beyond, the District will gather information in the following ways:

- **Enrollment projection** — Enrollment levels play a large role in shaping District expenditures. In order to better predict the number of students who will attend Chatham Central Schools, the District is undertaking an enrollment projection study.
- **Expanded transportation study** — The District continually reviews its transportation system to ensure students are bussed to and from school in as safe and cost efficient manner as possible. In 2010-11, this study allowed transportation services to be consolidated, with the elimination of two bus runs. This year, the study will be expanded to include a review of transportation limits (such as acceptable walking distances) set by the district, as well as look into what savings "carpooling" with other districts might provide for certain out-of-district bus runs.
- **Facilities study** — This fall, the District is contracting with Questar III BOCES to conduct an operational study of all District facilities to determine the feasibility of consolidating the District from three school buildings into two. Once the study is completed, the District will host community forums to discuss the findings of the study and determine if consolidation is the best course of action for our educational program.
- **Functional consolidation/merger study grant** — Chatham, together with the New Lebanon Central School District, will apply for a grant to fund a joint study to determine what possible benefits or drawbacks would exist if the two districts were to share services, functionally consolidate certain operations, or merge into a single district.
- **Regional services** — Chatham Board of Education members and school officials have been participating in Questar III BOCES workshops to explore the possibility of savings through increased regional services and cost sharing initiatives among multiple school districts.
- **State aid study** — How District expenditures are reported plays an important role in determining the level of state aid Chatham receives. To ensure the District receives the maximum level of reimbursement it is entitled to and boost revenue, the District has contracted Management Advisory Group of N.Y., Inc. to provide a detailed examination of the District's expense reporting practices.

"By taking a look now at every option available for containing costs, we will have that information available to us if, in the future, the District needs to look at these kind of measures as a way to preserve opportunities for students," said Nuciforo.

# Understanding the NYS Property Tax Cap

In June of 2011, New York State passed legislation that changed how school districts develop their tax levies.

The legislation has been referred to as a “2 percent tax cap,” but the law itself does not limit the amount that a district may increase taxes, nor does it limit the amount that an individual’s property tax bill may go up. What the law does do is set a higher threshold of voter approval for school budgets that carry a tax levy increase above the “cap.” That “cap,” known as the “tax levy limit,” will be determined each fiscal year by individual school districts according to a formula outlined in the new legislation.

Under the law, if a budget carries a tax levy increase above the “cap,” it must be approved by a supermajority (60 percent) of voters. If the budget carries a tax levy increase within the “cap,” a simple majority (50 percent) is needed for the budget to pass.

Exactly how the “tax levy limit” will be calculated requires more clarification from the state, but it is currently understood that the formula takes into account eight different economic factors, of which the two percent number (or rate of inflation, whichever is less) is only one. Also, certain costs (i.e. insurance and pension premiums) are exempt under the legislation, requiring spending increases in these areas to be added on top of the “tax levy limit” to determine the actual tax levy voters will be asked to approve.

As a result, many school districts may propose tax levy increases that are above 2 percent yet still be within the limits of the “cap.”

Also under the new law, if a budget is put up for a vote twice and rejected both times, the District must adopt a contingency budget that carries no increase to the tax levy over the prior year’s tax levy.

In recent years, NY schools have faced mandate-driven cost increases outside of their control while at the same time schools have lost significant revenue due to cuts in state aid. The new legislation neither provides significant mandate relief nor facilitates any significant systemic changes to help school districts rein in costs.

Over the last two years, the Chatham Central School District has implemented efficiency measures that have reduced spending by 4.3 million dollars without adversely affecting opportunities for students. However, the added fiscal constraints of the property tax cap law, coupled with the current economic climate, bring new challenges to the District’s goal of maintaining the right balance between the preservation and improvement of our educational program and what our community is willing to support.

As with any new and complex legislation, understanding of the tax cap legislation is evolving and the District will keep you informed as more information becomes available. Also, you will be able to find information about the property tax cap on the District website at [www.chathamcentralschools.com](http://www.chathamcentralschools.com).

## Studying Behavior and the Human Mind

Studying psychology at Chatham High School is more than textbooks and lectures; students undertake a series of hands-on experiments designed to help them understand the science and methodology behind the study of human behavior.

A recent class project tasked the students with gathering social data using the scientific method. Working in groups, students first developed a problem based on personal observations made in their everyday lives. Once students decided on a testable hypothesis, they then developed a procedure to test their theory.

