



the Bulletin



January 2012

Ensuring opportunities for learning, personal growth & social responsibility

10 new & nifty things happening this year at the BH-BL Central Schools

1. "Project Chinese" uses grants & technology to offer new, low-cost language classes

BH-BL is using a new and innovative combination of grants, distance learning, and parent fees to offer after-school classes in Chinese to grades 1 - 12 students at almost no cost to the district.

"Knowledge of Chinese language and culture will help kids in the political and economic world of their future," says world language department head Suzanne Rayome. "We see this as a step in a multi-year effort to bring more 21st century skills to BH-BL students."

Project Chinese takes advantage of grants that instructors at the WSWHE BOCES are using to share knowledge of Chinese. A hundred BH-BL parents each paid \$50 tuition so that their children in grades 1 - 5 could explore Chinese language and culture during the four November "half-day" afternoons when no regular classes are scheduled.

After-school classes for grades 6-12 have attracted 19 pupils so far, who paid a tuition of \$100 for both face-to-face and online instruction. More Chinese classes will be offered in the spring, and a Chinese immersion class for older students is planned for summer.

2. Parent Portal gives parents access to students' grades online

Want to check your child's grades and what assignments she might be missing from home?

Many BH-BL parents are already doing this, and by late January, all secondary school

parents will be able to — thanks to the PowerSchool "Parent Portal" on the district's website.

Parents receive a unique access code they use to log in to the Parent Portal and see their child's data in a secure environment. Parents can view their child's schedule, attendance records, grades, assignments, teacher comments, and teacher email addresses.

Secondary school teachers have been learning and adapting the PowerSchool software to fit our school district over the past year with a goal of improved communication and follow-up

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4 Tax cap rules are complex



Christy Muller

Captains for many of this year's fall varsity sports teams celebrate being named a state "Scholar Athlete School of Distinction" at October's pep rally. See "New & Nifty" item # 10 inside for details.



Superintendent search is underway

Community & staff members are helping the Board of Education as the search for a new BH-BL superintendent moves into the interview phase in January.

Jim Schultz will be retiring in June after 41 years at the school district.

The search is being facilitated by Capital Region BOCES superintendent Dr. Charles Dedrick.

Board of Education members expect to announce the name of the new BH-BL leader in early April.

In the meantime, all steps and announcements in this process are posted on the "Superintendent Search" page on the district website (www.bhbl.org).



10 new & nifty things at BH-BL Continued from page 1

between the school and home. Efforts are now underway to adapt PowerSchool to BH-BL elementary school needs.

Most parents find the Parent Portal easy to use. Middle and high school parents are welcome to attend a training session on accessing their child's records on Jan. 18 at 7:00 pm in the high school library.

3. Hurricane Irene: Teachers & students respond generously when help is needed

When flood waters hit the Schoharie Valley this fall, BH-BL teachers and students quickly arrived to lend a hand. Members of the Teachers Association started helping devastated schools in Middleburgh immediately after the flood. This included cleaning mud in basement-level classrooms, collecting \$1,140 in donations to the Red Cross from teachers and other staff, and providing 260 hours of labor.

Teachers also created an "Adopt a Classroom" drive that resulted in a van-full of donated school supplies and books plus more than \$1,200 in gift cards to help flood victims rebuild their lives and classrooms in Middleburgh, Schoharie, Windham and Gilboa.

Students from several high school clubs helped with the clean-up too. The Interact Club and X-Factor group traveled to Middleburgh and Schoharie to help at the public library and several individual homes.

4. New foundation may lead to new funding sources & partners

Board of Education members are working to create a second foundation to bring more grants, more corporate partnerships, and simply more money to BH-BL.

The district is fortunate to already receive support from the very successful BH-BL Education Foundation, which twice a year awards grants for activities and equipment teachers have requested for classroom enrichment.

But last spring residents at district budget forums asked for a way for individuals to donate money that could potentially offset some of the budget cuts the school board has been forced to make.

Work is underway to create a second foundation to do this — and more. School board member Elizabeth Herkenham is chairing the new foundation's planning group. Her committee is working to create a new foundation that could be a vehicle for new partnerships and collaborative ventures for the school district, as well as a vehicle to solicit donations from the public, alumni, businesses, private sector foundations, and philanthropic organizations. Stay tuned for further developments!

5. BH-BL is reaching more parents via its new Facebook page

More and more Americans are using Facebook to read and share the news that matters most

to them. BH-BL now has a Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/BHBLSchools where we can quickly and easily post news blurbs and photos.

Anyone can view this page. So far nearly 500 people have chosen to "like" the page, which means that BH-BL news automatically shows up on their personal Facebook pages. "We're trying to keep up with changes in how people prefer to get their news," says BH-BL communications specialist Christy Multer. "Over 400 people are viewing our Facebook page each week, and the majority are ages 35 to 54. It's a great way to connect with today's parents."

Multer also posts news on the district's regular webpages at www.bhbl.org, which have anywhere from 300 to 1,000 unique visitors per day.

