

# South Colonie Schools

**EXPECTING EXCELLENCE — DELIVERING RESULTS**

## A Look at Our Program Effectiveness

The South Colonie Board of Education and staff take their responsibility of providing a quality education for students while maintaining fiscal accountability very seriously. So, what do South Colonie taxpayers get for their tax dollars?

### Overall Achievement as a School District

► South Colonie is ranked in the top 10 of 85 school districts in an 11-county area in an analysis performed by the Albany *Business Review* newspaper. In 2008, South Colonie was ranked 9th out of 85 in overall achievement. These rankings are based on graduation data and results on state tests in English, math, social studies and science. Colonie Central High School was also ranked 8<sup>th</sup> for having the highest three-year percentage of graduates planning to attend two- and four-year colleges.

► Last spring, three district schools — Lisha Kill Middle School and Roessleville and Veeder Elementary Schools — were among 1,759 public schools, 19 charter schools, and 288 public school districts named “High Performing/Gap Closing” under the No Child Left Behind Act. “High Performing/Gap Closing” schools and districts have been recognized because they met all applicable State standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and math during the 2006-07 school year and also made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA and math for two consecutive years.

► South Colonie has been named a Blue Ribbon District by *Expansion Magazine* — which ranked it in the top 33 percent of school districts in United States. *Expansion* is a monthly business publication for company executives looking for a place to expand or relocate their facilities. Two elementary schools have also been named Blue Ribbon Schools.

### College and Work Force Preparation

► South Colonie pupils start learning about careers in elementary school with exposure to career fairs and Junior Achievement projects. By high school, many of them have focused their interests by taking upper level courses and Advanced Placement offerings as well as electives like Forensic Science, Biotechnology, Aerospace Engineering, CISCO Networking and Web Design.

► South Colonie pupils have many opportunities to earn numerous college credits while in high school by taking classes in English, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies through the State University at Albany, Hudson Valley Community College and the College of Saint Rose.



## A letter from our South Colonie Superintendent Jonathan Buhner

Dear community members,

As the South Colonie Administrative team and Board of Education prepare to build our next operating budget for the 2009-10 school year, I thought it would be helpful to share with you the current budget forecast along with the steps we have already taken as the budget development process moves forward.

Difficult economic conditions over the last year combined with New York State’s specific fiscal challenges has our District team working to develop a sound budget which will find efficiencies while still meeting important objectives.

Based upon the budget proposed by the Governor, David Paterson, in December, the District is facing a significant state aid funding cut for the 2009-2010 school year. This figure is more than 12 percent of the District’s total state aid package or approximately \$2.5 million. This number is based on last year’s state aid and does not provide any support for inflationary costs for the next school year. Essentially, that makes the number even worse.

Our school district is evaluating all programs and operating expenditures for possible efficiencies and will be using the tools we have available to try to make up for the significant cuts we anticipate from the state.

Our goal is always to put together a fiscally sound budget that maintains quality and keeps the district

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## More Examples of Program Effectiveness

- ▶ Curricula in general engineering and biomedical engineering are offered through the nationally recognized pre-engineering program Project Lead the Way.
- ▶ In May of 2008, 179 CCHS students completed 245 Advanced Placement courses with 76 percent earning a score of three or higher on their AP exams.
- ▶ South Colonie Foreign Language courses begin as early as fifth grade, and the high school offers Foreign Language courses in French, Spanish, Italian and Japanese.

### Graduation Data

- ▶ 96 percent of the Class of 2008 earned a New York State Regents diploma, 54 percent of the class earned an Advanced Regents diploma, and 40 percent of the class had a Grade Point Average of 90 or higher.
- ▶ Nine out of 10 graduates continue their education at two- and four-year colleges, earning more than \$1.6 million in scholarship money last year.
- ▶ CCHS students are well rounded with three-quarters of graduates, on average, getting involved in athletics and/or student clubs and organizations. The district takes pride in developing opportunities for all students.

