

'Cost of Education' Report Criticized at State Hearing

By KATIE NEWINGHAM
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

UNION — The New Jersey Department of Education's recently released report on "The Cost of Education" and its plans to change the formula for calculating state education aid were the subject of a public hearing Tuesday at Kean University.

The report states that its purpose is "to calculate the costs that New Jersey school districts face in meeting state performance and accountability standards." The 98-page report intends to address a per-student base cost and focuses on adjusting the base cost to reflect the needs of special-needs students.

The Professional Judgment Panel (PJP) created a table to identify median base cost and added costs in New Jersey schools. The piece of the report causing backlash from school districts throughout the state is found on page two, stating: "It is critical to note, however, that panelists only identified a set of resources to be used in a series of hypothetical school scenarios and did not specifically examine any existing school or district in the state. It is therefore not appropriate to suggest that any specific resources or programs identified by the panels should be applied in all New Jersey schools. Nor can the report be used to determine which portion of these resources should be paid for at the state or local level."

The panel included Lucille Davy, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, Allen Dupree from the New Jersey Department of Education Division of Finance Office of School Funding and Justin Silverstein from Augenblick, Palaich and Association, Inc. (an education consulting firm). A total of 27 speakers addressed the panel, including two broadcasted from the County College of Morris in Randolph.

Ms. Davy started the hearing by saying, "It is important for you to know that this is the first in a series of hearings...we're here to listen." She said there would be more hearings in the new year.

One of the main concerns for the majority of speakers at the hearing was how Abbott schools would be affected. The New Jersey Supreme Court case Abbott v. Burke resulted in requiring the legislature to provide equal funding; therefore, educating urban students at the same level as suburban districts. There are 31 Abbott schools in New Jersey with an estimated 320,000 students.

Rosie Grant from the Paterson Education Fund was the first speaker at the second hearing of the day. "I believe all New Jersey children should succeed and they need the appropriate aid to do that, she said. "Those that have more get more in education in New Jersey...we need to make provisions for all children throughout New Jersey."

"The numbers cannot be trusted. These cookie-cutter examples are not based on real New Jersey students, schools, or communities...I ask you to conduct a realistic study," Ms. Grant said.

Richard Noonan, superintendent of Madison public schools, said "Common sense would be to look at actual experience before using a hypothetical model, which the report does not do." He added that the Madison schools are asking to stop using this report and embrace a new formula.

Assemblyman Joseph Cryan of Union questioned Ms. Davy directly about why the data in the report is from 2003, which she would not answer.

Mr. Cryan objected to the 98-page report, which he deemed old and lacking real data. "I stand proud for Abbott...school funding needs to be for every kid in the state," he said.

Carl Kruger from Rutgers' Institute on Education Law and Policy said the Department of Education needs to start all over and that there are real available models throughout the state.

Donna Jackson, representing the United Parent Network, said: "I'm gonna fight for all children, no matter where they're from." "Stop playing black versus white and urban versus suburban...the bottom line is we're dealing with this thing from (idiocy)," she said.

Raymond Bandlow, superintendent of Hillside public schools said, "The problem is not spending, its funding...money has been frozen for years from all districts besides Abbott's...wealthy districts can go to property taxes, [but Hillside] can't."

"For the school districts designated as Abbott districts...it is a battle about the State of New Jersey's investment in the future," said Ronald Lee, the school business administrator for the Newark public schools. "It is a battle that pits suburbs against cities, community against community and taxpayer against taxpayer, in a state that is reported to be the highest per-capita income and the second most segregated in the nation."

"The recommendations, as presented in the reports on 'Public School Funding Reform' and 'Cost of Education,' will significantly reduce aid to Abbott Districts and (do) not address the particularized needs of students in New Jersey's high poverty, high minority urban schools as mandated by the New Jersey Supreme Court rulings under Abbott v. Burke," Mr. Lee added.

Also present at the second hearing was William Foley, superintendent of Westfield. "What doesn't the report tell us?" he questioned. "It does not provide a guide for a 'super' county superintendent to cut school district costs, nor does it offer a model for a county school district. It does not tell us what it costs to meet the New Jersey state standards; or how much it costs to teach a child to read...Means and medians, not to mention professional judgment panels, cannot account for the wide differences in actual expenditures and district needs."

"While I would like to hope that it will be the department's recommendation and ultimately the law that many more school districts will receive equalization aid, in fact this number has been shrinking. At least part of the reason for the steady rise in local property taxes has been state aid numbers that have been frozen for five years," he said.

"There is no shortage of ideas for providing an effective funding formula. What we have is a shortage of money...Certainly, the public wants to lower property taxes, but they do not want to lower school quality," Mr. Foley said.