“There is a lot of responsibility placed on the student in this project,” explained the class’s teacher, Ashley Keegan. “The students must develop an idea about a certain behavior and then go out and either prove or disprove it.”



As part of the experiment, the groups were tasked with identifying both independent and controlled variables in their tests, as well as the steps and materials they would use. All tests had to be conducted within the school during regular hours.

“I really like hands-on projects like this. They really help me to understand what we are studying,” said high school student Amanda Cuerbo. Her group set out to test the age old theory that male students would often help a female student who dropped her books.

Once each group collected enough data to accept or reject their hypothesis, they worked together to analyze the results of the tests and prove their hypothesis either true or false. The groups created graphs, charts or illustrations to support their assessment of the data. Finally, each group was responsible for presenting their experiment to the class and publishing their findings in a paper depicting the entire experiment.

“We proved chivalry is dead,” said Amanda about her group’s findings. “Of all the times we dropped our books, almost nobody stopped to help.”

“The great thing about psychology is that you can get into projects like this. It’s an elective that is one step away from college, so it gives students that sense of independence they would experience in college,” said Keegan. She added that five students in the class are actually earning college credit for their work through a partnership with Columbia-Greene Community College.

As the semester progresses, the class will experiment with advertising, develop personality profiles, and study dreams.

# 21st Century Learning

At Chatham, 21st century instruction refers to the skills, technologies and insights that are being used to shape our educational program and better prepare students to meet the challenges they will face.

The drive to better prepare Chatham students for college and career readiness in today's world began with conversations with experts from the education and business communities. The District tasked a committee of administrators, staff, parents and students to define what skills students would need to be successful in the 21st Century. These skills were developed into an instructional model, which was adopted by the Board of Education in June 2011.

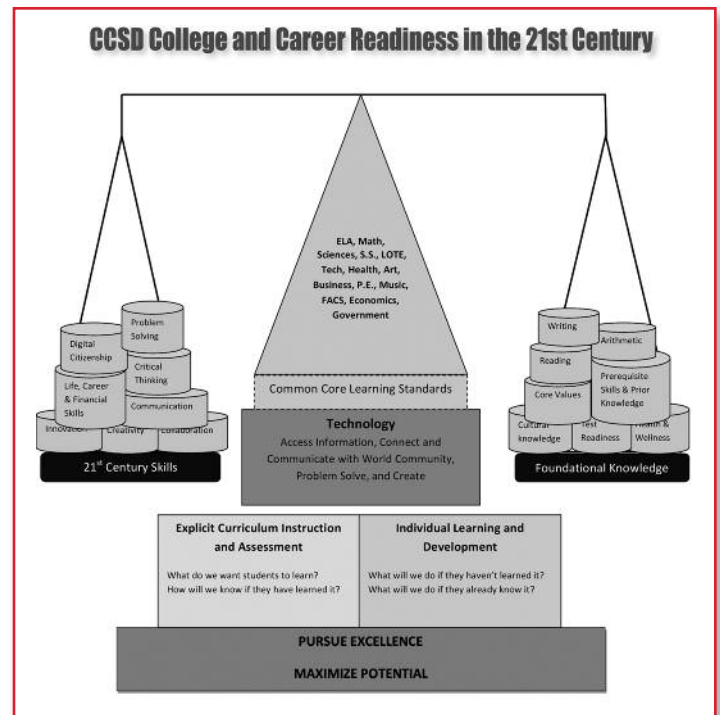
The new instructional model is now being used to shape the delivery of education at Chatham. Over time, these initiatives may appear as new programs, integration of new technology into the classroom, or teachers using different approaches to instruction.

"Today's world is different, what children see and know is different. We are finding ways to put a new spin on our lessons and relate them to our students," said second grade teacher Lindsay Frament.

As part of the second grade's upcoming nutrition program, Frament and other second grade teachers plan to have students gather their own data on different foods, interview food service staff, and create their own interactive nutrition posters online. In this way, the lesson not only hits on life skills like healthy eating, but also creativity, communication, technology and problem solving skills.

"It gives students a role in their learning and builds skills they need," explained Frament.

"This is going to give students more involvement and interaction," said CHS social studies teacher Mark Pearson, who is busy developing new lesson plans of his own based on the 21st



Century model. For the AP U.S. History students he teaches, Pearson plans to integrate performance based lessons into the class, having students step into the shoes of important figures from the past and act out important events. "By enacting it, they are going to own the history. They are not just memorizing dates and facts, they are experiencing it."

