



HAT'S HAPPENING

CITIZENSHIP • CHARACTER • EDUCATION • WISDOM • KNOWLEDGE • SCHOLARSHIP • SERVICE • INTEGRITY

DECEMBER 2011

1st Quarter Accomplishments



High School High Honor Roll



High School Improvement Roll



Middle School High Honor Roll



Middle School Improvement Roll

Introducing Mr. Wahl – High School Assistant Principal



It is an honor to join the Williamson High School as the new Assistant Principal. As a teacher and Enrichment Coordinator in the Williamson Central School District for the past fourteen years, I have had the pleasure of working with many parents, teachers, and staff who share

in our district's mission of providing a learning community that inspires character, service, knowledge and wisdom. I am excited to continue this focus at the high school level and add to the proud tradition of academic excellence at Williamson.

As a husband and father of two middle school age sons, I enjoy all the benefits and challenges that come from having an active and supportive family. It is this perspective that I bring in guiding the young men and women of Williamson

through this important time in their lives. I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to work as a member of a team to ensure the success of teachers and students in our district. Along with my responsibilities of supervision and leadership, I hope to continue to build on the strengths of our school and refine the learning process for all.

As I begin my new role at Williamson High School, I look forward to developing our school partnership and sharing with you our continued progress. Please feel free to contact me at the high school via email, phone or appointment, as I value your input in this important process. Working together, as a learning community, I know we can meet the challenges of creating a safe and positive learning environment for our students to grow.

Warm Regards,

Andrew Wahl

awahl@williamsoncentral.org



National Honor Society Inductees:

Alexis Ginther
Christine Dobie
Nicole LaVancha
Paul Speer
Kelsey Stitt
Ben Yackel

Megan Fitzgerald
Christian Baker
Ariana Allman
Haelee Catchpole
Catherine Bonke

Old English III Awards



Middle School . . .

Over 73% of the students in the Middle School are on the achievement, merit, honor or high honor roll for the first quarter. Students are proud of their accomplishments and teachers are continuing to work hard to instruct and challenge the students. Students are encouraged to seek assistance if needed and be responsible for their learning. Together with families and the community, we encourage students to put forth their best effort and engage in their learning.



*John E. Fulmer
Middle School Principal*

Activities that have occurred in the first quarter of this year at the Middle School include:

- **Volunteer Club** - Various activities are being planned.
- **Student Association** – Officers have been elected and many activities are planned for the future.
- **Book Fair** - All students were given the opportunity to purchase discounted books and school supplies. Students purchased over \$3500 worth of books this year.
- **Seussical** - Rehearsals have been occurring for the production of the school musical scheduled for February 10th and 11th.
- **Educational Field Trips** - 8th grade students went to Camp Arrowhead for team building; and 6th grades participated in a “Mission to Mars” field trip at the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Other grade level trips are planned.
- **Olweus Program** – Weekly meetings and activities occur throughout the year to discuss anti-bullying strategies. Family groups have been formed connecting students across grade levels.
- **WMS Pride** – All Williamson Middle School students and staff participated in a walk of 911 feet around campus in remembrance of those lost in the 9/11 attacks. Street crews have been formed to begin our “Adopt a Hallway” initiative. International club has joined with this group to highlight positive character traits expressed in different languages. We will also be participating in the Martin Luther King celebration taking place in Williamson in January.
- **Red Ribbon Week** – There will be a week-long focus on educating a drug free lifestyle school wide including capturing a great deal of school spirit.
- **Modified Athletics** - Over 110 students participated in extra-curricular athletics at the Middle School during the fall season.
- **Report Card Night** – Over 68% of Middle School parents picked up their student’s report card and had an opportunity to speak directly to classroom teachers.

Upcoming events...

- Collection of personal items to be donated to the Open Door Mission this Holiday Season.
- 5th and 6th Grade Holiday Concert – December 13th @ 7:00.
- Written round of the Spelling Bee – December 14th after school.
- 7th and 8th Grade Holiday Concert – December 16th @ 7:00.



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Elementary School. . .

Introducing Ms. Saxby

My name is Ellen Saxby and I am the new Williamson Elementary School Principal. I am very excited to be taking on this new role in the District.

I vividly remember interviewing here in Williamson some twenty four years ago, when the elementary building housed grades K-2. It was the last day of school and there was great fanfare out in the bus circle, as students left for the summer. Teachers and staff waved good-bye with joy and sadness all mixed together. As I sat in the main office waiting for my interview to begin, I thought to myself...I want to be in that bus circle! And I was for sixteen wonderful years. I taught in a variety of classroom settings during those sixteen years, and hold each of them close to my heart.

Over the course of the next eight years I had many roles in the district; Middle School Assistant Principal, 5-12 Student Service Administrator, and Director of Technology.

And now I have come full circle... back to the Elementary School, where I began my career in Williamson. I look forward to the many exciting events that will take place in the Elementary School this year. I especially look forward to being in the bus circle...not just on the last day of school, but every day!



