

Newsletter

ABOUT YOUR SCHOOLS

Vol. 36 Number 2

January 2011

Happy New Year to All of the Exeter Township School District Community!



Dr. Beverly Martin

As we begin the budget-planning process for 2011-2012, it is with a keen understanding that the next year will likely present some of the greatest financial challenges that most of us have ever faced in our careers as educators and business managers, not only here in the Exeter Township School District, but in public school districts across the country. The economic recession that has so rocked this country over the last three years, has now hit public school systems with a vengeance. Local revenue sources have diminished due to the decline in real estate transfer taxes, loss of interest revenue, and tax assessment appeals. Although we will not know for some time what our revenue will be from state and federal sources, it is predicted to be 10%-20% (\$1.2 to \$2 million) lower than it is currently in 2010-11 due to state revenue shortfalls, a loss of federal stimulus funds, and a new administration entering Harrisburg.

One fact we do know is that our Act 1 index is set at 1.8% as compared to 3.7% and 5.2% for the past two budget cycles. This means that, unless we take advantage of exceptions allowed by the state due to higher than expected costs in specified areas, the district will not be able to raise local taxes above the index of 1.8%. Based on the current value of a real estate property tax mill, a 1.8% increase in the real estate tax rate or .53 mill, will generate only \$700,000 of new revenue. The most significant exceptions that the district may qualify for include a special education exception of

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Preregistration for 2011-12 Kindergarten

In order to plan for the 2011-2012 school term, the district needs to determine an accurate number of incoming kindergartners. Initial information and registration packets will be mailed to all families that the district is aware of who have preschoolers turning age 5 before September 1, 2011. If you have a child who is age appropriate for kindergarten and do not receive this information before mid-February, please phone Charlene Benner at 610-779-0700 (ext. 1029) or e-mail her at: CMBenner@exeter.k12.pa.us

Completed forms are turned in at Preregistration which is scheduled for **Wed., Feb. 16 and Thurs., Feb. 17** at the K-4 schools from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. The average time to preregister is 15 minutes and it is not necessary for a preschooler to accompany his/her parent.

Board Reorganizes for 2011

As Pennsylvania law requires, the Exeter Township School Board held its reorganization meeting during the first full week in December. On Tuesday, December 7 Mr. Robert Quinter, Jr. was elected president and Mr. Jack Linton was elected vice president. Mr. Quinter is beginning his 10th year as a board member. He is the ETSD representative to the BCIU board and serves as its vice president. Robert Quinter, Jr. is fulfilling a long-time desire to serve as the ETSD board president just as his father did in the 1970's and 80's. Mr. Linton is beginning his twelfth year on the board and served the last three years as president.

At the October 12 meeting Mrs. Sharon McLendon was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Andrea Sandusky, who was required to resign in September because of her employment in the court system. A genuine "thank you" is extended to Mrs. Sandusky for her service to the district. Mrs. McLendon, a district resident for 31 years, was chosen from five candidates. She is the mother of three children and the grandmother of a Reiffon student. As a senior high school guidance counselor in another district, she believes that all children are entitled to receive the best possible education and she is dedicated to doing her part to help make this happen. Mrs. McLendon said: "Exeter School District provides an overall quality education for its students. The school climate attracts professionals who wish to join a workforce committed to academic excellence. These factors speak well for Exeter's reputation. The curriculum and educational programs, as well as small class sizes afford students the opportunities to realize and develop their potential as they prepare for college, career, and the world of work."

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Board Reorganizes

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The board utilizes nine committees. The committees are as follows: **Business Functions** - Mr. Hart chairperson and members Mr. Staub and Mr. Brady; **Personnel** - Dr. Bender chairperson and Mr. Brady; **Student Functions** - Mrs. Kutscher chairperson and members Mrs. McLendon, Mr. Linton, and Mr. Diesinger; **Technology** - Mrs. McLendon chairperson and members Mr. Hart and Dr. Bender; **Athletic*** - Mr. Staub chairperson and Mr. Brady; **Curriculum*** - Mr. Diesinger chairperson and members Mrs. Kutscher, Mrs. McLendon, and Mr. Linton; **Growth and Development** - Mr. Staub chairperson and members Dr. Bender and Mr. Brady; **Audit*** - Mr. Staub chairperson and Mr. Hart; **Facilities*** - Mr. Brady chairperson and members Dr. Bender, Mr. Linton, and Mr. Staub.

