

'In the Loop' with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

Details on election, candidates and budget vote

BY **JODEE RIORDAN**
Board of Education President

With guidance now in place from New York state, and the budget deadline met, we were finally able to announce the date and details of the Board of Education election and budget vote. Here is what you need to know to be "In the Loop":

The budget vote and Board of Education election is Tuesday, June 9:

The budget for 2020-21 will be presented to the community for approval.

Capital project will be presented to the community for approval.

Three seats are open for the Board of Education. Voters will elect three of four candidates.

Voting will be conducted entirely by mail-in ballot. All eligible and registered voters in the district will receive an absentee ballot by mail, and a postage paid mailer to return the ballot. Ballots will be mailed out no later than Friday, May 22, and voters should have a ballot no later than Tuesday, May 26. Voters will be required to return all ballots to the district office by 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 9. It is imperative that voters mail ballots back to the district clerk with plenty of time to get here by 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 9. A postmark prior to Tuesday, June 9, will not suffice: The ballot must be physically here at the L-P district office by 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 9.

What you need to know about the budget:

Proposition No. 1:

√ The proposed budget is \$49,092,660.00

√ The proposed budget is an increase of 1.25% over the previous budget

√ To date, New York state aid to Lewiston-Porter has been reduced by \$429,264

√ The proposed increase to the tax levy will be 2.625%, which equals the tax cap threshold

√ The budget supports the strategic plan, maintains current core programs and one-to-one technology

The Board of Education adopted the budget on Tuesday, May 19, at our regular board meeting. While

we still do not have solid state aid numbers, we have crafted a balanced budget based on the numbers available. Budget increases were limited to only contractual obligations and educational mandates (increases to special education, transportation) and balanced through strategic and careful programmatic cuts, decreases in contractual services, negotiating health care cost containment, and the elimination of 11 positions through attrition (five teaching positions, five teacher aides, and one cleaner position).

Conservative budgeting, limited spending, constant monitoring of expense, and contractual savings due to the closure allowed for budgetary savings in 2019-20. Loss of state aid revenue and further potential cuts are balanced by strategic use of these budgetary savings, careful appropriation of hard-earned reserves and a modest increase of 2.625% to the tax levy, meeting the tax cap threshold. This was an extremely difficult budget process, and we have planned for uncertainty in the year ahead through careful planning and strategic cuts that protect the overall education program and provides fiscal stability to our taxpayers.

What you need to know about the proposed capital project:

Proposition No. 2:

√ The proposed capital project referendum is \$17,250,000

√ The capital project will encompass a two-phase scope of work, to take place 2020-2024.

√ Project is tax neutral (there are no increases to tax rate due to this project; keeps level debt)

√ Projects are funded directly by New York state (76%), with support of annual NYPA funding

Scope of work is limited to the reconstruction, rehabilitation and renovation to several key areas within our district buildings and facilities to implement various health, safety, accessibility and code compliance measures required by the New York State Education Department:

√ Upgrade and replacement of mechanicals (HVAC/air condition-

ing) at IEC, middle school and areas of high school (gymnasium)

√ Athletics/recreation/physical education facilities, in the interest of safety: Replacement of synthetic turf surface for the football field; Replacement field lighting for the football field and new lighting at the soccer fields.

√ STEM/academic areas: Renovation of Intermediate Education Center library

Alternate site work items are anticipated to include reconstruction of the water supply line and various paved areas.

Over the past five years, we have developed careful, conservative fiscal planning and a strategic plan focused on student achievement. We also developed a tighter schedule for capital improvements, which protects the community's investment in their facilities and provides for the health, safety and security of our students and staff with smaller, more frequent projects. This approach to capital improvements maximizes state building aid tax and is tax neutral (there are no increases to tax rate due to this project) and maintains level debt (further strengthening our fiscal position).

The scope of work focuses on the health and safety of our students, staff and community. Air conditioning at each of the buildings has been a strategic goal from a facilities standpoint. The intense heat that has been evidenced in August, September, October and May, June has been difficult for our students, especially in the early grades. We've had a number of students suffer heat exhaustion in some instances. Currently, the Primary Education Center and almost all of our high school are air conditioned. This project would focus on building system upgrades to the HVAC system/air conditioning at the middle school and Intermediate Education Center and areas of the high school. The middle school boiler will be replaced. Almost half of the \$17.25 million project is focused on this work.