Fairy Tale Ball

Everyone from princesses to pirates attended the annual Fairy Tale Ball put on by Mrs. Sharp's and Mrs. Newmyer's second grade classes. Attendees came dressed as their favorite fairy tale characters and waltzed the afternoon away. Friends and family of our second graders also joined the festivities to help celebrate fairy tales.



Big Pumpkin Day

Big Pumpkin Day was a big success, thanks to all of our volunteers! Students participated in games, crafts, hayrides, and pumpkin dancing.

Understanding New York's Property Tax Cap Q & A



*Gary Barno -
School Business Administrator*

Does the new tax cap law mean school tax levies can't increase by more than 2 percent?

No, although the new law has been referred to as a "2 percent tax cap," it does not in fact restrict any proposed tax levy increase to 2 percent. The law does, however, require at least 60 percent voter approval for a school budget if the proposed levy increase exceeds a certain amount. That amount, called the "tax levy limit," will be determined by each district according to a complex formula outlined in the law, and will vary by district.

What is a "tax levy limit?"

For school districts, the "tax levy limit" is the highest allowable tax levy (before exemptions) that a school district can propose as part of its annual budget for which only the approval of a simple majority of voters (more than 50 percent) is required. Any proposed tax levy amount above this limit will require budget approval by a supermajority (60 percent or more) of voters. Essentially, the "tax levy limit" sets a threshold requiring districts to obtain a higher level of community support for a proposed tax levy above a certain amount.

How is the "tax levy limit" determined for school districts?

The law dictates an eight-step formula that each school district must use to calculate its individual "tax levy limit." In particular, the calculation adjusts a district's tax levy to reflect growth in the local tax base (if any) and the rate of inflation or 2 percent (whichever is lower).

What will the property tax cap law mean for MY tax bill?

First, the new law applies to the tax levy, not to tax rates or individual tax bills. Second, it does not impose a universal 2 percent cap on taxes—or any other specific amount. And third, there are several factors that dictate how an individual's school tax bill is calculated after a school district sets the final tax levy—none of which are within the district's control. Tax bills continue to be calculated by using a property's assessed value (as determined by the local town assessor) and the tax rate—or the amount paid in taxes per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Does the public still vote on school district budgets?

Yes, school district residents will still vote on a proposed budget on the third Tuesday in May. Under the new law, the level of voter approval needed to pass a budget will now depend upon the amount of the tax levy required by the proposed budget. If the tax levy (before exemptions) is at or below the "tax levy limit," a simple majority (more than 50 percent) is needed for budget approval. If the tax levy (before exemptions) exceeds a district's "tax levy limit," the support of a supermajority (60 percent or more) of voters is required for budget approval.

Will the tax cap legislation affect all school districts equally?

The tax cap legislation will affect all districts to varying degrees, but it is clear that some will be affected much more than others. In particular, for poor and/or rural school districts with low property wealth and declining tax bases, staying within their "tax levy limits" will severely restrict their ability to sustain core educational programs. This discrepancy is largely rooted in what an increasing number of school leaders say is an unfair formula for distributing state aid to districts around the state. Districts like Williamson will depend more on increased state aid and meaningful mandate-relief to help alleviate continuing fiscal stress, neither of which are very promising as districts prepare their budgets for a public vote in May.



Wendy Havens - Assistant Superintendent

Race to the Top

There is a great deal of change underway in education across the United States. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have agreed to replace their current learning standards with the new Common Core State Standards. Forty-five states are also working to replace existing tests with assessments that are aligned with the standards. New York State has committed to participating in both of these efforts and has received federal funding for the New York State Education Department to implement them. In addition, New York State is also implementing a great teachers and leaders program that will link student achievement to the evaluations of teachers and principals.

The focus of the changes is on having schools move toward the goal of world-class learning outcomes for all students. Instruction will be focused on developing key cognitive strategies and skills that students need in order to be prepared for college and careers.

The Common Core Standards which were published in June of 2010 were developed under the sponsorship of the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards focus on English language arts and mathematics with literacy standards in history, social studies, and science and technical subjects. Two major goals of the standards are to specify key knowledge and skills in a format that makes it clear what teachers and assessments need to focus on and raise the achievement bar to a level comparable to the best education systems in the world. Major changes in the standards are:

- Fewer but higher standards and grade level expectations
- Focus on both college and career readiness
- Learner expectations that are academically rigorous and also emphasize application and performance
- Assessments that are more open-ended and authentic indicators of what students know and can do with knowledge acquired

Parents and the community are an integral part of the change. In math, shifts to the Common Core Standards focus on deep understanding of concepts, fluency in problem solving and application to real world problems. Parents will need to understand why homework may change from worksheets with thirty problems on them to a few problems that require more in depth thinking and justifications for their solutions. With the focus on a higher level of literacy so that all students are ready for the demands of college and career level reading by the end of high school, parents reading at home with their children will continue to be a critical part of each child's program. The common core standards for writing state that students must achieve the ability to "write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence." The standards also focus on students' mastery of research, opinion writing, analytical, and presentation skills. The speaking and listening standards require students to "gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence." Use and understanding of media and technology are also required. These skills will be practiced by students at school and at home.

