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## Changes coming for New York's schools

### Federal education initiative brings new evaluations, standards

Mohonasen officials are working on a plan to incorporate new federal mandates into the district's schools and classrooms.

The work is taking place under the umbrella of the federal Race To The Top (RTTT) education initiative, which came with a \$700 million grant to New York State last year.

With the funding comes a requirement that the state's districts ramp up their use of data in teaching; incorporate a new set of national learning standards into the curriculum;

and adopt a new teacher and administrator evaluation system. Most of the \$700 million is going to the state Education Department, with each of the state's school districts receiving a share of the remaining funding to help them meet the requirements.

Mohonasen is slated to receive approximately \$73,000 over the next three years in RTTT funding (or about \$24,000 a year).

Because the amount the district is set to receive is

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### Tax cap law changes school budget landscape

As Mohonasen leaders continue to analyze the tax cap legislation signed into law by the Governor in June, Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Spring is projecting that significant budget cuts will again be necessary for next year.

At this time, Spring said it is unclear what the exact allowable tax levy increase will be for Mohonasen next year. While the cap has been touted by state leaders as 2 percent, it actually includes a number of provisions and ex-

emptions that mean districts could exceed the 2 percent and still be under the cap. As a result, the actual allowable tax levy increase will vary by district.

While it's still early, Spring expects Mohonasen's allowable increase will be between 2 and 3 percent.

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## Summer fun with broadcasting



Students in the Fun with Broadcasting summer enrichment class learned how to use video broadcasting equipment and lighting to record a mock news broadcast. They used cameras, soundboard equipment, a video transition machine, a teleprompter and a green screen. Students also used video-editing software to make special projects for next year's DMSTV. This course was just one of many summer enrichment, athletic and Town of Rotterdam programs that were underway at Mohonasen this summer. To learn more about DMSTV and Mohonasen's other broadcasting programs, please visit [www.mohonasen.org/TV](http://www.mohonasen.org/TV).

[www.mohonasen.org](http://www.mohonasen.org)

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## ➤ Tax cap has officials already planning for 2012-13 budget

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To get there, Spring is projecting that the level of cuts necessary for 2012-13—the first year to be affected by the cap—will be similar to the \$2.7 million made in the current year's budget.

"Looking ahead, there are a number of factors set to affect our budget planning—and now we will add a prop-

erty tax levy cap to the mix," Spring said. "I continue to be frustrated about the lack of serious mandate relief from our state leaders. While this bill includes some first steps, it does not address pension costs, health insurance or the other mandated items that have the largest impact on school cost increases."

"These are difficult fiscal times for our taxpayers and moving ahead we will continue to focus on balancing the needs of our students with our community's ability to pay," she added.

The exemptions from the cap include pension contributions beyond a certain level and spending for voter-approved capital projects.

**Voters will still decide on school budgets in New York.**

Furthermore, the allowable

tax levy increase more accurately refers to the figure that determines what level of voter support is needed for a school budget to pass. If the tax levy increase is above the cap, the support of a supermajority (60 percent) of voters would be required for budget passage. If it is within the cap, a simple majority is needed for budget approval.

**If a proposed budget is defeated twice by voters, the district would be forced to adopt a budget that does not increase the tax levy over the current year. This provision has prompted some school leaders to refer to the tax cap as an actual 0 percent cap.**

### MANDATE RELIEF?

The tax cap legislation was approved with a package of changes intended to help school districts and local governments control costs. These included the creation of a Mandate Relief Council to review laws and regulations that lead to escalating expenses for school districts and local government; allowing smaller districts to share superintendents; and changes to bus routing. Mohonasen officials say that at this point they don't believe any elements of this relief will help

### ➤ Other budget factors

Aside from the tax cap legislation, there are a number of factors set to affect Mohonasen's 2012-13 budget. These include:

- The loss of \$800,000 in Federal Education Jobs money that is being used to fund a number of current positions within the district.
- Increases in the state-mandated district retirement contributions.
- Contractual salary increases.
- Increases in other contractual areas, such as health insurance.
- Increasing energy costs.
- Limited availability of fund balance after it has been spent down in the recent years of declining state aid.
- State aid? At this point school leaders are not planning for an increase in state aid for 2012-2013.

the district bring down costs substantially.

