

LANSING COMMUNITY NEWS

Serving the Town and Village of Lansing, Cayuga Heights, King Ferry & Genoa

"Not quite paradise, but a nice place to live."

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Regents Aid, Spelling, Baseball & Drugs Top School Board Discussions

By Matthew Shulman

Taxes, improving academic standards, a new interscholastic sports team and an unplanned 30 minute discussion about Lansing students' use of drugs and alcohol topped the action among 50 scheduled agenda items at the Board of Education's regular January meeting last Thursday evening.

State Aid: All Smoke & Mirrors?

Though Gov. Pataki's "state of the state" speech and Regents preliminary proposed budgets purport to increase state aid to schools, Lansing administrators and Board members are skeptical. They believe that an analysis of both proposals' specifics may indicate a coming reduction in state aid.

"There's a projected state revenue shortfall of \$3 billion, \$1 billion in "one-shots" and a planned income tax cut," said Business Administrator Tom Jones, quoting figures prepared by the State Aid Planning Service. "If the school operating aid uses the same formula as this year, that will cost another \$400 million. I'm not expressing any personal opinion," Jones went on, "I just want to know where the money's going to come from."

"It would be wonderful if (Pataki) can do what he says," said Supt. Andrea Price, "but it's all smoke and mirrors. We're not getting more; we're going to get less."

For example, one item from the Regents' proposal defines the "average rate of incidence" of special education students at 12 percent and would cap aid for special education at this level. "This sounds good," said Price, but Lansing and many schools have more than 12 percent of its students receiving special education services.

Lansing's problem may be compounded if the executive budget printouts due this week confirm the Board's concerns. Even if the state retains the same operating budget formula, Lansing's increasing enrollment will oblige us to increase faculty, support staff and material, said Price.

Spelling Curriculum Accepted

The Board accepted a new spelling curriculum that will feature 60-75 minutes of spelling each week. Board member Joni Geiger said that the new curriculum will hold students responsible for using their acquired spelling skills in their written work. "What works with kids is holding them



OPEN FORUM - The NYS Education "Report Card" evaluation of Lansing's schools will be the topic at a 90 minute open forum in the high school cafeteria on Thursday, January 23. All are encouraged to come. The regular Board meeting will follow at 8:30 pm.

accountable all the time, not just on the Friday test," said Price.

While the early primary levels will continue to include inventive spelling to encourage the youngest students to express themselves in writing, these students will be required to learn, and demonstrate the retention of, the core vocabulary presented each week.

Modified Baseball

Athletic Director Ed Redmond presented the Board with a petition from 30 seventh and eighth grade students requesting establishment of a modified baseball team. Redmond said that he has existing uniforms available and that the Town Recreation Dept will permit the team to play at the town fields until the new fields are ready.

Board members agreed that this program would fill a gap between the current town and school programs. Though the projected \$1672 cost had not been budgeted, the Board felt the expense was justified and approved to the proposal.

Student Alcohol & Drug Use

An offer from local Masons to finance the purchase and erection of signs proclaiming the Lansing schools as a

"Drug Free Zone" stimulated an unscheduled half-hour discussion among Board members, administrators and citizen observers about the breadth and persistence of substance abuse by Lansing youth.

Joni Geiger initiated the discussion with her concern about posting the "drug free zone" signs. She said that suggesting that it's not appropriate to put up such signs when students and administrators alike know that drugs and alcohol remain a persistent problem among a minority of students.

Referring to the 1995 Lansing high student survey in which 81 percent of the students said that there is a drug and alcohol problem, Board vice-president Kathy Miller said that, "We have a strong group of kids waiting for adult leadership." Miller said that she has witnessed apparent transactions taking place. "To put a sign up and not do anything about it [drug and alcohol use] sends the wrong message," she said.

Jeff Lovejoy said that his 11 year-old has also mentioned observing dealing at school. "The next day I was there (at school)," but the dealer's car didn't show up. "The students aren't in denial," said Lovejoy. "The parents are."

Middle School Principal Mary Bente recalled that the Lansing forum had held a November session on local drug and alcohol abuse and reminded folks that Pat Trotter will be meeting with a core group next week to plan a community-wide strategy to involve parents in efforts to curb substance abuse. (Additional information next week.)

Other Business

The Board was informed of Lou Emmick's retirement after "at least" 48 years of service. He and other retirees will be honored at a spring reception.