Teachers and administrators in Williamson have been preparing for the new Common Core Standards. They have been studying the required changes and are incorporating them into units that they have prepared for students. The professional development will continue with a move away from traditional practices, to a more constructivist approach that allows students to engage in discussion and use a variety of strategies in their learning.

If you would like additional information about the Common Core Standards or other Race to the Top initiatives, you may visit <http://engageny.org/common-core/>

Message from the Superintendent . . .

In this edition, you have read articles on the higher initiatives required for the Race to the Top and facts about the tax cap that was passed in the state legislature last spring. There has never been a time in my 30+ years in education where public education has faced changes as significant as these. The world is changing and education must change with it. Race to the Top has addressed this need. Our students need to be able to compete with the students in China and Japan for jobs when they graduate. It will take several years for us to fully implement these changes, but I do believe that schools five years from now will be substantially different than those of today.



Maria Ehresman
Superintendent of Schools

While I believe that the Race to the Top is the right direction for education in New York State, I believe that the tax cap that was passed last spring will make it difficult for many schools that are not wealthy to reach these goals, unless the state aid formula for schools is changed. State government has a constitutional obligation to provide for public schools. However, according to a report issued by the Center for American Progress, this is not happening in New York. The report found that New York State's funding of public education as "highly regressive". The report further states that "highly regressive states are providing fewer resources to their high-poverty districts even though those districts serve many disadvantaged children with high levels of need." Over the last two budget cycles, Williamson has lost \$3,000,000 of state aid in a \$20,000,000 budget. Our budget has been flat for the last three years. We have cut 21 positions, taken administrative pay freezes and used much of our reserve funds to keep the budget flat.

This inequality in funding is made even more difficult by the tax cap which comes into play this year, since in rich districts they levy more taxes. Districts who are more dependent on state aid have a smaller tax levy; whereas Districts who are less dependent on state aid collect more taxes from their taxpayers. Williamson gets about 50% of its revenue in aid from the state and about 47% from taxes. A wealthy district gets about 20% of their revenue from the state and about 76% of their revenue from taxes. Therefore, a percentage of a wealthy district's levy provides much more revenue as seen in the example below.

	Williamson	Wealthier District
Budget	20,000,000	20,000,000
State Aid	10,000,000	4,000,000
Tax Levy	9,400,000	15,200,000
3% of the Levy	282,000	456,000

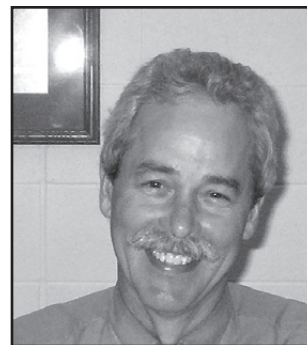
I understand that there is less money in New York to support education. I am not asking for an increase, I am asking for a redistribution of state aid so that districts like ours are not hurt more than those of wealthier counterparts. Contact Governor Cuomo and your state legislators today and demand a fair, equitable and predictable state aid formula that provides for all of New York's public school children.

Message from the BOE President...

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

George Orwell, English author

Traditions can be wonderful. They link us with our past; connect us with our community and provide a firm foundation to face the future. However, some traditions like New York State's school aid distribution formula are seriously out of sync with the realities of the 21st century. To continue using a convoluted, arbitrary and antiquated process to deliver education funding simply makes no sense. The excuse that "we've always done it that way" is a feeble argument. New York has no shortage of new mandates, programs and laws that have a direct impact on our students and communities. Yet the basic idea of equal distribution across the state seems to elude our political establishment. School districts are under constant pressure to improve student performance. We wouldn't have it any other way. Our dedicated teachers, staff and administrators are continually developing innovative curricula and looking for ways to enhance the educational experience of our children. We are not satisfied with the status quo. We always try to do better. We should expect no less from our elected and appointed officials.



Michael Collins
Board of Education President

In the coming months, we will be preparing the budget for next year. As always, we will carefully balance the needs of the district with the financial realities we all face. Our community has a tradition of supporting education. Families, friends and neighbors understand the importance of learning. From classic regents programs, vocational and shared programs to Advanced Placement and college credit courses, we strive to provide a challenging, supportive environment where our students can grow and reach their full potential. We are committed to preparing our children for the future. The passion to do one's personal best cannot be mandated. It comes from the heart. It's up to each of us to nurture that spark. We are all stewards of the future and stewardship is a tradition in which we can all take pride.

On behalf of the board, thank you for your support. We look forward to serving you as we move forward in the coming year.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes

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