

Taconic Valley

BERLIN CSD

School Board Settles On New Budget Proposal

Tax Hike At 1.99%

by Chris Tergliafera

At the April 20 Berlin Central School District regular Board meeting, Superintendent Joseph Dhara gave his final budget presentation for the 2021-2022 school year. While the budget does include money received by the district from the American Rescue Plan (ARP), it isn't all being put toward the budget he presented.

Superintendent Dhara explained that while it may be tempting to use large amounts of the \$1.7 million received from the plan, using the minimal amount and saving the rest to be used in future years would be in the best interest of the school district. So the minimum of 12.5% required to be used according to guidelines was included in his overall budget which would see an increase of 11.2% for the upcoming school year.

One point of contention was the 2.75% tax levy recommended by the Superintendent. Some Board members felt that was too high for the community to absorb and a more friendly 2% tax levy could be reached by cutting operating costs for the upcoming and future years. Mr. Dhara felt that student programs could be negatively affected at the 2%. While Board members agreed they did not desire to fiscally harm such programs, they felt they needed to explore all possible avenues to adopt a budget by the April 26 deadline. An impromptu meeting was scheduled for Thursday April 22 at which time the Board decided to use more than the Superintendent's suggested 12.5% of the ARP funding to lower the tax hike below 2%.

A public hearing to address the 2021-2022 budget will be held on Thursday May, 6, followed by a Tuesday May, 18 budget vote that will be held in the Middle/High School cafeteria.

Berlin Schools Prepare For End Of Year Events

At the meeting Superintendent Dhara expressed his excitement at the extensive plans being made for both Prom and Graduation. Many area schools won't be holding Prom, and a special waiver was necessary to make it happen. Only a few weeks ago it wasn't certain either event would be able to take place. In addition, multiple senior nights are scheduled in which senior athletes will be allowed to bring their parents.

Superintendent Dhara also announced new CDC guidelines have led to the possibility of Berlin Elementary returning to in person learning 5 days a week, and Berlin Middle School and High School return-

ing to 4 days a week. Options for summer learning are also being explored in order to help students who have lost learning time over the past year.

Student News

Students from the fourth grade class presented two projects they have been working on. The first was using rulings and their understanding of fractions to build birdhouses. The second was on the formation of the Federal Government and the understanding of its three branches.

Student Representative Jordanne Brazie discussed the drastic improvement in the girls soccer team and that the improvement becomes more apparent with every game. She also congratulated the mastermind team who has won its league, and is in the playoffs for the first time since 2017.

During the public comment section a student asked if it would be possible to allow outdoor free play to middle and high school students during their excess lunch period and study hall time. The Board said it would take this under consideration. Elementary school students are now able to have intramurals outdoors, and not deal with the space restrictions that accompany indoor activities.

Other Notes

Additional student furniture has been moved into school buildings in case social distance guidelines change, and more students need to be accommodated. The District has received its first shipment of Chromebooks and a plan is in place to swap them out with some of the older underperforming models. An insurance plan is also being looked into for next year that would help parents in the event that their child damaged a Chromebook or iPad.

A summer food program through the school was considered, however staffing, which the school would have to pay for, is the primary concern. And after inquiring, there wasn't enough interest to absorb the cost. However, both Stephentown and Grafton offered food programs last year. *The Eastwick Press* has committed to Rensselaer County to once again operate the Grafton program out of the former Elementary School and the Stephentown Memorial Library is finalizing its plans as well.

The Board approved Mark Mann, Mary Marro-Giroux, and Frank Zwack as representatives to the Rensselaer-Columbia-Greene Counties Board of Cooperative Educational Services. All three were incumbents.

Letter To The Editor

I Won't Stay Silent About It.

To Whom It May Concern,

I have lived my whole life in this beautiful area and loved it so much that I wanted my four kids to grow up here as well. I wanted them to experience the God fearing, country loving, neighbor helping way of life that I and my four siblings grew up with. We in this valley have not been known historically as a people of strong wealth, but we are well known as a wealth of strong people and we take care of and protect our own. So we should take great insult when someone, or group, invades our school and subjects our children to their personal agenda and tries to make an issue over something that has not been an issue in our school. I'm referring to the fact that by the time this letter is in print our students in grades 7-12 in the Berlin Middle/High School would have already endured two "Days of Silence" in recognition of the homosexual community. The e-mail to parents informing them this was taking place was sent after the students were already in school on the first Day of Silence, outraging parents and students alike. The e-mail states, "Only students will be expected to remain silent, unless they are called upon to speak in class." They were also invited to pick up rainbow masks with the word SILENT printed on them from the counselor's office. Not only is this message an extreme overreach of administrative power sent from a school counselor who belongs to the LGBTTQQIAAP community and the Gay Straight Alliance, but it is also a ridiculous waste of our children's educational time. Whatever and whomever someone wants to have sex with outside of school has no bearing inside of school and our students shouldn't be "expected" to recognize a person's sexual proclivities. As it is, our educational system is trying to play catchup with the havoc the pandemic has caused. Do we really need to pile on this political drama as well? If so, where do we draw the line? There are many issues (like the millions of innocent lives being silenced forever through abortion) that would benefit from more awareness and education. If we all got two days to indoctrinate a whole school full of kids in what we feel is an important issue, they would be "expected to remain silent" indefinitely! Of course we wouldn't allow that any more than we should allow this injection of social propaganda and political ideology into our children's classrooms.

Respectfully,
Justin Ferguson Dodge
Berlin

A response from the School is on page 5



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