The District's instructional model for College and Career Readiness in the 21st Century is shown here (a full-sized version is available at [www.chathamcentralschools.com](http://www.chathamcentralschools.com)). This model is being used as a guide for the development of benchmarks and implementation of educational programs that promote excellence and prepare students for success in the 21st century.



# UNSUNG HEROES:



Volunteers are an integral part of Chatham’s extracurricular athletic program. Much of the program’s success can be credited to the time and commitment of our coaches, many of whom volunteer their time and expertise.

“Volunteer coaches provide a valuable service to our athletes and our program,” explained Chatham athletic director Scott Steltz. “They share coaching duties with our head coaches, bring new ideas and drills to the teams, and are another person for our athletes to communicate with. A lot of these coaches have come up through the ranks of the local youth programs, so they know a lot about our athletes and their talents.”

Volunteering as a coach is a lot more than just showing up for practices and games. Take girls’ varsity soccer assistant coach Bruce Otto for example; between daily practices, games, research online and after hours strategy sessions on the phone with head coach David Chrapowitzky, Otto estimates he spends “four or five hours every day” as a coach during the season.

Time commitment aside, Otto brings a wealth of experience and expertise to his team, having played high-level soccer for the University of Connecticut and as a semi-pro. He is quick to talk strategy, about how to analyze other teams and exploit their weaknesses, about how he uses his past experiences with the game to help Chatham players boost their confidence and performance.

“There is real satisfaction in seeing them develop as athletes,” said Otto.

Otto is by no means alone when it comes to commitment or expertise. A high level of skill, leadership and dedication is common among the coaches.

“It can be time consuming, but it is what we love to do,” explained Suzanne Wightman. Suzanne and her husband Steve have been a powerful presence in the development of Chatham’s track and cross country programs. The couple is passionate about track and lifelong fitness skills, so much so their backyard is a virtual training center, complete with its own pole vault pit.

# VOLUNTEER COACHES



## 2011 Volunteer Coaches:

Tim Clifford – *soccer, JV volleyball*  
James Colon – *boys' varsity basketball*  
Dan Doyle – *softball and baseball*  
Dan Gregg – *girls' basketball and softball*  
Brandon Pitcher – *boys varsity baseball*  
Bruce Otto – *girls' varsity soccer*  
Lindsey Reis – *girls' varsity soccer*  
Dave Sirani – *baseball*  
Kevin Skype – *JV baseball*  
Chris Vanderbeck – *baseball*  
Glen Wheeler – *girls' JV soccer*  
Tim Wheeler – *team manager for baseball, football, basketball*  
Dan Williams – *modified boys' basketball*  
Steve Wightman – *cross country, indoor track, outdoor track*  
Suzanne Wightman – *cross country, indoor track, outdoor track*

The Wightmans have their coaching down to a science, collecting and utilizing heaps of statistical data to assess their athletes, size up the competition and plan successful meets. Strong organizational skills are a must when managing teams of over one-hundred athletes, but being a successful coach also means building trust and being a leader with character.

“We ask our athletes to do hard things,” explained Steve Wightman. “They need to know you have their best interest in mind, or they are not going to respond to you.”

When not on the field or poring over data, Steve is busy innovating ways to help his athletes improve and excel, developing training exercises and even building special equipment to address an athlete's specific challenges.

“We are all out here for the same reason, we love working with the kids and we love to coach,” added girls' junior varsity soccer assistant coach Glen Wheeler. “I work with a great group of kids, they are dedicated and every one of them works hard. That makes you want to work harder and be a better coach.”

All Chatham coaches must undergo a stringent certification process before they are eligible to work with athletes, and volunteers are no exception. A coach must be fingerprinted, maintain a coaching certification, as well as certifications in the use of first-aid, CPR and automatic emergency defibrillators. Coaches must also attend mandatory preseason meetings covering coaching responsibilities and extracurricular policies, selection/classification guidelines, safety, and good communication practices.

“They are a committed group of individuals and are role models for our kids,” added Steltz. “We stress the value of community service at the High School and it sets a good example for our students to see adults from the community who are volunteers and show up every day.”

For the countless contributions they make to our athletic program, Chatham Central School District would like to recognize our volunteer coaches.

