



The HIGHLANDS Report

Northern Highlands Regional High School District • Allendale, Upper Saddle River, Ho-Ho-Kus • March 2004

A Message From Our Superintendent . . .

Robert M. McGuire, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

As a fierce winter begins to wind down we are in the process of developing our proposed budget for 2004-2005. Because the governor is waiting until the last possible moment to deliver his budget message, our budget development process has been delayed by order of the Commissioner of Education. According to a directive we have received, the period for school districts to hold public hearings for school budgets is now Friday, March 26, 2004 through Wednesday, March 31, 2004. Accordingly, we plan to present our budget on Monday, March 29, 2004 at 8:00 PM.

Next year we anticipate another enrollment increase approaching ten percent bringing our student population to about 1350. Because construction is proceeding and will continue during the school year, next year will be difficult, but through effective coordination we hope to minimize the discomfort. Hopefully, our project will be completed during the spring of 2005, and, in September 2005, we will open school in a state-of-the-art, spacious educational facility. We are grateful to you for making this possible.

In this newsletter, Gary Lane, our School Business Administrator will describe our enrollment growth, our per pupil costs and the extent to which we have received support from the New Jersey Department of Education during this period of time. While Northern Highlands never received a great deal of money from the state our rate of decline in aid is startling, and contributes greatly to increases in property taxes.

At both the national and state level politicians from both major political parties make commitments not to raise taxes even when they are appropriate to fund programs they have pledged to support. This results in diminished support for educational programs which are mandated by federal and state laws. A prime example of this is special education, the costs for which have grown precipitously in virtually every school district in New Jersey, and certainly here at Northern Highlands. The result is that costs are passed along to local property taxpayers without regard for their ability to pay.

In the construction of our budget we will do everything that we can to be fiscally responsible without diminishing the services that we provide to our students. We know that quality schools are essential to the excellence of communities, and our communities are without peer.

While we are discussing finances we will describe, in this issue, two competitive grants secured by members of the teaching staff. In addition we will relate a few recent events that we hope will be of interest to you.

Congratulations

To Our Finalists in the 2004 Competition
for National Merit Scholarship Award

Andrew B. Collins

Terence J. Houlihan

Kevin J. Lebo

Brent A. Morowitz

Zachary A. Pollinger



Terence Houlihan, Andrew Collins, Kevin Lebo, Zachary Pollinger, Brent Morowitz

Northern Highlands Regional High School Receives Grant from Toshiba America Foundation



Left to right: Margo Winning, Board of Education President, Robert McGuire, Superintendent, Ray Massaro, Toshiba, Diane Krone, Chemistry Teacher and Author of Grant

December 2, 2003 - Northern Highlands Regional High School received a Science and Math Improvement Grant from Toshiba America Foundation in New York City in the amount of \$15,570 for a project titled - "The Use of Modern Chemistry and Modern Instrumentation to study Health Issues". The project was created by Ms. Diane Krone, chemistry teacher.

The grant money will enable students to investigate how

atomic and molecular structures relate to the electromagnetic spectrum. Students will use new instruments to "fingerprint" molecules in samples of various foods and sunscreens.

The mission of the Toshiba America Foundation is to contribute to the quality of science and mathematics education in the U.S. communities by investing in projects designed by classroom teachers to improve science and math education for students in grades K-12. Teachers from around the country compete for funding in order to enhance their classrooms with innovative project-based learning.

Toshiba America Foundation is a private, endowed, not-for-profit grant making organization dedicated to supporting education programs in the United States. Toshiba America Foundation was established in 1990 and endowed by Toshiba America, Inc. (TAI) and its U.S. subsidiaries. For more information about Toshiba America Foundation, visit its website at <http://www.taf.toshiba.com> or call (212) 596-0620.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT GRANT

Northern Highlands' Environmental Science class, taught by Nicholas Bernice, has completed an energy study of their school building. The Savings Through Energy Management (STEM) program views the school as an energy consumer. Students are taught to recognize energy problems in the school, to identify appropriate (and cost-effective) solutions to the problems and to calculate the amount of fuel (or electricity) and money to be saved by correcting each problem. Students had more than 30 hours of instruction and completed a comprehensive 28 page report. Eleven specific energy problems were found; concluding that with proper attention over \$45,800 could be saved annually. The program was funded by a grant, written by Mr. Bernice valued at \$6000, from the US

Department of Energy, NJ Board of Public Utilities and the NJ Office of Clean Energy.

All of the students participating in the program sat for and passed the Energy Auditor Exam. The Highlands students, now certified energy auditors, who participated are:

James Capozzi
Cory Davis
Lisa DeCeglia
Carolyn Haines
Victoria Hanke
Aaron Hess

Nicole Kahvajian
Candice Kakar
Evan Kempey
Lauren Malaney
Katie McVeigh

Congratulations to all!

"Child Find"

Special Education Services

Programs for young adults ages 14 through 21 are conducted at Northern Highlands Regional High School. These programs are for young adults who have an identified disabling condition and/or measurable developmental delay in physical, social communication, and/or emotional areas and who may require and would benefit from special educational services. Eligibility for these services is determined by a Child Study Team evaluation of the child. Any resident who has a child, ages 14 through 21 years who may require special services, should contact the Office of Special Services of Northern Highlands at 201-327-8700 extension 216. Project "Child Find" serves special needs children from birth to 21 years of age. For those children under 14 years of age, contact your local k-8 school system.

Northern Highlands Mock Trial Wins County Championship

For the fifth time in its 11 year history, Northern Highlands' Mock Trial team under attorney/teacher coach Lynne D. Feldman, won the Bergen County Bar Association's Championship at the Washington Township Municipal Court on February 9th.