### Beyond the books

- ▶ South Colonie faculty continue to set the bar high with many authoring books and curriculum material, lecturing at national and state conventions, and participating in enrichment activities they share with their students after returning from Japan, South America and the Galapagos Islands to name a few.
- ▶ South Colonie educators have been named Teachers of the Year by business and professional organizations for leading and mentoring today's youth, while others have been featured as Educators of the Week by local media outlets.

### Beyond the books

- ▶ South Colonie athletes excel on the field and in the classroom — with many of its teams capturing Sectional titles while being named New York State Scholar Athletes with their 90 or better academic averages. Additionally, the district receives awards on a regular basis for overall sportsmanship.

- ▶ South Colonie pupils benefit from a wide range of fine arts programs such as the award-winning Line & Cue theater group, students chosen to perform in state bands and orchestras, and having artists regularly featured in local art shows.



## A letter from our Superintendent Jonathan Buhner

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moving forward on key educational initiatives. While we will work to control costs, a state reduction of this scale will definitely have an impact.

The Governor's proposal is now being reviewed by the New York State Legislature with a budget deadline of April 1. While we don't know what lawmakers will do with school aid formulas at this time, the District will need to work from a worse case scenario and build the budget based upon the original numbers that were sent from the Governor's office.

Another challenging piece of this is that while the District is faced with a proposal that significantly reduces state aid, unfunded state mandates currently make up about 14 percent of our overall budget. Additionally, there is a proposal on the table in this upcoming budget year to shift a portion of the cost of pre-school special education expenses to local school districts. These expenses have been paid by state and county governments in previous years.

With all of this said, I think it is vital that we work together to find a responsible budget balance, which maintains critical programming for our children and keeps the District moving forward in a positive direction. One of the strengths of South Colonie is the quality of its schools and the commitment to making sure that our students are prepared to compete anywhere and find success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## A letter from our Superintendent Jonathan Buhner

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As we build this budget, many difficult decisions will have to be made and we certainly welcome input from our community members. As a District this work started early this schoolyear and has been ongoing. We have taken multiple steps to reduce spending in this current school year and are developing strategies that will allow us to reduce expenditures next year.

In the meantime, please take a minute to browse through this newsletter, which presents some interesting facts on the effectiveness of South Colonie's educational program as well as specific ways the district is working to be cost effective. I hope this provides you with a quick overview of some of the steps we have taken to ensure we are being fiscally responsible with community resources. This District has a lot to be proud of.

As the budget process moves ahead leading up to our school budget vote on May 19th, we will be providing you with continuous updates and additional information on the budget in the *In Focus* community newsletter and on our district web site. You are also invited to attend our budget workshops (*schedule on page 6*) and share your thoughts as we plan next year's budget together.

In advance, I thank you for your participation and commitment to the South Colonie Central School District and I promise that we will continue to work diligently to provide a budget that meets your expectations for excellence at a cost our community members can support.

Jonathan W. Buhner,  
Superintendent of Schools

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## More Examples of Program Effectiveness

▶ Community service and education go hand-in-hand in South Colonie. Each year, the district's Stuff the Bus with Toys for Tots program helps the U.S. Marine Corps provide gifts for needy children throughout the Capital District and the North Country during the holidays. Schools and school organizations have also been honored for their Character Education efforts to assist the community in events such as the Penny Harvest program. Roessville Elementary was recently named a Capital Region School of Character by the Sage Colleges, and Shaker Road Elementary a "Champion for Children" by the Northeast Parent and Child Society.

▶ South Colonie recognizes and welcomes its senior citizens by offering an enhanced STAR program reducing school property taxes for qualified individuals, offering evening courses at reduced rates, providing free admission to student athletics, plays, dinner theaters, concerts and more.

▶ CCHS students continue to be very competitive at US FIRST Robotics — a national event where young people solve engineering design problems.

### Taking Pride in Our Alumni

▶ Nearly 50 graduates have been inducted into the Colonie Central High School Hall of Fame — established in 1994 to honor South Colonie alumni who can serve as role models and a source of inspiration for students based on their variety of accomplishments following high school.

### Building Strong Bodies and Healthy Minds for Life

▶ The school district's mission includes fostering the personal growth of all pupils and giving them lifelong skills that can keep them healthy and enrich their lives.