# Focusing on Math, Singapore Style

The instructional method that propelled Singapore's students to the top of the world in math performance is now part of Chatham's curriculum. This year, a Singapore based math series known as "Math in Focus" is being rolled out in the Mary E. Dardess Elementary School and Chatham Middle School.

"We are very optimistic about how this program will help our students learn math," said Kristen Reno, principal at Mary E. Dardess. Reno and a committee of teachers from M.E.D. and the Middle School spearheaded the move to find a math curriculum that better met their students' needs.

The Singapore method uses exceptionally clear and simple explanations to emphasize problem solving and model drawing. Focus is placed on a small number of fundamental concepts, allowing lessons to be presented in greater detail. Lessons are based on a progression from concrete experience to a pictorial stage and finally to the abstract level or algorithm.

This method differs from the traditional "spiraling approach" where a broad number of concepts are first introduced and then circled back to later in the curriculum.

"It's less breadth and more depth" explained Chatham Middle School sixth grade teacher Irmentrud Amos, who, like Reno, was part of the committee that recommended Math in Focus for Chatham. "More time is spent on fewer topics, so students can gain a deeper understanding of the key concepts behind each lesson."

In Math in Focus, students learn each concept to the mastery level and move on to the next, with each lesson building upon the last in a logical progression.

"Since it works from the concrete to the visual to the abstract, it provides students with the steps to get to the answer," added Middle School special education teacher Kristine Mackowski. Mackowski noted this differentiated approach lends itself well to a broad range of learning styles and abilities, and is very beneficial to students experiencing learning difficulties.

The K-8 curriculum also uses a common vocabulary and framework throughout, so lessons utilize similar language year to year and avoid significant repetition.

"Of all the programs we looked at, Math in Focus stood out," added Reno. "We recommended this program because it provides students with the skills they need, it matches Chatham's 21st Century learning goals, and it is totally in step with the new common core standards."

The Math in Focus program was adopted by the Board of

Education in June, 2011 and teaching staff received training specific to the new program prior to the start of the 2011-2012 school year. Kindergarten, first and second grades, as well as fifth and sixth grades began using the new curriculum this year, while grades three and four as well as grades seven and eight will begin in 2012-2013.



## District Addressing Needs of Students with Disabilities at CMS

The New York State Education Department has identified Chatham Middle School as a "school in need of improvement" based on state assessment results in English Language Arts for students with disabilities. Test scores for students at the middle school level indicated that the "students with disabilities" subgroup did not meet improvement benchmarks set by the state. Approximately 12 percent of students at Chatham Middle School are considered students with disabilities. Schools that do not show adequate yearly progress for two years in a row in the same subject, grade or subgroup are considered in need of improvement.

It should be noted that, in all other areas of assessment, students met state standards and Chatham Central School District remains a "district in good standing" according to the State Education Department.

Chatham Central School District utilizes such state assessments, as well as other data to identify and address areas of our educational program that need improvement. As a result, the District has already put in place measures to improve the progress all our students make, including those with disabilities.

"Chatham sets high standards for our students, and we are continually working to improve our academic program to ensure all students meet their full potential," said Superintendent of Schools Cheryl Nuciforo.

To close the achievement gap for students with disabilities, the District is:

- implementing teaching methods that allow staff to better address the different learning needs of all students
- working closely with a BOCES special education school improvement specialist to implement ongoing improvement in core instructional areas for students with disabilities
- providing academic intervention services and additional literacy programs for students
- implementing scheduling changes at the Middle School to increase focus on academics
- providing additional professional development for staff

When a school in need of improvement makes adequate yearly progress for two years in a row, it is no longer considered in need of improvement.

For more information on state assessments, or the No Child Left Behind accountability system for schools, please visit the NYSED website at [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov).

# 2011-2012 District and BOE Goals

**Long-Term Goal: Provide an educational program that promotes excellence and prepares students for success in the 21st century.**

- Develop benchmarks for 21st Century learning skills to be implemented across buildings and grade levels. Use model to begin program improvement.
- Increase the number of students meeting proficiency standards and achieving excellence. Meet or exceed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for Chatham Middle School ELA.
- Implement professional development based on 21st Century and project-based learning.
- Develop and implement the new APPR/teacher and principal evaluation system.
- Implement curriculum in English Language Arts and mathematics based on Common Core Standards.
- Complete Program Reviews for English Language Arts and Physical Education.
- Conduct Program Reviews in Mathematics and Languages Other than English.