The Board agreed to go hold a public hearing to amend the partial senior citizens' property tax exemption to conform with changes made by the Town Board.

The Board asked that taxpayers be reminded of a special seminar for guardians and parents at 7:30 pm on Thursday, January 30 on "The 4th and 5th Rs: Respect & Responsibility." The program will be presented at the Middle School Auditorium and will focus on integrating ethical values and character education in home and school life.

Art & Technology Put Community Service In Curriculum

Do students apply themselves with more interest and learn more efficiently if they can see the practical value of their education? A series of unrelated community service projects in Lansing and around the county by Lansing students may hold the answer to this theoretical question.

Just ask the middle school art club, which received a standing ovation from the Cayuga Nature Center (CNC) Board after our youngsters' presentation on design to convert an old bunk room into a visitors center and gallery space. Or ask Mr. Suarez's high school technology class about the feedback it received on their three design plans for portable steps to ease Lansing seniors' access to the high school pool.

Cayuga Nature Center Interior Design

When CNC Director Janet Hawkes first asked about



TECHNOLOGY SERVES LANSING SENIORS - Asked to ease Lansing Seniors' access to the high school pool, Tracey Van Doren listens to questions about one of three solutions developed by technology and art students. The class, guided by Bill Suarez and Patricia Brown, met with town Recreation Department director Steve Colt and senior Joan Hardie on Jan. 6th.

student involvement in the center's renovation, Angi Nicholson asked her to meet the art club. Hawkes came to school to describe the project and the CNC's long-term goals and invited the students to inspect the site. The art club visited the rustic building, toured the grounds with a naturalist and returned to class to translate their ideas into a formal interior design plan.

The final plans included wall murals featuring Tompkins County lake, marsh and forest habitats and the flora and fauna typically found in our little corner of the world. They even created a moose mural after learning that this creature once roamed around our lake. Our young men and women were also responsible for making Dec. 18's formal presentation to the CNC Board which won them not only applause but the right to implement their plans. And last Saturday, the art club travelled to Cayuga Lake's west shore to begin the work. A formal inauguration will be scheduled this spring.

Portable Pool Steps For Seniors

When the Lansing Recreation Dept. started its senior water aerobics class, it didn't take long before some of the swimmers noted how difficult it was to enter and exit the pool. The current steps are just unrailed, recessed footholds that had simply been designed for younger users.

With commercially available portable steps running about \$2,400, Steve Colt spoke to art and technology teachers Bill Suarez and Patricia Brown about the possibility of our own students designing and fabricating suitable steps.

The students agreed and developed three technically feasible preliminary designs. The first group drew plans for a set of removable, railed, 3/2 foot wide steps that would hook onto the pool's gutter. The second solution was a portable hand rail that would tie into the existing recessed steps. The third solution was a reinforced, railed, plastic ramp that could also accommodate a wheel chair.

On the first day after the holiday break, swimming coach Diane Hicks-Hughes and Steve Colt were joined by senior aerobics' representative Joan Hardie in the art room for de-

sign team presentations. For nearly an hour, the students and their guests discussed the merits and drawbacks of each solution. "Did you ask your grandparents their opinions?" queried Hardie to bring the relevancy of the project home to the students.

By Wednesday the Lansing seniors had selected the portable 5-step design. Working with their teachers, the students will complete final designs, specify material needs and develop cost estimates.

It's not yet certain if the students will actually fabricate the steps themselves; much depends on the materials ultimately selected. But even if they don't assemble the materials, they'll certainly be involved in every phase of the final design and will consult in the fabrication.



ART CLUB SERVES NATURE CENTER - Melissa McClure, Rose Marcy and the entire Middle School Art Club spent the past few months designing plans to convert an old bunk room at the Cayuga Nature Center into a visitors' center and gallery. Last Saturday, led by teacher Angi Nicholson, our youngsters travelled to the center to start the transformation.

Hills
JCPenney



TAX FREE - WHAT IT MEANS TO ME

New York State and Tompkins County have granted a tax break for consumers

ON ALL FOOTWEAR AND CLOTHING THAT ARE CONSIDERED DAILY WEAR/USE

Household items, food, electronics and other miscellaneous products are NOT included.

[This public service message presented by Hills, JC Penney, Montgomery Ward and Pyramid Mall]

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