Even with a 2.5 percent tax levy increase, the 2011-12 budget—which was approved by voters in May before the tax cap was put into place—included \$2.7 million in cuts and the elimination of 34.5 FTE positions. This came after the third year of reduced state aid for education.

The level of cuts in the budget for the upcoming school year would have been even deeper had officials not used \$1 million of the district's fund balance (or "rainy day" fund) or received more than \$525,000 in concessions from the teachers, support staff, supervisors and administrators.

While Mohonasen leaders understand the level of tax fatigue and frustration

with ever-increasing tax bills, Spring said they also know that the best economic stimulus is a solid education and high school diploma.

Because of the number of challenges faced by the district, Spring is urging all members of the Mohonasen community to stay engaged in the budget development process.

"Together, as a community, we will face the challenges in front of us and work to maintain quality schools for our children," she said.

The district hopes to hold a community forum this fall with local legislators to discuss the challenges of the tax cap. Look for more information regarding the forum at [www.mohonasen.org](http://www.mohonasen.org).



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## IN BRIEF: New York's Tax Cap

- Tax levy increases will be capped at a specific amount, according to a state formula.
- Because the formula takes different, district specific information into account, the actual allowable tax levy increase will vary by district.
- Some pension cost increases can be added to the allowable tax levy increase.
- Some districts will receive an allowance for tax base growth, which could further increase the allowable tax levy increase.
- Exemptions are also allowed for court judgments and capital project costs.
- If a district's tax levy increase is under the allowable amount, the difference can be carried over to the next year.
- A district may propose a budget that goes over the allowable increase, which would require approval from more than 60 percent of voters. A budget that falls within the allowable increase would require approval from more than 50 percent of voters.
- If a proposed budget is defeated twice by voters, the district would be forced to adopt a budget that does not increase the tax levy over the current year.

### What is the tax levy?

The tax levy is the total amount of money the district collects through taxes. Approximately 50 percent of Mohonasen's revenue comes from local property taxes. The other 50 percent comes from New York State.

### Contact your elected leaders

As always, parents, staff, students and taxpayers are urged to voice their opinions on these matters to our elected leaders. To do so, please visit our Contact Your Elected Leaders Page on our website at [www.mohonasen.org/budget](http://www.mohonasen.org/budget).

## Late buses cut back to two days a week

Due to budget reductions for the upcoming school year, *late buses at Pinewood Intermediate School, Draper Middle School and Mohonasen High School will only be available to students on Tuesday and Thursdays.* In the past they were available Tuesdays through Fridays.

Late buses are not available at Bradt Primary School

This decision was made last spring, when the current year's budget was developed.

All after-school activities and detentions will only occur at the middle school on these days. However, at the high school, activities and detentions will be held all week long, with transportation only being available on the designated days. At Pinewood, late buses will only be available for certain programs.

## Administrator taking on new role

Mohonasen's Academic Administrator for Guidance Christopher Ruberti will take on several new duties this year, and as a result his title has been changed to Administrator for Student and Operational Support Services.



with business office officials.

"We have lost a number of administrative positions over the last three years due to budget cuts and at the same time, state and federal mandates have only increased," Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Spring said. "As a result, our remaining administrators have picked up additional job responsibilities along the way and the change in Chris' title reflects that."

Ruberti will continue to oversee all guidance and student support services within the district, as well as data collection, state and federal reporting, scheduling, course registration and all other duties associated with his former title for the upcoming year. In the new role, he will also be more involved in the daily operations of the school district, working closely

Spring added that in these uncertain financial times, it's important to have administrators who can perform a variety of functions and take on new responsibilities when necessary.

## ➤ Changes set to improve college, career readiness

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hardly enough to cover the costs to adequately comply with the new requirements, Mohonasen is one of 21 area districts that have pooled their funds to form what is known as the Capital Region Network Team. This consists of experts in the areas of data collection, curriculum/instruction and testing, and will help the district meet the new requirements.