6. New heating system for Stevens Elem. will save energy & money

The 1960s-era steam boilers that used to heat Stevens Elementary school are no more. This antique equipment was replaced with a modern, high-efficiency hot water heating and control system in the summer of 2011, using funds approved by BH-BL voters in the 2009 energy referendum.

The change has resulted in better control of heat, classroom environments more suitable for learning, and energy savings. A similar conversion from steam to hot water heat in the much larger high school in 2006 began saving the district more than \$100,000 a year in reduced energy use.

7. Renovations to high school pool earn rave reviews & save money

The room holding the high school pool also got a major face lift during the summer and fall of 2011, earning rave reviews from the students, staff and residents who use the pool.

Money from the 2009 energy referendum paid for an 8,000 pound dehumidification unit that will significantly reduce the cost of heating the area while also improving air quality in the pool. This new unit removes moisture from the air and uses recovered energy to heat both the pool water and air. The room also got a new ceiling, new lighting, starting blocks, and an electronic scoreboard with touch pads for the swimmers.

Some of these amenities were purchased using an anonymous gift of \$25,000 from a Spartan supporter. Using the donated money in conjunction with state-aidable renovations could potentially triple the value of the original gift.

“The swimmers love it all,” says Kate Gurley, from the boys & girls swimming booster club. “The air quality is noticeably better, and the electronic scoring system provides immediate feedback and engagement for both fans and swimmers.”

8. Spartan Iron Chefs show off their skills

The high school foods lab was the site of some especially enthusiastic cooking and eating on Dec. 1, as nine high school pupils competed in the first annual “Spartan Iron Chefs” contest to see who could create

and serve the best vegetarian dishes.

A panel of three guest judges ultimately awarded first prize to the team of Alissa Avery, Katie Hoffman and Bill Koerber for their entry of a portobello mushroom stuffed with a fresh tomato ragout plus a vegetable terrine and goat cheese croquettes.

Family and Consumer Sciences teachers devised the competition using grants from the BH-BL Education Foundation, Stewarts Holiday Match, and ShopRite of Niskayuna.

9. New anti-bullying training is foundation of consistent response

Ensuring that any bullying or harassment in our schools will be met by a consistent and strong response is not something that happens overnight. BH-BL is investing a significant amount of time and energy into beefing up our anti-bullying procedures during 2011-12.

Since September ALL staff have been trained in what bullying includes and how best to prevent it and to stop it when it occurs. Efforts are also underway to empower students to speak out when they observe others being bullied, and to involve parents in sending a consistent message that such behavior is not acceptable.

The district is creating a new, required anti-bullying policy, which will outline a definition, student rights, and staff to whom students can report any incidents.



Jim Hadcock

10. BH-BL named “School of Distinction” for 100% Scholar-Athlete teams in 2010-11

And, last but not least, a drum roll please! ... because we are especially proud to say that for the first time in school history, all 27 varsity fall, winter and spring interscholastic sports teams achieved “Scholar Athlete” status in 2010-11.

This means that all 27 teams had team grade point averages of 90 percent or higher, and that in October 2011 BH-BL was therefore named a “School of Distinction” by the NY State Public High School Athletic Association.

BH-BL is one of only 20 schools in the state to win this honor for 2010-11 and is the first Suburban Council school ever to win it.

Combining academic and sports achievement in this way is quite a feat. “This is a clear testament to our students’ hard work and dedication, our staff’s belief in all kids’ potential, our parents’ involvement in their students’ lives, and our school board’s commitment to a comprehensive education,” says superintendent Jim Schultz. ♦

Nine high school students took part in the 2011 Spartan Iron Chefs contest, which was judged by BH-BL superintendent Jim Schultz, BH-BL food services director Nicky Boehm, and Charlton Tavern head chef Paul Persico.
(Go to www.bhbl.org for more photos.)



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Tax "Cap" legislation is more complex than many perceive

Sets a threshold for budget approval, rather than a true cap

Over the next several months, the BH-BL Board of Education will be developing the proposed spending plan for the 2012-13 school year. As in past years, residents and staff are urged to participate in the budget process by coming to meetings and/or following the steps as they unfold and are posted on the district website.

The big change this year is the legislation passed in June 2011 that established a property tax levy cap in New York. Although often referred to as

a "2 percent tax cap," the new law does not in fact restrict any proposed tax levy increase to two percent — as was evident in recent town and county budget discussions.

Instead, the law prescribes an eight-step formula for towns, counties, and school districts to calculate a figure known as a "tax levy limit." Because each district will calculate its own "tax levy limit," the figure will vary by district.

NY residents will still vote on school budgets each May. However, rather than capping a district's tax levy increase, the tax levy limit establishes a threshold for **what level of voter support** is required for a budget to pass.

If a district's proposed tax levy (before exemptions) is at or below its tax levy limit, a simple majority of "yes" votes (more than 50 percent) is needed for budget approval. If the proposed tax levy (before exemptions) exceeds the tax levy limit, the support of a supermajority of voters (60 percent or more) is required for budget passage.