*Non-board members Bonnie Lutz and Kenneth Smith serve on the Athletic Committee; Barry Ewald, Daniel Fanelli, and Todd Tomczyk serve on the Audit Committee; Elaine Druzba, James Seidel, Mark Donato, Diane Keifer, John Straub, and Christy Stout serve on the Facilities Committee; and Dr. Trudy Demko serves on the Curriculum Committee.

Several board members have been selected to represent the district on various county committees. Robert Quinter, Jr. continues to serve as the representative to the BCIU Board and Russell Diesinger continues as the representative to the Berks Career and Technology Joint Operating Committee. J. Ken Hart represents the district on the Berks Earned Income Tax Bureau.

The public is welcome to attend board meetings, which begin at 7 p.m. and are held in the district administration building. In most months, the first Tuesday is dedicated to committee meetings, the second Tuesday is a workshop session, and the third Tuesday is the voting meeting.

Happy New Year *(continued from page 1)*

\$815,000, a retirement contribution exception of \$430,000, and a debt payment exception of \$125,000. Generally speaking, the exception amounts represent increases in specific costs that are greater than the index increase of 1.8%. If approved, the exceptions could provide an additional \$1.3 million in property tax revenue through an additional one mill increase. In the past two budget cycles, the Exeter Township School Board did not take advantage of any exceptions the district qualified for, and limited the property tax rate increase to 3.52% and 3%.

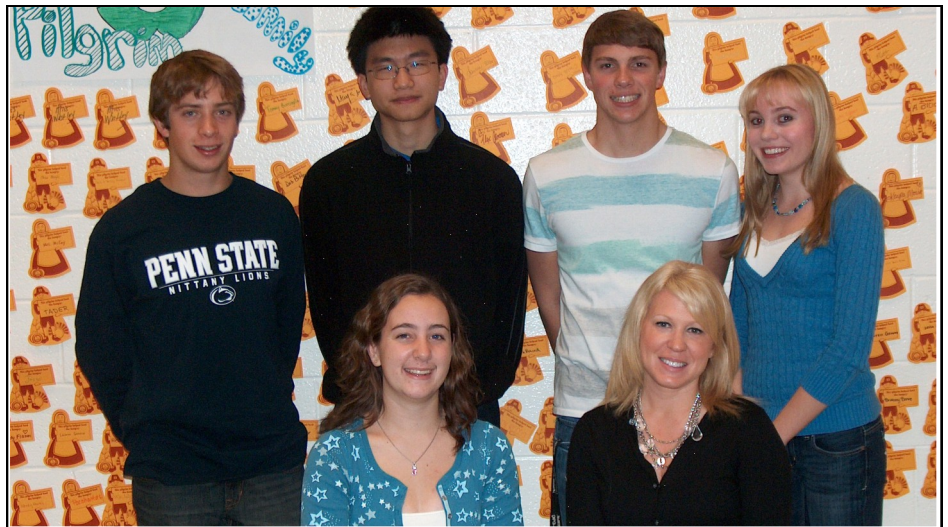
We also have some very daunting increases in expenditures that we cannot control and for which we must find the funding. We anticipate an estimated 9% or \$500,000 increase in health care costs for our employees, a 56% or \$450,000 net increase in our mandated contributions to the state retirement system, and increases in employee wages averaging 3.3% or \$1,000,000. Thus, it is all the more critical to find ways to cut the expenditures where we can to offset costs that are rising at a time when revenue is declining.

The first and most important effort to cut projected costs was the decision to educate our K-4 students in three, rather than four buildings, with the opening of Owatin Creek Elementary School in the fall of 2011. By taking M.L. Lausch School temporarily offline while we are in a flat enrollment period due to the decline in the housing market, we are able to delay adding over \$900,000 to our expenditures. Nonetheless, this decision was a difficult one, fraught with a great deal of emotion and anxiety to the many good families and staff members who consider Lausch their second home. Additional cost-cutting measures we've pursued or are pursuing include cutting our general supply and library book budgets, scrutinizing the need to fill any position that is vacated through the resignation or retirement of any staff member, reducing extra paid contract days, reducing staff development costs, and obtaining favorable electricity generation contract pricing to avoid rate increases related to expiring rate caps.

