

**Massena Central School Board of Education Update
November 2, 2018**

District Safety Committee Conducts Tabletop Exercises at Nightengale Elementary

On Tuesday, the District Safety Committee met at Nightengale Elementary School to conduct tabletop safety exercises. Led by Lieutenant Jason Olson, the Nightengale Safety Team was asked to consider how they would respond to a scenario that would threaten the safety of students and staff at the school. Different variables were introduced throughout the exercise to test decision-making in case a real threat occurred at the school. The Nightengale team did a great job responding throughout the exercise. Similar tabletop events will also occur this year at Jefferson, Madison, and Central Office. Chaired by Junior High Principal Alan Oliver, the District Safety Committee includes many school representatives including students and outside agencies such as police, fire and rescue. We appreciate the work of this important team as they collaborate on keeping our schools safe and secure.

Harvest Dance

I want to thank Chief Adam Love and his crew for helping with security at the Massena High School Harvest Dance on Friday night. Just prior to the dance, a post on social media created a concern over student safety. The police investigated and subsequently determined the threat to be unfounded. In the end, the students who attended the dance had a fun evening due to the work of our Student Counsel advisors, chaperones, administration, and local police. I particularly want to thank Chief Love as he came in while off duty and remained the entire time. We are fortunate to have this dedicated leader in our community.

Interact Club



The Interact Club has been very active with their support for a variety of community events. On 10/21, they worked at the VFW Veteran's dinner and received a donation of \$150 for their charitable causes. On 10/21 the students waited tables at the Tastes of Autumn benefit for Hospice. On 10/27, the Interact students braved the weather at Trunk or Treat and then the Woods Walk at the Nature Center. We appreciate the work of advisor Mike Chartrand and our Interact students. This arm of the Rotary Club for students ages 12-18 provides exceptional service for a variety of charity and non-profit groups.

Trunk or Treat

Congratulations to the Massena Drug Free Community Coalition and our Community Schools Coordinator Kirstin Colarusso Martin for another successful Trunk or Treat event. Despite the cold and rainy weather, the second annual Trunk or Treat brought over 1,800 participants to the high school on Saturday, 10/27. This was approximately 200 more participants than last year. Fifty-four different trunks were involved with increased participation from our different school and student groups. Thanks to all for providing this opportunity for a fun family and community event.

[Here](#) is a WWNY Television clip about the event.





School Resource Officer Update

One of our District goals this year is to “Explore the creation of a School Resource Officer”. The District Safety Committee is leading this effort as it has representatives from the school as well as community emergency services including the Massena Police Department. A subcommittee was formed and they have begun meetings that include the Mayor and Chief of Police. We have also been in contact with St. Lawrence County Civil Service which sets the job requirements and other schools such as Canton and Potsdam that added SROs this year. This week, the subcommittee presented a survey to parents, students, and staff to gauge interest in the reinstatement of the SRO. The subcommittee will meet again on 11/15 to review the results of the survey and continue working to provide a recommendation to the Board of Education. We will keep you posted.

Albany Update

The following information is from NYSCOSS Deputy Director Bob Lowry about some important developments impacting public schools.

TRS Employer Contribution Rate to Decline

Yesterday the New York State teachers Retirement System Board met and approved an estimated range of 8.5 to 9.5 percent for the employer contribution rate to be charged against 2019-20 payroll. This would be a decline from the 10.62 percent rate being charged against 2018-19 salaries.

TRS estimated that the rate reduction will lower costs for school districts, BOCES, and other covered employers by \$200 to \$400 million from the amount charged against payroll this year.

One factor in TRS's rate calculations is a five-year average of the rate of return for system's investments. A dark cloud is that, for the calculation a year from now, the 18.2 percent return rate for 2013-14 will fall out, almost certainly lowering the five-year average and creating pressure for an increase in the employer contribution rate to be charged against 2020-21 payroll.

State Budget Outlook and the Economy

Tuesday's elections will start to resolve one set of uncertainties about the year ahead in Albany. In the next couple weeks, we will also begin getting information about the state budget outlook for next year.

On November 15, the State Education Department will release the first School Aid database for 2019-20. This will give us estimates of the cost of School Aid for next year, if current law formulas were to be continued. The estimates for expense-based aids are especially important as increases in Building, Transportation, BOCES and Excess Cost Aids have been taken as givens to be funded before any increases in Foundation Aid or other funding streams are contemplated, at least in the year immediately ahead.