The network team will work with Mohonasen administrators and teachers to implement best practices, analyze student data, and identify ways to address any academic problems and learn from the entire improvement process.

“What this new law does is prescribe, more than ever, what data we collect, how we collect it and how we use it to drive and hopefully improve instruction for all students,” Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Spring said. “However, it doesn’t come without a cost to the district. This is just another example of an under-funded mandate. Our administrative staff will be working overtime during the next year to make sure Mohonasen is in compliance.”

### RENEWED STANDARDS

One of the largest mandates is the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Learning standards outline the skills that need to be taught through daily classroom lessons and define end-of-the-year expectations for what students should know. Standards are the basis for any class curriculum.

These new standards, which replace the former math and English language arts standards in grades K-12, are designed to better align what is being taught in the classroom with college and work expectations.

There are also new literacy standards designed to supplement the curriculum for history/social studies, science and technical subjects in grades 6-12.

All states that are receiving RTTT funding have agreed to adopt these standards in their entirety. In New York, they will ultimately replace the 2005 learning standards that all state assessments and classroom curricula are currently based on.

The new standards will be fully implemented by the 2012-2013 school year.

“In some cases, these standards will replace what we are teaching to our students, but in most cases

*“What this new law does is prescribe, more than ever, what data we collect, how we collect it and how we use it to drive instruction and hopefully improve instruction for all students. However, it doesn’t come without a cost to the district. This is just another example of an under-funded mandate. Our administrative staff will be working overtime during the next year to make sure Mohonasen is in compliance.”*

*- Dr. Kathleen Spring, Superintendent*

they will help us focus on developing certain skills and emphasizing certain ideas. This includes making students more independent, helping them use technology more strategically and helping them better comprehend and critique what they are learning,” Spring said.

“We also expect that with the increased standards will come increased state testing,” she added. “But the state has yet to release those details.”

School leaders are already working to review the new standards and develop an updated curriculum.

### NEW EVALUATIONS

A new evaluation system for both teachers and administrators is also coming, starting this September.

The evaluations will be conducted annually, and will be used for a number of things, from developing more effective professional development programs for teachers to decisions about promotion, retention and removal.

Based on a 100-point scoring system, teachers and administrators will fall into one of four categories: highly effective, effective, developing and ineffective. Scores will consider state exam scores, observations and a number of other state-dictated measures.

This is the first time that teachers/administrators will be evaluated based on their students’ test scores, an issue that has been controversial in the field of public education in New York and across the country. Additionally, there are portions of the teacher evaluation process that are subject to collective-bargaining negotiations.

Because information about the evaluation process was released only recently, school leaders expect that this new system will continue to evolve.

Have a question about RTTT, the new learning standards or the new teacher/administrator evaluation system? Call 356-8200 or e-mail [aleon@mohonasen.org](mailto:aleon@mohonasen.org).



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## Is your School News Notifier profile up to date?

With the new school year here, you may want to make sure that you are signed up to receive School News Notifier (SNN) messages for the right school(s), particularly if your children are entering a new school this fall.

You can check on the notifications you are set to receive — and change them — anytime by logging on to the SNN homepage, found through [www.mohonasen.org](http://www.mohonasen.org).

### THEN, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

Use your e-mail address and password set at the time of registration to log-in. There is a "Forgot Password" link if you no longer have yours.

Once you have logged-in, you will see a page with the notifications you are set to receive indicated by a check mark.

Select new notifications by checking the appropriate box. Uncheck any notifications you no longer wish to receive.

If you are changing notifications, click "Update Profile" at the bottom of that page. That will bring you to a confirmation page where you can log out.

### NOT SIGNED UP FOR SNN? WONDERING WHAT SNN IS?

School News Notifier is a free, opt-in, e-mail news and alert system that district

officials use to send school news, event information, school closing and delay information, etc., out to parents, students, staff and community members.