▶ South Colonie Food Services has been honored with a New York State OGS Best Practices Award in recognition of the district's innovative and creative use of government commodity foods in the school meal program. Food Services was also one of the first participants in the "Choose Sensibly" program — a state initiative aimed at fighting childhood obesity.

▶ The district has a comprehensive health curriculum in place and has received several grants to help combat childhood obesity.





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## More Examples of Program Effectiveness

### Providing Safe Schools

▶ Safety is a theme that runs throughout our K-12 school programs. This includes teaching bus and bicycle safety, offering driver's education, providing year-long anti-bullying programs, activities and campaigns, promoting police interaction in our schools including a comprehensive DARE program and School Resource Officer at the high school, and providing carefully thought-out substance abuse prevention lessons. This proactive approach continues to benefit our students.

▶ The district has an active Safe Schools Committee in place continually monitoring and updating safety procedures and emergency plans for all of its schools and facilities.

▶ South Colonie school bus drivers have been honored for driving safety and acts of heroism including recent awards from the Albany County Traffic Safety Division and the Hudson Valley Chapter of the Automobile Association of America.

### Strong Communications

▶ South Colonie is in the process of implementing a district-wide emergency alert information system that will automatically notify parents by telephone in the event of an unforeseen school closing, early dismissal or evacuation. This system should be in place by the end of the 2008-09 school year.

▶ As part of its participation in the BOCES Communications Service, the district will be redesigning/modernizing its web site this year at no extra cost to South Colonie taxpayers.

▶ The district continually works to keep its parents and residents informed through a variety of timely, award-winning building and community newsletters as well as web site information.

### A Friend to the Environment

▶ The EPA honored South Colonie this year for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through superior energy management.

▶ Veeder Elementary School was the first school in the state and 10<sup>th</sup> school in the nation to achieve designation as a "Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary."

▶ South Colonie had one of the first Transportation Departments in the area to participate in the American Lung Association's school bus "anti idling" campaign to lower exhaust emissions.

▶ Colonie Central High School was one of only 50 schools in New York State to be awarded funding for installation of energy producing solar roof panels and study of solar energy as an alternative energy source.



New this year, the South Colonie Board of Education is bringing two budget development workshops to you. Special open budget discussions and Question and Answer sessions will be held on:

- Thursday, February 12, 7 p.m. — Veeder Elementary School
- Thursday, March 5, 7 p.m. — Shaker Elementary School Library

For the full Budget Development Calendar, please turn to page 6

# South Colonie Schools

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## Examples of Cost Effectiveness

Each year, South Colonie dissects the budget line by line to ensure it is operating as cost effectively as possible. Controlling costs also means seeking grants and donations where possible and adhering to comprehensive procedures to prevent misuse of funds. The Business Office takes pride in its internal controls to track the use of school funds, while meeting numerous auditing and accountability standards.

### Energy & Utilities Savings

▶ Since 2001, South Colonie has had an aggressive energy conservation program in place and has exceeded its energy savings projections, avoiding more than \$2.5 million in energy usage.

▶ South Colonie has an Energy Educator who continually monitors energy usage and researches the latest technology available to keep costs under control. As a result, six schools have earned an Energy Star label from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — signifying that they operate more energy efficiently than 75 percent of the schools in the United States.

▶ South Colonie is among 18 school districts, businesses and organizations recognized by the EPA for achieving significant energy savings and leading their fields in responding to the agency's Energy Star Building Challenge.

▶ The district capitalized on additional New York State Excel Aid available to schools in 2006 to replace antiquated roofs and approximately 35-year-old school boilers and heating systems to make them more energy efficient, thereby lowering district-wide utility costs.

▶ Installing energy-efficient, auto-on, auto-off lighting fixtures in many schools and offices has substantially lowered lighting costs.

▶ The district uses a computer-automated system to monitor and control heating and lighting in all of its schools, and expects to continue modernizing this equipment in coming years. The system is zoned for specific rooms and can be controlled from a computer at the District Office.

### Salaries and Benefits

▶ Increased enrollment does not always mean increased staffing. The district continues to focus on initiatives while finding efficiencies in operations.

