

## School Board seeking input in forums on 2012-13 budget

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The Grand Island Board of Education has scheduled two public forums next month to get input on the 2012-13 budget.

The board would like suggestions on what the public would like to see in the budget as well as possible cutbacks. The sessions in the Middle School Little Theater are scheduled for 6:30 p. m. Feb 6 and 9:30 a. m. Feb. 8.

The district hopes by that time to have more specifics on the impact of the state cap on the property tax levy on Grand Island's budget.

Loraine Ingrasci, assistant superintendent for finance, said of the tax cap picture for all school districts: "Right now it's as clear as mud."

"It's an absolute mess," said Superintendent Robert W. Christmann, adding, "Every school district will have a different tax levy percentage" because of exclusions and other factors affecting the way the tax cap is calculated.

Grand Island could legally increase its tax levy by 3.61 percent primarily because of growth in the town's tax base, Ingrasci said during Monday's board meeting. Last year's tax levy was about \$28.3 million.

Christmann also noted that \$250 million of the state aid for schools contained in the governor's budget is "for competitive grants" tied to where a district is in the annual professional performance review process and its growth.

"If you've been cutting staff and programs you don't get any money. So the rich school districts get richer while the poor ones get poorer," he said.

The board, like other Erie County school districts, also passed a resolution asking the state for reform of underfunded and unfunded mandates including pensions, arbitration, the Wicks Law and Triborough Amendment and health insurance increases.

It also accepted the March 30 retirement of Ingrasci, who is leaving after eight years. She extended her retirement date to complete work on the 2012-13 budget.

Board President David Goris thanked her for helping the district “march forward from a financial planning standpoint.”

In other business, Middle School Principal Jerry J. Parisi said the Parent Portal should be operational by April 1. A letter is expected to go to Middle School parents with report cards next week explaining how it works. Christmann said a Parent Portal for the High School will probably be launched in September.

The portal allows parents online access to their childrens’ grades, attendance, progress reports and assignments, among other things.

Christmann also announced that the district is initiating a pass for residents 60 and older, giving them free access to school events, including athletic competitions and plays.

Board member Joan Droit suggested that the applications be made available at locations including the senior center.

The board will meet with the Town Board at 6:30 p. m. next Monday in the Senior High School cafeteria. One item on the agenda will include a discussion of Supervisor Mary Cooke’s concerns about increasing graffiti across Grand Island. Christmann, while noting that graffiti “has not blossomed in the schools,” said the town would like information on the reward the district posted previously for information on such incidents.