Lorenzo Richardson from the Concerned Citizens Coalition and from the Jersey City schools, said "The only purpose of this report, other than being used for bathroom material, is to realize that this report was just thrown together" and not to cut the kids out because they are the future.

The Report on the Cost of Education is available at www.state.nj.us/njded/news/2006/report.pdf. Archives from all three of the hearings can be found at njedge.net or on the Department of Education's website, state.nj.us/education.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield
Saturday, December 9, Christopher Garcia, 19, of Mountainside was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Central and Lenox Avenues on charges of driving while intoxicated (DWI), possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana and unlawful possession of prescription drugs. He was released on his own recognizance and released to a responsible adult.

Sunday, December 10, Thomas Cleary, 32, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield Avenue and Grove Street and charged with DWI. Subsequently, he also was charged with refusal to submit to an Alcotest. Cleary was released to his brother.

Sunday, December 10, Everic L. Underwood, Jr., 33, of Piscataway was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Hillcrest Avenue and Cornwell Drive on contempt of court motor vehicle warrants from Piscataway, with \$1,000 bail, and South Plainfield, with \$170 bail. He was released on his own recognizance per Piscataway authorities and then posted bail on the South Plainfield warrant.

Sunday, December 10, Jose Miranda, 48, of Edison was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on a contempt of court motor vehicle warrant from Woodbridge. He was released after posting \$120 bail.

Monday, December 11, Edward Carter, 32, of Westfield was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Doran Road and Scotch Plains Avenue and charged with obstruction of justice for allegedly refusing to give police identification information. Police said his identity ultimately was determined through fingerprinting.

Carter also was taken into custody on an outstanding no-bail Union County Sheriff's Department warrant; a \$750 Piscataway motor vehicle warrant and a \$150 Westfield motor vehicle warrant. He was turned over to the Union County Sheriff's Department.

Monday, December 11, a motor vehicle was burglarized in a parking lot in the 800 block of Forest Avenue. Someone broke a window and removed the vehicle's navigational system, valued at \$200.

Monday, December 11, a Woodbrook Circle resident reported a burglary at his home in which \$800 in jewelry was removed from his master bedroom. Police said there was no sign of forced entry.

Tuesday, December 12, Anthony L. Ball, 50, of East Orange was arrested at the Northern State Prison in Avenel on a criminal warrant issued by Westfield. He was transported to the Union County jail and held on \$1,240 bail.

Wednesday, December 13, Christopher Montemurro, 24, of North Plainfield was arrested and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana and with possession of drug paraphernalia following a motor vehicle stop at South Avenue and Hort Street. He was released on his own recognizance with a summons pending a court date.

Wednesday, December 13, a North Avenue resident reported the theft of a Garmin navigational system from her motor vehicle while it was parked at a local repair station.

Wednesday, December 13, Telesofzo Lozano, 27, of Red Bank was arrested at Red Bank police headquarters on outstanding Westfield warrants — one criminal and one motor vehicle — each with bail of \$250. He was held in lieu of bail pending transport to the Union County jail.

Thursday, December 14, Francisca P. Torres-Hernandez, 29, of Westfield was arrested and charged with shoplifting earrings from a North Avenue store. She was released with a summons.

Thursday, December 14, Margaret L. Macnish, 19, of Elizabeth was arrested at the Elizabeth Police Department on a traffic warrant from Westfield. She was held on \$500 bail.

Friday, December 15, after being stopped for motor vehicle violations at Central Avenue and Laurel Place, Arhamad Carson, 28, of East Orange was arrested on open motor vehicle warrants from East Orange, for \$311, and Morris Plains, for \$104. He was released after posting bail.

Saturday, December 16, a resident of the 1900 block of Grandview Avenue reported that his home was burglarized. Entry was gained through an unlocked kitchen door. A camcorder, two digital cameras and a woman's purse containing various items of personal property were reported missing.

Saturday, December 16, Miguel A. Saucedo, 20, of Cranford was arrested at Westfield police headquarters pursuant to a contempt of court traffic warrant issued by the Westfield Municipal Court. He was released after posting \$500 bail.

Fanwood
Thursday, December 14, Sameerah A. Henderson, 28, of Newark was arrested following a motor vehicle stop and charged with providing police with false information. After further investigation, she was also charged with outstanding warrants out of Newark and Paramus.

Thursday, December 14, Randy Cano, 20, of Newark was arrested for an outstanding Newark warrant following a field

investigation on Martine Avenue.
Thursday, December 14, Annyck S. Rogers, 25, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Springfield warrant after a field investigation.

