

Scarsdale Forum Discusses Scholastic Achievements Amid Financial Constraints

School administrators discussed the district's welfare in light of the state's difficulties.

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The district's educational progress amid statewide budget cuts were focal points during Thursday evening's [Scarsdale Forum](#) general membership meeting.

Assistant Superintendent of Business Linda Purvis previewed the district's 2011 – 2012 budget, which was to be delivered to the [Board of Education](#) on Feb. 4.

“The school board has limited because of state mandates,” said Jill Spieler, Board of Education president in her “State of the Schools” address. “The statewide property tax cap would greatly limit our educational resources.”

While Scarsdale schools are top-rated, there exists a clear disparity between education in the United States and other countries.

“This year, the district is hosting five educators from the People’s Republic of China, and it’s underwritten by the Chinese government,” said Superintendent of Schools Michael V. McGill. “In the United States, we are cutting back in education.”

Citing [Governor Andrew Cuomo’s plan to cut \\$1.5 million in state school aid](#), McGill noted, “We’re not immune to the rhetoric about education.”

Purvis said the effects of Cuomo’s tax cap limiting the growth in property taxes to two percent a year or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower, is almost immediate. Without provisions for local communities to override it or work around it, the district may have to cut maintenance facilities, raise class sizes or eliminate extra-curricular programs.

“Albany is unwilling to take on special interest groups, and is putting the burden on municipalities,” Purvis said.

This year the district cut eight teaching positions, including five from the high school.

“The question is not ‘Can we reduce staff?’ It’s ‘Do we want to?’” Spieler said.

Nevertheless, said Spieler, the Board's goals are to preserve educational quality while minimizing budget increases to compensate for the tax cap limit, reductions in pension contributions and relief from federal and state mandates.

Shain detailed the district's curriculum strategy and initiatives for school grades K-2 with "The Building Blocks of a Scarsdale Education."

Five building blocks for the future, she said, are balanced literacy; Singapore Math (recently featured in a New York Times article); inquiry approach to science and social studies (students ask their own questions of experts and learn from their answers); technology information fluency; and visual arts (arts, music, dance).

"There's a link between the lower grades and in the higher grades," Shain said. "The last years of high school leading to graduation are built on strong foundations that start in elementary school."

When one parent asked about curriculum uniformity among the elementary schools, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Lynne Shain said students in all five of the district's elementary schools are equally prepared for their next level of education.

Village Trustee Miriam Flisser favored McGill's report on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study.

"Although the USA scored below average in science and math on the study, Dr. McGill stated that had Scarsdale been a country, based on our scores, Scarsdale would have been number one in the rankings," Flisser said.

Due to the large number of reports, members voted via ballot on:

- Fiscal Education Committee Majority Report (John Benche – Chair)
- Fiscal Education Committee Minority Report on The Scarsdale Schools Compensation System (Mary Beth Evans) -
- Program Education Committee Report on The Scarsdale Schools Advanced Topics (AT) Program (Susan Grosz – Chair)
- Development Committee Report Ed (Morgan – Co-Chair)
- Zoning and Planning Heathcote Manor Report (David Buchen – Co-Chair).

Scarsdale Forum President Bruce Wells said the Majority Report passed by a vote of 59 to 19, and the rest of the report also passed by large margins.

The Board will discuss the budget Feb. 7, 9, 14 and 16 with a snow date of Feb. 17. For more information, visit (www.ScarsdaleForum.com), call (914-723-2829) or write tooffice@scarsdaleforum.com.