Also, in the interest of student safety, proposed site work is anticipated to include a new synthetic

turf surface for the football field and replacement field lighting for the football field and new lighting at the soccer fields. Lighting at both Blakeslee Field and Elia Stadium has become more and more of a safety concern in recent years. All lighting at both fields is suspended on wooden poles. We've already had a lighting pole topple over at Elia Stadium due to wind. The turf field was installed in 2007, with a life expectancy for the turf is 12-15 years. Significant rips and tears in the field are becoming both a safety concern and more and more costly to repair.

Election

What you need to know about the Board of Education election:

√ Three seats are open on the Board of Education: Two seats are a three-year term; one seat is a one-year term (to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Natalie Beilein)

There are four candidates (ballot position determined in alphabetical order):

√ Anika Fetzner

√ Charlotte Huebschmann

√ Jennifer Klemick

√ Danielle Mullen

Each voter will vote for three candidates. The top two vote-getters win a three-year term, while the third-place vote-getter wins the one-year term.

Our newsletter, The Link, contains biographies submitted by each candidate. A link to The Link is on the district homepage. The candidates will be invited to introduce themselves to the public at the June 2 Board of Education meeting. Please join us to meet the candidates and educate yourself on their platforms.

Thank you for support of education at Lewiston-Porter. Just a quick note on the closure:

Education: Online learning continues now through the end of the school year. The last day for secondary instruction, grades 6-12, will be Tuesday, June 9; and elementary instruction, grades K-5 Wednesday, will be June 10. There will be two days for K-12 student/family to pick up personal items from classroom and lockers: Wednesday, June 10

(last name, A-L) and Thursday, June 11 (last name M-Z), from 12:30-6 p.m. in all buildings. Please check in with your child's school for specific building level plans based on these dates.

Food Service: We continue to provide meals to meet the needs of our families seven days a week: Meals are available on Monday-Wednesday-Friday, from 9-11 a.m., for all students under the age of 18. Students receive meals for two days (two breakfasts and two lunches) when picked up on Monday and/or Wednesday, and for three days on Friday (three breakfasts and three lunches). Meals are available at the Lewiston-Porter High School main entrance. Families not able to pick up should email Dr. Patti Grupka (pgrupka@lew-port.com) to make arrangements to have meals delivered.

Lewiston-Porter is partnering with the WNY Food Bank to provide food for any family in need. Each Wednesday, families with children can pick a backpack of supplementary, nonperishable food items when they pick up their lunches and breakfasts. Each backpack includes a protein and vegetable along with other food staples.

It is not necessary to register in advance, just ask when you pick-up and you will receive a backpack. Those who have home delivery will have the bag delivered to their home on request.

Child Care: Lewiston-Porter Central School District provides free child care for all essential workers while schools are closed due to COVID-19. Please see our website (or executive order No. 202.4) for a complete list of eligible essential workers. Child care is from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays for children of eligible workers ages 3-12 at the Lewiston-Porter Primary Education Center in partnership with the Buffalo Niagara YMCA. To register for the service, please contact the Lockport Family Branch YMCA at 716-434-8887 or email Brigid Dillman, office manager, at bdillman@ymcabn.org between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

Cuomo: Summer school through distance learning this year

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Thursday announced summer school will be conducted through distance learning this year to help reduce the risk of spread. Meal programs and child care services for essential employees will continue.

School districts must also develop a plan for students with disabilities who participate in extended summer school year programs over the summer to ensure they receive instruction.

The state will make a determination on the fall semester and issue guidelines in June so schools and colleges can start to plan for a number of scenarios. K-12 schools and colleges will submit plans for approval to the state in July.

"As we focus on reopening, schools pose unique complications - they have high density and transportation issues causing a greater risk of spread unless protective measures are fully in place," Cuomo said. "Now we have another issue that is com-

plicating the situation even further with COVID-related illness in children. We are continuing to study this new illness and learn more, but for now, summer school will remain closed for in-class teaching and will be conducted through distance learning this year."

The governor announced the state is currently investigating 157 reported cases in New York where children - predominantly school-aged - are experiencing symptoms similar to an atypical Kawasaki disease and toxic shock-like syndrome possibly due to COVID-19. The illness has

taken the lives of three young New Yorkers, including a 5-year-old in New York City, a 7-year-old in Westchester County and a teenager in Suffolk County. To date, 13 countries and 25 other states have reported cases of this COVID-related illness in children.

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