For the second year in a row, the Highlands team took home the county Bar Association trophy after its prosecution team of "attorneys" Caitlin Bergan (11th grade) and Lauren Barra (11th grade) and "witnesses" William Velarde (10th grade), Eric Friedman (10th grade) and Erin Pierson (11th grade) persuaded real Superior Court Judges Harry Carroll and Brian Martinati that "defendant" Mel Perfect had, indeed, conspired to commit computer theft, burglary and felony murder.

A total of 32 Bergen County teams from both public and private schools receive the casebook in late October, and all 260 participating schools statewide prepare the same case. Bergen County has the largest number of schools per county participating in the Vincent J. Appruzzese Mock Trial Competition sponsored by the NJ State Bar Foundation. As a result, before winning at the county finals, the Northern Highlands team competed seven times against various schools.

Each school's team consists of both a prosecution (in even years it is a criminal case, and in odd years it is a civil case) and a defense team of two attorneys and three witnesses each. The defense team, which competed four times, consisted of "attorneys" Andrew Branch (11th grade) and Amy Nylund (11th grade), with "witnesses" Susie Alpert (11th grade), Jon Byer (12th grade) and Christina D'Alia (10th grade) as Melanie Perfect, the defendant. Except for the initial four rounds, a coin toss 5 minutes before the start of the case determines which side will compete against the opposing school.

Practices consisted of long hours of learning actual rules of

evidence, courtroom procedure, and the intricacies of the witnesses' affidavits. "We were so fortunate to have new technology in my classroom that really assisted us this year in our case's preparation," remarked Feldman. "The kids could project from the computer onto a screen at the front of the room as they practiced and revised their direct and cross-examinations of the witnesses, so that by the end of the long evening, all we had to do was to print the final copy".

Weekend meetings at students' homes and long hours after school were wedged between the team's other activities such as the play, the musical, DECA, Quiz Bowl, debate, chess club, ice hockey and cross-country, not to mention their regular studies. The team was assisted this year by Mr. Vincent Barra and Mr. Rick Rosa, Highlands parents and attorneys themselves.

Everyone who is interested in this activity is free to join it, said Feldman, since the team relies on "spies" to see what tactics other schools are using in their cases. "And we have two sophomores and five freshmen who we are training to take over positions once the juniors graduate".

Next on the team's agenda is a team dinner sometime in March, and then the big trophy from the Bergen County Bar Association which will be presented at a special Law Day program at the Bergen County Courthouse on May 1, 2004. Special thanks must be given to the Bar Association's Mock Trial Coordinator, Menelaos W. Toskos, Esq., who has done an excellent job in organizing the program.

"I call this team FABULOUS because all but two members were brand-new to mock trial, and they did a stunning job," observed Feldman. "They have all been a real pleasure, and dealing with this lovely group seems more like being with a family than an extracurricular activity".

Pupils and Costs

Since the quality of its schools correlates so highly with the desire to live in a particular community, it is in everyone's interest to maintain excellence in education. For this reason we, and the K-8 districts that feed into Northern Highlands, continue to seek improvement during a period of significant enrollment growth. Since we are a labor intensive industry, this enrollment growth has been the driving force in the growth of our school budget. It affects the number of teachers and supervisors required, the number of sports and after school activities offered, supplies,

Gary S. Lane, RSBA, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
other support services, transportation, and even fixed costs such as health benefits. And at Northern Highlands, enrollment has been growing every year for more than 10 years. In 1993-94 the school population stood at 715 students. This year, our enrollment has increased to 1,228 students, a 72% increase! For 2004-05, we anticipate an overall increase between 8-10%, with a resident enrollment increase of approximately 11% accounting for the majority of growth.

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Revenue to support the school district is derived from basically three sources: state aid, taxes and other revenue such as tuition and interest on investments. Let's take a look at how each of these have fared over the past ten years. How has the state supported our district? Unfortunately, during this time period, our state aid has dropped from \$822,370 to \$666,881. Had our state aid kept up with our enrollment, we would be receiving over \$1.4 million dollars in state aid! With our state aid for 2004-05 slated to be just \$686,887, we cannot rely on Trenton for much help to off-set taxes or support our educational funding needs. As such, much of the burden has fallen upon the tax levy. During this time period, considering the 72% enrollment increase and the rise in fixed costs we all felt in our own homes, the tax rate increased *less than 70%* - two percent less than the enrollment increase. And the other revenues? They increased from under \$500,000 to over \$3.9 million. As a percent of the budget, *state aid decreased* from 8.9% to 3.7%, *taxes decreased* from 85.7% to 74.5% and other revenue *increased* from 5.39% to 21.8%, almost exclusively from tuition revenue.

How does all this impact the cost per pupil? With costs and enrollment going up, it is somewhat of a race to see which grows more. We have tried to keep a handle on the budget

growth vis-à-vis the increase in enrollment. As shown, we have reduced our reliance on tax levy by bringing in other revenues and have had to work without any great, or at times, *any* increase at all in state aid. We have increased the budget when necessary to support the needs of the students, balancing our decisions against the tight revenue sources. While there are many ways to calculate cost per pupil, the most common is to remove certain variable expenses such as federally funded programs, special education costs, capital projects and debt service. Over the past six years, this adjusted cost per pupil has grown by a total of 5.18%, an average of less than 1% per year. Even if the calculation were to be made on the bottom line, total costs by total students serviced, the average increase in cost per pupil is less than 1.5% per year.

As we look ahead to 2004-05, we have some very difficult challenges ahead of us. A minor increase in state aid, a potential leveling out of other revenue sources and continued increase in enrollment. As always, we will move forward in the best way possible to maintain the excellence you expect from Northern Highlands and to support the educational needs of the students.

Gary S. Lane, RSBA,
Business Administrator/Board Secretary

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Superintendent

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