**Long-Term Goal: Develop a school system that has the flexibility to address the learning and developmental needs of all students.**

- Review and examine anti-bullying measures and modify as indicated. Develop Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Develop and implement programming plans for struggling and highly able students, K-12.
- Investigate Universal Pre-Kindergarten options.
- Expand co-teaching in middle school and high school.
- Review building schedules to ensure appropriate amount of academic time on task.
- Conduct Program Reviews for Guidance Services and Response to Intervention/Academic Intervention.
- Initiate a Guidance Plan based on the K-12 Guidance Program Review.

**Long-Term Goal: Develop and support leadership at every level that promotes a positive school culture and supports student achievement.**

- Increase opportunities for student leadership and increase active student participation in District initiatives.
- Increase opportunities for leadership among Board members.
- Increase opportunities for involvement of community members.
- Increase opportunities for leadership and initiative among administrators.
- Develop and implement the new APPR principal evaluation system.
- Form a representative committee to revise the current teacher leadership structure.
- Identify future leaders among faculty and staff and offer mentoring and opportunities for growth.

**Long-Term Goal: Develop a culture of long range planning that supports continuous improvement while addressing the impact of declining enrollment and economically challenging times.**

- Long range plans to be addressed in 2011-2012—Facilities, Finance, Technology, Shared Decision-Making
- Develop a long-term strategic plan that drives program, facilities, and resource planning.
- Continue the cycle of program review.
- Examine the impact of declining enrollment on facilities and program. Complete Facilities Study and develop recommendations.
- Continue to explore opportunities for efficiency, shared services, functional consolidation, and/or merger.

**Long-Term Goal: As a Board of Education, seek and implement best practices in District leadership.**

- Extend and strengthen community outreach by hosting a booth at community events and the Columbia County Fair.
- Increase Board members' opportunities for leadership and training with a focus on financial issues and new Board member orientation.
- Update and/or develop financial policies to ensure best financial practices in the District.
- Encourage community participation in District committees and events with the goal of encouraging potential Board members.



## CAR-RT SORT POSTAL CUSTOMER

Produced in cooperation with the Questar III Communications Service

### ADMINISTRATORS

Cheryl Nuciforo	392-1501
<i>Superintendent</i>	
Chuck Snyder	392-1503
<i>Interim School Business Administrator</i>	
Jean Scheriff	392-2417
<i>Director of Pupil Services</i>	
Kristen Reno	392-2255
<i>Mary E. Dardess</i>	
<i>Elementary School Principal</i>	
Annamarie Barkman	392-1560
<i>Chatham Middle School Interim Principal</i>	
Karen Bechdol	392-1560
<i>Chatham Middle School Assistant Principal</i>	
John Thorsen	392-4142
<i>Chatham High School Principal</i>	
Karen Bechdol	392-4142
<i>Chatham High School Assistant Principal</i>	

### BOARD MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expires</i>
John Wapner	2012
<i>President</i>	
James Toteno	2014
<i>Vice President</i>	
James Cartin	2014
Michael Clark	2012
Gail Behrens Day	2013
Francis Iaconetti	2014
James Marks	2014
David O'Connor	2012
Melony Spock	2013
Catherine Fowler	2012
<i>Student Representative</i>	



## Capital Improvement Project Wraps Up

With Phase Two of construction wrapping up this fall, Chatham Central School District's capital improvement project is nearly complete. The majority of the renovations were completed over the summer, although finishing touches remain at M.E.D. on a small addition housing a new elevator and the school's newly refurbished library. These projects will be completed over the next few weeks.

Highlights of Phase Two include refurbished handicapped accessible bathrooms, installation of energy efficient lighting, and repairs to the bus garage roof. M.E.D. saw a reconfigured playground, total refurbishment of its kitchen, health office and library, as well as installation of new flooring, more parking space and an elevator. The High School saw new hall lockers installed throughout the building, remodeled weight training and locker room areas, and new walkways, while the Middle School received repairs to its roof and improvements to its sewer and drainage systems. Also, new and improved lights were installed on the athletic field.

Together with Phase One construction (completed over the summer of 2010), the \$5 million project addressed energy efficiency, program needs, infrastructure, safety and accessibility concerns. The construction and improvements allow Chatham CSD to continue to provide a safe and healthy educational environment for our students, staff and community.

The Capital Improvement Project was approved by voters in January, 2010. The project was paid for through NYS building aid, federal stimulus dollars, and District reserves.