At this point in the process, it is difficult to tell what measures we will need to take to have a balanced budget to present to the public in the next several months. We are committed to being as fiscally responsive to our taxpayers as possible, while still providing a top quality education to the students of our district. This will become even more challenging this year, and we ask for your support as we go through this process.

Thank you for supporting our schools, and may this be a happy, healthy and prosperous year for the Exeter community!

Dr. Beverly A. Martin



The SHS National Honor Society conducted their Pilgrim Sale in November and with donations totaling \$878, The Greater Reading Food Bank was able to supply local families with \$17,560 worth of food. NHS officers are (left to right, back row) Nate Born, Michael Wang, Chase Mengle, Lauren Genova, (front row) Erin Brady, and Advisor Marijo Smith.

Greetings from the Roost! SHS “State of the Union”

Marc P. Bellettiere, Principal

Each year I challenge our faculty by asking them one simple question: *How do your students know that you love what you do?* The answer to this question may take on several different forms, but one thing remains constant and blatantly obvious. Regardless of the day, age or advances in technology, there is no replacement for good teaching and good teachers build lasting, caring relationships based on trust and mutual respect. That is what we expect and what we witness here each and every day!

As we approach the midway point of the 2010-2011 school year, the senior high school is not only buzzing with much excitement, but facing numerous challenges as well.

We are very proud of the gains that we have made in the area of assisting those with special needs. Our special (and regular) education faculties have worked tirelessly to provide support and guidance for those who need it the most. Through inclusive classroom and co-teaching models, we attempt to closely align our regular and special education curricula. Although we still have a way to go, we are certainly on the right track. Our real challenge exists (as it does in any public school) in helping those who struggle, while raising the bar for our more academically advanced students but not ignoring those somewhere in the middle.

We are also quite proud of some of our new initiatives, including Civics for all juniors, Honors American Literature, and the inclusion of a course in Level 1 Mandarin Chinese, which is offered as a distance-learning course with the BCIU. These offerings, as well as many others, look to challenge our students and to further develop creativity, higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.

Our students continue to impress us with their support and generosity. Our students have raised thousands of dollars for charities such as the Greater Berks-Reading Food Bank and cancer research, as well as donating holiday gifts to the U.S. Marine Corps’ Toys for Tots and food for the needy to Catholic Charities of Reading.

However, it is important to note that we have some genuine concerns that require our immediate attention. First and foremost the overall performance of our students on the PSSA needs to be improved. Our recent PSSA results have placed us into what is known as School Improvement 2. Specifically, our economically disadvantaged and special education subgroup populations have not met the state’s expectation for proficiency. The state requires these scores to be reported as separate subgroups because each group is comprised of more than 40 students. The School Improvement 2 status requires us to more definitively address our academic deficiencies for all students and to create a more detailed and stringent plan of action to remedy the situation. If we do not improve, we face Corrective Action, where the Pennsylvania Department of Education may play an instrumental role in “improving our school” if we cannot demonstrate proficiency on the state assessment. Needless to say, this is not a good position to be in, and certainly not one becoming of our fine institution. The

next assessment will be given to all juniors in March and we have challenged all of them to help restore the pride to our great school.

Secondly, we need a more heightened awareness in regards to student accountability and responsibility. While the majority of our students do the right thing each and every day and are focused on academic success, some do not. Those who are unmotivated to learn and choose to just “merely exist” will be held accountable for their behavior and we will make every effort possible to demonstrate to them the merit in acting appropriately and taking their education more seriously. Failure cannot be an option!

So, I leave you with this. We have several challenges to face and questions to answer. This will certainly not be an easy road. However, with a committed staff and student body, and an attitude that we will never quit nor accept failure, we will prevail. You have our promise that we will do all we can for your children each and every day.

