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For immediate release

OA BOARD ADOPTS 2011-2012 BUDGET

*Tax levy increase held below 2% for 4th straight year;
Secondary nursing staff, \$30k in enrichment funding restored*

OWEGO – The Owego Apalachin Board of Education adopted its 2011-2012 budget during its regular meeting April 7. The adopted budget contains a tax levy increase of 1.997 percent. The \$41,051,045 budget cuts expenditures by 1.6 percent compared to the current year and eliminates nearly 45 positions.

“This has been a very painful budget season,” said Dr. Bill Russell, OA superintendent of schools. “The cuts to state aid approved by the governor and the legislature were very devastating to us and other districts around the state.

“In the Owego Apalachin district, our state aid was cut by nearly 8 percent, or \$1,392,348,” he said. “If we didn’t make dramatic cuts and dig deeply into our reserves and fund balance, we would have had to raise local property taxes by 9 percent to make up for the state aid cuts.”

In the newly adopted budget, the district will eliminate 11 teaching positions and one secondary guidance counselor. It also eliminates positions of teacher’s aides, teaching assistants, network assistants, a maintenance mechanic, a bus driver, a computer programmer, a computer operator, and clerk typists. Twenty of those positions were eliminated through retirements and resignations; the remaining positions were cut through layoffs.

At Thursday night’s meeting, the board amended the proposed budget twice, rejecting a proposed cut to the secondary nursing staff, and restoring \$30,000 to after-school and summer enrichment programs for students.

“All areas of the budget, including athletics, administrative costs, transportation, maintenance, supplies, public relations, and equipment were also cut,” noted Randy Pryor, the district’s business official. “Nothing was sacred as we tried to find ways to reduce our budget.”

The district will also use a substantial amount of reserves, fund balance, and one-time revenues to make up for the state aid shortfall and balance the budget. These one-shot revenues total approximately \$1,570,000.

“We’re fortunate to have some savings to draw on in these difficult times,” Dr. Russell said, “but given that we had to use \$1,450,000 from savings during the current year, we’re quite concerned that we will exhaust these resources very quickly if there is not some effective remedy to the school budget crisis in the state.”

“It was a difficult and lengthy process for the superintendent and his staff to be able to present a workable budget to us,” said Lee Dunham, OA board member. “And once we had the budget, it was difficult as a board to decide what to restore – if anything at all – and what to leave out for 2011-2012.

“When all is said and done, our expenditures are down from last year’s budget, and we were still able to keep the tax levy increase under 2 percent,” Dunham said. “We hope we’re presenting a budget the taxpayers will accept. Along with so many other school districts, we have a long road ahead and we’re looking at every avenue possible so we won’t need to hurt programs in the future.”

“Our goals were to protect our high-quality programs and services for students,” Dr. Russell said. “Also, to protect taxpayers from excessive tax increases, to maintain adequate staff to deliver programs and services to students, and to be prudent in any use of fund balance and reserves to balance the budget. I think we met those goals, though only with a lot of hard work.”

“The board took a broad view that it’s not just this year’s budget we had to look at,” said Gene Cvik, OA board member. “We looked at four years, and clearly, the picture won’t get any easier. Every school district across New York state has its own issues, and many of them are common to what Owego Apalachin is going through.

“As far as our budget,” Cvik added, “I think we did as good a job as we could. We made a number of painful cuts and we used a fair amount of reserves to keep the tax levy increase as low as possible.”

For the fourth year in a row, the increase in the OA tax levy will be below 2 percent. Preliminary indications are that this will be among the lowest tax increases in the region.

The OA district will hold public hearings in May at both its elementary schools. The first is 7:30 p.m. Monday, May 2, at Apalachin Elementary School. The second is 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 4, at Owego Elementary School.

District residents will be able to vote on the OA budget from noon to 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 17.

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