This database is also the one used in assembling the Governor's budget. The only variances between the November 2017 database and the School Aid formulas in Governor Cuomo's 2018-19 Executive Budget were in Foundation Aid, which he proposed increasing by \$338 million, and Building Aid, which he proposed increasing by \$421,000 to cover the cost of extending a "bonus" for security enhancements that had been scheduled to expire. The final enacted budget relies upon a February 15 database which results in other aid changes from the Governor's budget – usually net increases in aid.

In the next week or so, the Governor's Division of the Budget (DOB) will release its Mid-Year Update to the State Financial Plan. This statutorily required report includes data on the performance of the state's finances for the current fiscal year and projections for the three years to follow. So it gives some sense of what might be in store for us in the coming year's state budget deliberations.

The first quarter update, back in August, projected a \$4 billion structural deficit for the coming year. With the part of the operating budget supported by state sources (i.e., excluding federal and capital funds) totaling just over \$100 billion, a \$4 billion dollar structural deficit amounts to 3.8 percent of projected expenditures for the year. For perspective, the same calculation a year ago would have shown a 3.9 percent deficit, and 3.3 percent two years ago. So the projected deficit is in line with what the state has managed in the recent past.

There has been positive economic news since the first quarter report was released – sales tax revenues and growth in the national Gross Domestic Product have both exceeded assumptions in DOB’s first quarter financial plan update.

But two Washington-directed items are wildcards in predicting the state’s financial outlook.

One is potential fall-out from the federal tax legislation capping deductions of state and local taxes at \$10,000. New York derives approximately 42 percent of its personal income tax revenue from 1 percent of its taxpayers and if just 251 of the wealthiest taxpayers were to change their primary address, the state could lose half a billion dollars in revenue. Impact on housing markets is also a concern, but experts debate whether any effects have yet to materialize.

The other threat would be a renewed effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, should Republicans retain control of both houses of Congress after Tuesday. For example, the bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2017 would have taken an estimated \$4.7 billion out of the state budget in 2020-21 and more in succeeding years.

Here is an interesting review of longer-term economic trends across the state from the conservative Empire Center for New York State Policy: [NY’s Uneven Economic Recovery: A Continuing Tale of Two States](#).

Mental Health in Schools

Two weeks ago the Assembly Education Committee held a hearing on Health, Mental Health and Physical Education in Schools.

Here is the [testimony](#) we submitted.

The hearing’s primary focus was on school district compliance with curriculum mandates, including the mental health instruction requirements which took effect this year. But our testimony emphasized a different thrust.

We characterized curriculum requirements as “upstream solutions” which are often neglected despite their potential to prevent small problems from becoming bigger problems as children grow older. But we stressed the urgent “downstream” problems schools are seeking help with now.

For example, we cited findings from our finance and policy survey this summer: Improving mental health services for students was again the most widely cited funding priority among responding

superintendents and 67 percent of superintendents said they have a high level of concern about their students' mental and emotional health.

Bob also participated in a panel discussion at the annual conference of the Mental Health Association of New York State and made similar points. One of the other conference participants passed on some resources from the State Office of Mental health to share with our members:

- [Improving School and Community Outcomes for Children and Adolescents with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges](#)
- [What School District Leaders Should Know When Creating School and Mental Health Partnerships](#)
- [What Local Mental Health Leaders Should Know when Creating Partnerships with NYS Schools](#)

Other OMH resources are available [here](#).

Massena CSD In The News

Thursday, November 1, 2018

“SeaComm supports Massena’s Leary Junior High’s WEB program” – NC Now

SeaComm donated \$500 to the Where Everybody Belongs program at the Jr. High School.

Link:

<http://www.northcountrynow.com/news/seacomm-supports-massenas-leary-junior-highs-web-program-0246300>

Friday, November 2, 2018

“Parent-teacher conferences planned Nov. 7 at Massena Central High School” – NC Now

Link:

<http://www.northcountrynow.com/news/parent-teacher-conferences-planned-nov-7-massena-central-high-school-0246427>

and

“Massena Central students to dismiss early Nov. 7; no school Nov. 12-13” – NC Now

Link:

<http://www.northcountrynow.com/news/massena-central-students-dismiss-early-nov-7-no-school-nov-12-13-0246328>

District Upcoming Events

11/7—Half Day—JH & HS Parent Teacher Conferences; Elementary Staff Development

11/12—Veterans Day; No School

11/13—Regional Staff Development Day; No School

11/15—Audit Committee Meeting—6:00 pm—HS Student Affairs; Board of Education Meeting—6:30 pm—HS Room 314