Lorane Student Artwork Displayed at The GoggleWorks

If you’ve ever stepped into The GoggleWorks in downtown Reading, you know that it is an impressive place. The old goggle factory is now a thriving creative complex featuring many galleries, theatres, and artist studios. This year Lorane students were asked to participate in an exhibit at The African-American Coalition of Reading (A.C.O.R.) Gallery on the second floor under the direction of Mr. Ed Terrell. Mrs. Jennifer

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First place honoree Marisella Monte, with Jennifer Buchholtz, art teacher (left) and Lorane Principal Pam Kiskaddon (right)

M.L. Lausch School - Celebrating Successes and Looking to the Future

Dr. Joseph Schlaffer, Principal

Over the past school year and into the current one, our community school has had reason to celebrate. The academic achievement of our students has never been higher, and the environment we provide for the students and staff continues to nurture and grow with each passing year. Couple this with outstanding parental support and involvement, and it is easy to see why we have cause to celebrate.

Last year, 83% of our third grade students scored at the “proficient” or “advanced” levels on the annual state assessment in reading, while 99% were proficient or advanced in mathematics. In fourth grade, 78% of our students were proficient or advanced in reading, and 87% were proficient or advanced in mathematics. These scores represent the highest levels of school achievement ever in both grades, for both subject areas.

As a life-long educator, taxpayer, and most recently a parent with a child in the district, it is unbelievably comforting to know and wholeheartedly trust that our children will get nothing short of a fantastic education in the district. During a time in our history when education is constantly under fire, I never felt more secure in knowing that we are providing a quality education for the children in our community.

Over the course of the past several months, the district has elected to temporarily close M.L. Lausch Elementary for financially prudent and logistical reasons. Both the state of the economy and the budget has dictated the need for this change. Former Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Nicholas Corbo, once talked about how difficult it is to take a community school off line. The reasons he cited then are more apparent now. For many children, parents, and employees, the idea of not coming to M.L.

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Meet Assistant Supervisor of Special Education, Veronica Barna



Late last spring Veronica (Roni) Barna began her work as assistant supervisor of special education. Mrs. Barna replaces Wendy Skoczen who left to work in another district. Prior to arriving in this district Roni was a classroom teacher in Hazelton, Wilkes-Barre, and for 14 years in Johnson City, New York. Most recently she served as the IST/RTI diagnostic testing facilitator for 11 years in the South-

ern Lehigh School District in Coopersburg, PA.

Mrs. Barna received a B.S. in education from Misericordia University, M.S. in special education from Marywood University, and a M.S. in education leadership and certification from Delaware Valley College. She holds elementary and special education teaching certificates in Pennsylvania and New York, as well as, principal and supervisor of curriculum and instruction certificates in Pennsylvania.

Roni and her husband reside in Gilbertsville and enjoy visiting the many bed and breakfasts in the state. As a life-long learner, she is currently learning to play the harp. In a recent interview Mrs. Barna said: “I am delighted to become a member of the Exeter Township School District family. My new position allows me to blend my love of reaching all students and accepting new challenges. I am most impressed with the friendliness and welcoming atmosphere of all staff, administration and board members.”

Health Fair Reaches 10 Years of Education for Everyone



Suzanne Blankenbiller, Jacksonwald School Nurse (front center) has been organizing, along with all district nurses, the District Health Fair for 10 years. She is standing with personnel from four agencies which have participated in all 10 fairs. They are Exeter Ambulance, Exeter Fire, St. Joseph Medical Center, and Berks Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services.

Jacksonwald Students Speak to Author in Skype Session



Students in Lore Dehart's third grade class gather with librarian Sally Lamm (back, left) and Mrs. Dehart (back, right) after the recent Skype session with author Janet Wong.

The students in Lore Dehart's third grade class recently had the unique opportunity to speak directly to one of their favorite authors. Janet Wong, an acclaimed children's author of popular books such as *Apple Pie 4th of July* and *Minn and Jake*, shared information about her life and her books in a Skype session. Skype is a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet and it has become popular for its video conferencing features. In advance librarian Sally Lamm gave the students background information on Ms. Wong and her books, which are all rich with the diversity of the American culture. Students prepared questions for Ms. Wong and then received direct answers during the 30-minute session. The Skype interview was made possible when Mrs. Dehart won a contest at Barnes & Noble Bookstore.