▶ South Colonie uses BOCES services when it is cost-effective to do so. This can be significantly less expensive than hiring people outright, particularly since the district is reimbursed for a portion of the cost of the cooperative services through state aid.

▶ Recently negotiated changes to the district's health insurance policies will save South Colonie a significant amount of money in coming years. South Colonie employees and retirees also contribute to their health insurance costs.

▶ The district obtains its insurance through NYSIR — New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal. NYSIR uses only “experience ratings” of school districts, which in turn, saves school districts money on insurance premiums.

▶ South Colonie saves money through its participation in a 15-school-district consortium that buys indemnity plan health insurance as a group. Self funding of Worker Compensation and unemployment benefits also results in savings.

### Transportation Costs

▶ The district purchases its diesel fuel and gasoline for its school buses and vehicles through New York State contracts, saving about \$1 per gallon at the pump.

▶ The Transportation Department uses a computerized system to set its bus routes making them as cost effective as possible in terms of fuel usage and mileage.

▶ The district has maintained a yearly bus replacement schedule, taking aging school buses out of service and replacing them with new vehicles. This helps spread the purchase price out over a number of years, maximizes trade-in value and state aid, and controls repair and maintenance costs associated with older vehicles. We thank the community for its annual support of our bus replacement plan.

### Other Costs

▶ The district's attention to safety policies and potential safety risk has reduced the premiums it pays on general liability insurance for many years. The district also reduced premiums by sharing risk management ideas and practices with other districts statewide.

▶ Public Information, staff Haz-Com training, and instruction for certain disabled pupils are services that have proved to be both more effective and less expensive when purchased cooperatively through the BOCES.

# 2009-2010 Budget Calendar

## DATE/TIME/TOPIC

Tuesday, January 13, 7 p.m., District Office

Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, and Secured Youth Detention Facility

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Tuesday, January 20, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting

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Tuesday, February 10, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting with the following budget presentations: *Support Services* — Board of Education and Central Office expenses, BOCES, Public Information/Printing/Postage, Legal Expenses, Fringe Benefits, Insurance, Debt Service, Interfund Transfers, Continuing Education, and Interscholastic Athletics

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Thursday, February 12, 7 p.m., Veeder Elementary

**Special Budget Meeting — Open discussion with Question and Answer session**

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Tuesday, March 3, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting  
*Topics* — Special Ed and Pupil Personnel Services

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Thursday, March 5, 7 p.m., Shaker Elementary Library

**Special Budget Meeting — Open discussion with Question and Answer session**

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**Jonathan Buhner**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Tim Backus**  
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

**Beverly Miller**  
Assistant Superintendent/  
Management Services

**David Seaver**  
Director of Human Resources

**Board of Education**  
James (Tim) Ryan, President  
Brian Casey, Vice President  
Robert Domenici  
Rick Dunn  
Paul Gordon  
Shelle Jaquish  
Neil Johanning  
Leonard Motto

**In Focus Editor:** John K. Noetzel

## DATE/TIME/TOPIC

Tuesday, March 10, 7 p.m., District Office

*Instructional Program:* Enrollment Projections, Instructional Staffing, Support Staffing, Textbooks, Curriculum Development, Staff Development, Library & Media Technology, Building Budgets, Summer School, Central Avenue Learning Center (CALC) and Information Technology

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Tuesday, March 17, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting (1st draft of the Budget)

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Tuesday, March 24, 7 p.m., District Office

Budget Meeting/Work Session/Budget Adjustments

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Tuesday, March 31, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting  
Budget Review — Second budget draft presented

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Tuesday, April 21, 7:30 p.m., District Office

Regular Board Meeting — Budget Adoption

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Tuesday, May 5, 7 p.m., Saddlewood Elementary Cafetorium

**Public Hearing on recommended Budget –**  
Regular Board Meeting to follow at 7:30 p.m.

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**District Budget Vote & School Board Elections**

Tuesday, May 19, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.,  
Voting at all five District Elementary Schools ONLY

## SOUTH COLONIE

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