"Until the state comptroller clarifies some issues, which we hope he will do soon, we can only estimate the BH-BL tax levy limit," says superintendent Jim Schultz. "In the meantime, we are trying to educate our voters on what the legislation does and does not mean."

Key Facts about New York's Tax Levy Cap

1. The new law applies to a district's overall tax LEVY, not to tax rates, and not to an individual's tax bill.
2. The rate of inflation or 2 percent (whichever is lower) is one part of calculating a district's "tax levy limit." That is where the phrase "2 percent tax cap" comes from.
3. A district can propose a budget that exceeds its tax levy limit, but will need a 60% voter approval rate to pass that budget.
4. Contingency budget rules have changed too and are now much more severe. Now, under a contingency budget, there can be no increase in a district's tax levy.*

*As of this writing, it is unclear if exemptions would apply.

Please join us to learn more & share your opinions!

Public Budget Forums

Thurs., Feb. 9 2012-13 Fiscal Realities
Thurs., March 1 The Preliminary BH-BL Budget
Wed., March 21 The Nearly Complete BH-BL Budget

All 3 forums will be held at 7:30 pm in the O'Rourke Middle School cafeteria, 173 Lakehill Road.

Attending in person is the best way to participate, but you are also welcome to "attend" and participate live ONLINE if you have a computer with high speed internet access.

For all the details, go to:

www.bhbl.org/District/Boardonlineforuminfo.htm



Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake

CENTRAL SCHOOLS

(518) 399-9141, ext. 5002

www.bhbl.org

Dear Resident of the BH-BL School District,

Do you have preschool children living in your household? If so, we ask that you complete the form below and return it using the postage-paid panel on the back.

Having accurate preschool numbers is VERY important if the school district is to use its resources efficiently. The number of children who will likely be entering school each September and where they live impacts budgets and bus routes, as well as the number of classrooms, teachers, and books needed. Since it takes several years to fund and then build new classrooms, when needed, even knowing about the infants living within our school district is a vital planning tool.

If you have preschool children, please complete this form, detach it along the perforation, fold it in thirds so that the postage-paid return address panel shows on the outside, and put it in the mail. Please secure the form closed with a piece of tape. The post office requests that you DO NOT STAPLE IT.

If you completed this form last year, it is not necessary to do it again. The BH-BL registrar & superintendent's secretary Jacqueline Martini is happy to answer your questions at jmartini@bhbl.org or 399-9141, ext. 5002. Thank you for your help.



Parent / Guardian Information:

Name(s): _____

Residential Address:

House # _____ Street _____ Apt. # _____

Town _____, NY Zip _____

(Mailing address if different: _____)

Phone number: _____

Are there older children in this household who already attend school? Yes _____ No _____

Preschool Children (ages 0-5) living in this household:

First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Gender (M/F)	Date of Birth	Race / Ethnic Group*

*Race / Ethnic Group codes as specified by the New York State Education Department: Please write in ALL letters that apply to your child: **A.** Asian **B.** Black or African American **H.** Hispanic or Latino **I.** American Indian or Alaskan Native **W.** White or Caucasian **P.** Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Open here to see our preschool census form!

To save money, the school district has replaced our former door-to-door census with this simple postage-paid form.

Parents of infants, toddlers & pre-K children within the BH-BL school district:

Please help us help you. We really need all preschool children's data to plan and use limited school resources efficiently. Please open, complete, and return this form.

Will your child be five years old by Dec. 1, 2012 and eligible to enter kindergarten next fall? Having the name, address & birthdate of all pre-K children by the end of February makes Kindergarten Registration in early March run smoothly and also ensures that the **2012-13 school budget will include enough kindergarten teachers.** Do we have your children's info?

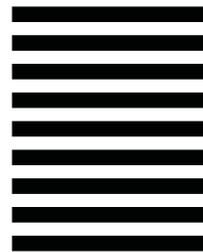
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Fold here

Deadline to file for STAR tax exemption is March 1

Although the state Legislature has been gradually reducing the value of NY homeowners' STAR exemptions, the exemption remains in effect and continues to provide significant school tax relief. Anyone who owns and lives in his/her own home and earns less than \$500,000 a year is eligible to receive a "Basic" STAR exemption, which does NOT have to be renewed annually. BH-BL homeowners with a Basic STAR exemption had \$549 - \$723 deducted from their Sept. 2011 school tax bill, depending on their town.

The "Enhanced" STAR exemption, however, DOES have to be renewed every year by March 1 to prove that a homeowner's income remains below the state standard. BH-BL homeowners with an Enhanced STAR exemption had \$1,059 - \$1,448 deducted from their Sept. 2011 school tax bill, depending on their town.

Applications for STAR must be filed with your town assessor, not the school district. Call your town assessor or visit your town website if you have questions about STAR or any other exemptions. Information about STAR is also posted on the NY Dept. of Taxation & Finance website at www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/star/index.htm