A Reminder to Exeter Township School District Residents: Your Local Earned Income Tax Return for 2010 Must Be Filed by April 18, 2011

Anyone who has earned income, regardless of age, for the year 2010, must file a tax return if you lived in the Exeter Township School District. Even if your employer has withheld and paid your tax, this return must be completed. This obligation is incurred by anyone who is a wage earner, farmer, unincorporated business (including partnership and individual proprietorship), and ALL OTHERS who received earned income or profits for services rendered.

Failure to file on time will result in a penalty and interest charge of 12% per annum and additional costs of collection. Regulations also provide a \$500 fine for refusal to file or other violations.

Residents of the ETSD are required to file a tax return, EVEN IF THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED A FORM THROUGH THE MAIL. Forms can be acquired by contacting the Berks Earned Income Tax Collection Bureau at 920 Van Reed Road in Wyomissing, phoning 610-372-8439, faxing 610-372-1102 or visiting the website: berkseit.com

Lorane Student Artwork

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Buchholtz, Lorane's art teacher, selected ten works to be displayed. The masks chosen to display were those created by second graders.

The African Masks were on display in the gallery for the month of December. The A.C.O.R. Gallery hosted a reception for the students, staff, friends, and families on Sunday, December 12. All students were honored for their hard work with certificates. The school was proud that three students' works were awarded ribbons for their talents. Prize winners were Marisella Monte (1st Place), Megan Myers (2nd Place), and Shaun Michalski (3rd Place). The other students who participated from Lorane were Daniel Bishop, Dominic D'Archangelo, Brooke Esposito, Colin Hoffman, Ian Meschter, Kevin Narvaez, and Benjamin Trexler.

M.L.Lausch School

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Lausch creates a myriad of emotions as well as upcoming challenges and apprehensions. As I walk through the building I see current staff members who attended M.L. Lausch as students, now teach the neighborhood children. I see employees who have made coming to work here a routine for over two decades. Nevertheless, change is the one constant we all face in our lives.

This school year has not been without its distractions; however, please know that our focus and commitment remain steadfast. The children truly are our future and we wholeheartedly appreciate your continued involvement and support. We all have cause to celebrate in the successes of the past, and to look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

**ETSHS
Spring
Musical
Show**



This year's SHS Spring Musical Show is *Curtains*. *Curtains* is a murder-mystery musical with music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb. It debuted on Broadway in 2007, garnering eight Tony award nominations. The performances are scheduled for March 10, 11, and 12 at 7:30 in the ETSHS Auditorium. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and senior citizens. The ticket order form will be posted on the district web site in the near future and be available in the SHS office and Admin. Bldg. The completed form and payment may be dropped off at the SHS office and tickets will be at the will-call table the night of the performance.

Homestead/Farmstead Applications

The Homestead/Farmstead application is a requirement of the Taxpayer Relief Act (Act 1) of 2006. Approved homestead/farmstead owners may be eligible for property tax relief on the July 1, 2011 school real estate tax bill if the Secretary of the Budget authorizes the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide school districts with property tax reduction allocations.

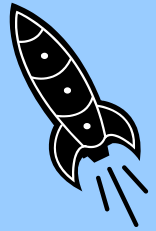
In December, the 2010 Homestead/Farmstead applications were mailed to those district taxpayers who did not have an approved application on file, according to the Berks County Homestead Office's database as of November 1, 2010. If your property has already been approved, no further action is required. If you received an application, it must be completed and returned to the Berks County Assessment Office by the March 1, 2011 due date. If you did not receive an application by mail and your property has not been approved, you can stop in at the Exeter Township School District Business Office, 3650 Perkiomen Avenue, Reading, PA, 19606 to get a form or call the Business Office at 610-779-0700, ext. 1001 and request an application be mailed. Any questions regarding whether your property has been approved can be addressed by the Berks County Homestead Office at 610-478-6262.

**Family Math Night for Grades K-6
Thursday, February 24th
Reiffton School 6:30 – 8 p.m.**

Theme: Mathronauts in Space: One Giant Leap for Mankind

Snow Date: Thursday, March 3, 2011

Children must be accompanied by a parent.



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The Exeter Township School District is an equal opportunity educational institution and in compliance with the requirements of Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The district will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, ancestry, national origin, disability, or handicap. For information regarding civil rights or grievance procedures, contact Mrs. Elizabeth Weber, Compliance Officer, 3650 Perkiomen Ave., Reading, PA 19606.

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