

# Pat-Med amps up special education

Budget preps for in-house CTE programs

BY NICOLE ALLEGREZZA

The Patchogue-Medford School District plans to revamp their special education programming through an enhancement plan by providing more support and more training for teachers. The initiative will be included in the 2018-19 budget with additional support to help transition special education students into future employment.

The goal, according to the district, is to ensure all special education students have the ability to reach their fullest potential in the pathway they choose by providing a high-quality, inclusive education. A total of six teacher aides will be added to accommodate the programmatic change. "Ultimately, we are looking to bring kids who would normally be out of district back," said superintendent of schools Dr. Michael Hynes.

The proposed \$190.5 million budget reflects a 3.54 percent budget-to-budget increase, totaling about a \$282 increase per year per average household valued at \$300,000. The budget does not pierce the tax cap and state aid is up at about \$73,851,274.

"Overall, I think the budget is extremely child-centered; whatever increases we were looking to make were directed to the children," Hynes said, based upon his whole-child approach and five-year Plan to Success, which is currently in year four and 85 percent complete, awaiting a 2019-20 decision on the Princeton Model or alternative.

"There are three major pushes this year," he added. "One big one is to push the literacy program by expanding our dual-language program and making sure all students are reading at grade level by the end of grade 3."

The budget, according to Dr. Donna Jones, assistant superintendent for business, in addition to the programmatic



The Patchogue-Medford School District presents the 2018-19 budget, in keeping with Dr. Michael Hynes' whole-child approach.

File photo

changes, includes capital projects to support those plans.

For example, the capital reserve fund expenditure voted upon a few years ago to refinish five to seven roofs, which was then expanded to refinish all 11 roofs, windows, lockers and tennis courts due to good pricing, will be completed this summer with the high school, South Ocean Middle School and River Elementary, leaving money remaining in the fund. According to Jones, about \$1.2 million remaining money will be placed on this year's budget vote as Proposition No. 3, to be utilized for security vestibules at all schools and to tweak schools with existing vestibules, which will then be outfitted with cameras, ID scanners and additional safety measures.

"[The vestibules] will basically capture visitors in an in-between space, such that we can vet them before they enter," she explained, noting that implementing metal

detectors has also been part of the discussion.

Proposition No. 1 is the 2018-19 budget and No. 2 will be to authorize the district to reestablish a new capital reserve fund for future projects with the usage of any surplus after the depletion of the first fund, should the security proposition pass.

The budget also set the stage for the addition of an in-house Career and Technical Education program, which, according to Hynes and Jones, will essentially save the district money and allow for expansion. The program, which will be slowly phased in beginning the following 2019-20 school year, will eventually allow both 11th- and 12th-graders to participate in a two-year program leading to a certification, as opposed to the BOCES program currently offered only to seniors.

"Instead of having our kids go out to another place, we want to bring them back," Hynes said. "It is also cost effec-

tive and going to basically pay for itself. Right now, we have about 100 students in BOCES. Ultimately, we will be able to serve 400 kids."

This year's budget also accounted for the addition of 10 full-time equivalent active or retired police officer security guards to accommodate additional security at the middle and elementary schools and will introduce a vote to take place in October to replace antiquated playgrounds.

Academic and program highlights include the purchase of exercise equipment, new kilns for the middle school art program, new instruments for the middle school marching band and the elementary school music program, and new textbooks as well as literacy supporting supplies. New programs and initiatives include the special education program, new work-base opportunities, dual-language expansion and heart-rate monitors for the physical education program at the middle schools. Technology improvements include new phones, radios, wireless security enhancements, upgraded payroll software, new elementary computer labs, new laptop carts at the high school, iPads for second-graders, staff computer upgrades, new elementary computers, high school computer science lab replacements, high school TV studio upgrades, and a school district website upgrade. Capital projects include ADA renovations, refinishing the gym floor at Saxton Middle School, roof recoats, tennis court replacements, new vestibules, new locker rooms at the middle schools and new panel curtains at the high school.

The school district budget vote will take place on Tuesday, May 15 from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. The budget hearing will be held on May 3 at 7 p.m. at the South Ocean Middle School. For more information, visit the Patchogue-Medford School District website or contact the district clerk at 631-687-6370. ■

## WF budget to reduce class size

BY RANDALL WASZYNSKI

The William Floyd School District is focusing its proposed annual budget on reducing class size across the five elementary schools by hiring five teachers as well as increasing instructional support at the middle-school level by hiring an assistant principal at each middle school and two teachers at both William Floyd and William Paca middle schools.

An unexpected increased enrollment of elementary school students entering the current school year has the class sizes for these grades ranging between 29 and 32. Accounting for another increase in enrollment at this level into next year, the addition of one teacher at each school would reduce the class sizes to 23 or 24 per class.

"We have some of the highest average class sizes per grade level in the school community," said Robert Vecchio, president of the William Floyd Board of Education.

The proposed budget, \$240 million, is a 1.57 percent increase from the current budget. The estimated budget proposes a 0.6 percent increase in state aid, compared to a 6 percent increase from last year. The district has proposed a 2.03 percent tax levy that translates to a \$1.3 million reduction from the maximum allowable levy, which was calculated at 3.4 percent.

"The board, at any year they were able



William Floyd's proposed \$240 million budget is a 1.57 percent increase from the current budget with a 0.6 percent increase in state aid.

File photo

to, has reduced the levy to a lower amount whenever it was fiscally possible," said David Beggins, assistant superintendent of business. "It's for the benefit of the residents. That's the same thing we're going to be doing this year going out to the budget for a vote."

The district had lost \$20 million in state aid in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years, and a longstanding effort has been in place to restore the positions that were

laid off and the programs that were cut.

"We've been slowly bringing things back," Vecchio said. "We're not bringing anything back that we cannot sustain over the long term. And everything we're bringing back is with the end goal in mind of continuing to increase our graduation rate, and it has been steadily climbing."

The district graduated a concerning 67 percent in 2007. But an 85 percent graduation rate — 86 percent including summer school graduations — in 2017 and increasing numbers in previous years has regained state aid since the cut. Vecchio referenced the incorporation of the William Floyd Learning Center at the beginning of the current academic year, pointing out the benefits of keeping students in-district as opposed to enrolling through BOCES.

"It's better for families that have kids in the Floyd schools not to be split between two programs," Vecchio said. "A lot of these investments that we're doing are slow, steady growth to get us back to where we need to be, where our kids deserve to be. And our results have proven that the investments we're making academically are having a direct impact on our graduation rate."

Beggins added that the benefits of the learning center keeping students in-district will translate into a higher regard for the district in the eyes of the state.

"We think we can do a better job [than

BOCES]," Beggins said. "A lower cost, a better product, and a better return."

The district plans to use half of a \$5 million capital reserve fund to begin roofing projects at Floyd, Woodhull and Moriches elementary schools and William Paca Middle School. Including the transfer to capital, the district proposed \$5.5 million in additions in its drafted budget.

A school counselor will be assigned to Hobart Elementary. The hire will be the third counselor among the five elementary schools.

"This has been a long-term goal of adding a school counselor to each school," Beggins said. "That will be part of our buildups going forward."

Beggins and the board also discussed the concern of a 20 percent decrease in voter turnout from the previous year, referencing the stakes of political officials in the matter.

"If more people show up to the polls, they are more apt to listen to us in regards to our needs," Beggins said. "We always appreciate when people come out to vote, no matter how you vote."

The annual budget hearing for the district — the fifth and final meeting relevant to the proposed budget — will be May 8 at William Floyd High School in the library at 7:15 p.m. The vote will take place on May 15 from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. in the east lobby of the high school. ■