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#### MOHONASEN ASKS FOR BUDGET INPUT (SCHENECTADY COUNTY, ROTTERDAM)

Posted on: 01/14/09  
Jackie Sher  
email: [news@spotlightnews.com](mailto:news@spotlightnews.com)

The Mohonasen Central School District held an open forum Monday, Jan 12, to discuss budget goals and priorities as part of the planning process for the 2009-2010 school year.

Before the meeting, the district posted a survey on its Web site to gauge community concerns and budget priorities.

"It is a new format that we are going with, and Monday night was the first meeting, so I think that it went well," said Eileen French, president of the Mohonasen Central School District Board of Education. "I think we would like to see more people in the audience to get more of a pulse on the reactions from the community."

According to Kathleen Spring, superintendent of Mohonasen Central School District, 269 people had participated in the survey by the time it closed on Friday, Jan. 9. Between 15 and 20 people attended the meeting.

"I think it went well," said Spring, of the meeting, which consisted of a 30-minute presentation and a 30-minute question-and-answer period.

The presentation discussed the district's budgetary goals, changes in the 2009-2010 budget planning procedures and the fiscal constraints the district faces.

"There were some great questions that were asked and how we will proceed with certain things given that the governor is proposing a \$1.5 million reduction in the aid we were receiving last year," said French.

The district could see a proposed budget cut of approximately \$3 million "if things stay exactly the same as the governor proposed with flat state aid and deficit reduction," said Spring.

Budgetary goals for the district include a minimal budget increase and a commensurate tax that would support the district's "Whatever it Takes, Whatever the Challenge" philosophy, and maintain programs while moving the district forward, as well as maximizing existing resources while seeking out new revenues.

According to Spring, many of the responses to the online survey, which were addressed at Monday night's meeting, were concerning how the district would handle inevitable rising costs, and whether or not staff cuts will be made.

"Quite frankly we don't have a lot of answers right now. **Discussion at the Monday meeting** was very generic, talking about what we know so far with the governor's proposals," said Spring.

The presentation did include what the district does know about the budget: New York state is particularly affected by the financial crisis because a large part of its

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revenue comes from Wall Street, and nearly 45 percent of Mohonasen's budget is made up of State aid.

"I think right now we're hearing that there is the potential of some Federal relief targeted at schools through the stimulus package that's being proposed, so it's kind of a wait and see game, but we feel that we have to be proactive and look at the worst-case scenario," said Spring.

She said that the governor suggested districts deplete their emergency funds, but she doesn't think that is a sound plan.

"That doesn't make good fiscal sense because it's the only reserve that we have. If there is a catastrophic emergency, we wouldn't have money in such an event," said Spring.

The next budget planning meeting of the Mohonasen Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 20, in the high school library. It is entitled, "Budgeting 101: An Introduction to Budget Terminology, Budget Lines and Components of Budget."

"Our hope is that we can have as many people **participate** as possible to really get those questions answered, but I think we have really good staff in Dr. Spring and in **Assistant Superintendent for Business Denise Swezey**," said French. "They're very precise with their details and that is really comforting knowing that they have a good handle on those numbers."

On Monday, Jan. 26, there will be another budget meeting to discuss updates on the budget and continue planning for next year.

You can contact [news@spotlightnews.com](mailto:news@spotlightnews.com) with any questions. Also, feel free to post comments below.

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