You can sign up to receive any or all of the alerts, which include those for the elementary schools (Bradt and Pinewood), Draper Middle School, Mohonasen High School, district and board of education news (this includes budget information) and school closings and



delays. You can also choose to receive closing and delay information via text message.

You can unsubscribe at any time.

To sign up, visit <https://snn.neric.org/mohon/index.cfm>. Having trouble signing up? Call our communications office at 356-8250.

## ON THE WEB

The preschool census form can be found online at <http://www.mohonasen.org/forms/forms.cfm>

Sign up for SNN, or change your profile at <https://snn.neric.org/mohon/index.cfm>

## Have preschool age children? Make sure to fill out a census form.

It is extremely important that Mohonasen has accurate information regarding preschool age children in the district. If you have preschool age children, please take the time to fill out a preschool census form and send it in to us.

Forms can be found in the district offices and on the district website.

Please note that if you took part in the recent United States Census, this is not the same as letting the district

know about your preschool age children. Even if you took part in the national census, you still need to fill out a form for the district.

Parents should complete and submit one form to include all preschoolers in their home—and then again for any infants as they are born.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. Questions? Call Bradt school at 356-8400 or the district registration office at 356-8222.

## January Regents will take place

The New York State Education Department announced this summer it will reinstate the January Regents exams this school year. The move came after New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott announced they had secured \$1.5 million in private funding to pay for administration of the exams.

This spring, NYSED said that it would not offer the January exams for high school students beginning

in 2012, after the Board of Regents voted to eliminate them due to budget cuts.

Because of the timing of the announcement, the annual district calendar does not include these testing dates, but they will be added to the website calendar. More information and a Regents testing schedule will be posted on the Mohonasen web page and a notice sent out on SNN when information becomes available closer to the testing dates.

## ➤ New standards for prekindergarten students

Along with the Common Core Learning Standards—the new academic requirements that have been adopted by New York and states across the country—comes new curriculum standards for prekindergarten students.

These standards dictate what skills students are expected to have when they enter kindergarten. With higher academic standards and increased standardized testing at the elementary level, it's more important than ever that children hit the ground running when they start kindergarten.

The new standards include English language arts reading, writing, speaking and listening standards; as well as math counting, operations, measurement and geometry standards. For a complete listing of these new standards, you can visit the Bradt Primary School webpage at [www.mohonasen.org/BR](http://www.mohonasen.org/BR) or contact the school at 356-8400.

*Here are some things parents of prekindergarten students can do to help prepare their children for school.*

### ELA ACTIVITIES FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

- ☐ Take advantage of opportunities to have conversations about stories before, during, and after reading a book:
  - Talk about what happened first, next and last.
  - Talk about a problem the character(s) had, and how it turned out.
  - Ask child to predict what might happen next.
  - Has anything like that ever happened to you?

- Does that remind you of anything?
- ☐ Label common items around the house (i.e. door, window, chair, TV, bed, sink, oven, closet).
- ☐ Have your child tell you what to write, write it out, and then re-read it together throughout the day/week. Have your child illustrate it.
- ☐ Make a list of events that will happen/did happen throughout a day, and re-read. Have your child illustrate it.
- ☐ Have your child draw a picture to tell about an event or experience, and have her explain the picture to you. Help her label key items and/or write down key points to retell, to re-read with her later.
- ☐ Look for opportunities for group story experiences (i.e. bookstores, libraries, family gatherings) that provide opportunities to listen as part of a group and take turns asking/answering questions.
- ☐ Make a list of the names of people in your household, and put a picture next to each name. Highlight the name on the mail each day, and have your child sort the mail by who it is for.
- ☐ Have your child cut out pictures from magazines and fliers:
  - Identify pictures of words that rhyme.
  - Identify pictures of words with the same beginning sound.
  - Have him cut out and sort specific letters, numbers, and basic sight words.

### MATH ACTIVITIES FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

- ☐ Make collections of 20 of the same thing and keep each separate collection in a container/zip lock bag.
- ☐ Make up cards with the numerals 0-10 on them.
- ☐ Pick a collection and put out between 1 and 10 things. Have your child tell you how many things there are. Have your child give you problems to solve and let her tell you whether or not you are correct.
- ☐ Put out different objects from a variety of collections:
  - Talk about first and last.
  - Mix up the collections and have your child sort.
  - Put an item like a raisin box on the table, and have your child place an item from a collection in different positions in relation to that item (i.e. in, on, in front of, behind, next to, over, under etc.).
  - Talk about characteristic of items in each of the collections (hardest, softest, biggest, smallest).
  - Make patterns and have your child continue them (i.e. cotton ball, cotton ball, clothes pin, cotton ball, cotton ball, clothespin). Have your child give you patterns to solve and let him tell you whether or not you are correct.



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**➤ SchoolTool a great resource for secondary parents**

All Draper Middle School and Mohonasen High School parents can continue to take advantage of our online parent access feature, SchoolTool. Through this online tool, parents can view their child's attendance, academic and discipline records from their home or office computer. To sign up or learn more, please contact the middle or high school main office.

**➤ Did you know that Mohonasen is now on Facebook?**

Mohonasen is now sending out school and district news and information through the social media website Facebook. Log on and "Like" us today at [www.facebook.com/Mohonasen](http://www.facebook.com/Mohonasen).



**➤ School meal prices increasing for 2011-2012 school year**

As a result of the federal Healthy, Hungry Free Kids Act, which was signed into law in December, meal prices at Mohonasen are increasing by 25 cents for the new school year. The new federal regulations require school districts to begin raising their prices so that they fall within specific guidelines.

The meal prices are as follows:

◆ **Bradt & Pinewood:**

Breakfast \$1.00 and Lunch \$2.00

◆ **Draper MS & Mohonasen High School:**

Breakfast \$1.00 and Lunch \$2.50

The new law also requires that school lunches now include only fat-free milk, as well as more fruits, vegetables and whole-grains.

**➤ Congratulations to the class of 2011!**



See more graduation pictures online at [www.mohonasen.org](http://www.mohonasen.org)

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## Mohonasen

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## POSTAL CUSTOMER

## ➤ Mohonasen, Schalmont explore options for sharing services

In light of the current economic climate, declining state aid and a new property tax cap, the Schalmont and Mohonasen school boards are exploring ways to share more services and ultimately save money.

The neighboring districts held a joint board workshop in mid-August. The meeting served as a brainstorming session, at which board members informally discussed whether they were interested in studying potential areas for shared services.

Areas of discussion included transportation and a bus garage, business support services, administration, faculty and staff, special education, alternative education, professional development, athletics and academic programs.

Board members overwhelmingly agreed that they would like to continue the conversations and learn more about the logistics of sharing services, especially business office functions and other support services, and a shared bus garage. They discussed the possibility of pursuing an efficiency study to better understand the pros and cons – as well as the potential cost savings, if any – of combining or sharing certain district functions.

Members of both groups stressed the importance of maintaining each district's identity, traditions and culture. However, as fiscal constraints continue to grow both groups acknowledged the benefits that sharing services could provide to taxpayers and students.

"I think this is a positive step," said Mohonasen board member Mark Sabatini. "We might learn a lot from each other and we're doing the right thing for our districts."

Both districts faced difficult budget decisions during the 2010-11 school year.

In Schalmont, the school board made nearly \$2 million in budget reductions, which were achieved through a combination of school closures and personnel reductions affecting 24 full-time equivalent teaching, support staff and administrative positions.

At Mohonasen, school leaders made \$2.7 million in cuts, eliminating 34.5 positions district wide. Voters in Mohonasen also rejected a \$43 million capital project in the fall of 2010.

## ALREADY SHARING SERVICES

Both districts already successfully share a number of programs and services. These include a community transition program for students with disabilities and a shared swim team. They are also part of a consortium of districts that purchase equipment, supplies and health insurance together.

The districts also share a number of services with Capital Region BOCES, both as a way to contain costs and provide opportunities to students across the region. For example, Mohonasen and Schalmont rent a number of BOCES classrooms for special education students from several neighboring districts. The number of rented classrooms has increased in recent years.