Friday, December 15, Zhong J. Xiap, 40, of Chicago, Illinois was arrested and charged with a no-bail immigration/deportation warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Friday, December 15, Thomas Monaco, 44, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged with an outstanding Union County Sheriff's Department warrant. He was also charged with being in possession of prescription drugs not belonging to him.

Friday, December 15, Lori D. Rouse, 21 of Newark was arrested for an outstanding West Orange warrant following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Saturday, December 16, Edward Griffin, 62, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with an outstanding Union County Sheriff's Department warrant after a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue.

Saturday, December 16, two 17-year-old juveniles, a 16-year-old juvenile and a 15-year-old juvenile, all from South Plainfield, were arrested and charged with theft after police stopped their car containing a stolen item. According to police, authorities were alerted to a theft of a holiday lawn ornament from a home on Jefferson Avenue, which the youths were in possession of.

Sunday, December 18, Jack Hargrove, 55, of Somerset was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road for an outstanding South Orange warrant. He was also charged with possession of a controlled dangerous substance.

Scotch Plains
Wednesday, December 13, a resident of Edgewood Terrace reported that several lawn ornaments were stolen from the front of his house. The ornaments were valued at \$180.

Thursday, December 14, a resident of Rahway Road reported when he returned home he noticed his house had been ransacked and several items were missing.

Friday, December 15, a resident of Clydesdale Road reported that a UPS package was removed from his front porch. The package contained several business items and were valued at \$200, police said.

Saturday, December 16, a resident of Summit Road reported that while attending a party someone removed her cell phone from her purse.

Sunday, December 17, a resident of East Second Street reported that someone removed a decoration from his front lawn.

Sunday, December 17, a resident of Short Hills Lane reported that someone used his credit card without authorization. It is unknown at this time how individuals obtained the credit card number, police said.

Mountainside
Tuesday, December 12, a resident of Queens Lane reported that someone made purchases and opened up a UPS shipping account using their credit card without authorization. The incident is under investigation.

Friday, December 15, a resident of Cherry Hill Road reported being the victim of attempted fraud. According to police, the victim was selling a car over the Internet and received an e-mail from a potential buyer who said he would like to purchase the car for a client in Saudi Arabia.

The potential buyer said his client sent a check for more than the asking price and asked the victim to send a check for the overage back to his client, police said. The victim said he was no longer interested in selling the car and no deal was made, police said.

According to police, this type of Internet scam is a fraud tactic and police urge residents to be aware of it. The buyer writes an international check for more than the asking price of an item and then asks the victim to return the overpayment, police said. Since an international check takes longer to clear, the suspects cash the reimbursement check and cancel payment on the original check. Captain R. Osieja urges residents to be aware of this type of fraud stating, "If it's too good to be true, it usually is."

Friday, December 15, a patron of a Route 22 theater reported that someone damaged the door handle and steering column of his vehicle. According to police, nothing was reported missing at this time.

Friday, December 15, Edderson Nunez, 33, of Springfield was arrested for driving without a valid driver's license following a motor vehicle stop on Route 22 for excessive smoke.

Friday, December 15, Nathaniel Seawright, 25, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with an outstanding warrant out of Linden in the amount of \$1,000.

Friday, December 15, Brigitta, K. Nioche, 67, of New York City was arrested and charged with DWI after police noticed a suspicious vehicle.

Saturday, December 16, Herman A. Warner, 52, of Somerville was arrested and charged with DWI after a motor vehicle stop on Route 22 at New Providence Road.



WANTING TO BE CHIEF THIEF...Junior Erin Miller, left, of the Westfield High School girls basketball team had three steals and 22 points in a 51-47 win over Linden on December 15. Blue Devil Casey El Koury, No. 12, gets into the action.

Mountainside Sees Changes in Key Municipal Positions

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — Borough Mayor Robert Vigilanti announced at Tuesday night's council meeting that the borough has come to a financial agreement with its new chief financial officer (CFO). Jill Goode has accepted the borough's offer for a one-year \$43,000 contract beginning January 1.

The new CFO will replace Dianne Marus, who is retiring effective December 31. Ms. Marus also is finance director for Montclair Township.

Under a new ordinance, Ms. Marus will continue to work part-time as supervisor of accounts until the fall of 2007 to help transition Ms. Goode into the position. Ms. Marus's salary for the part-time, temporary position will be \$15,000.

Mayor Vigilanti also announced the resignation of the borough's public defender, Kelly Waters, who has accepted a judgeship in Union Township. The mayor said Ms. Waters has recommended a "very competent" attorney, but said he could not bring the recommendation to the council as of yet.

The mayor said the borough might go through reorganization in January with no public defender in place.

The borough council also passed several resolutions. One would allow borough employees eligible for the State Health Benefits Program to waive their health coverage for financial incentive.

The new incentive program offers employees a rebate at 50 percent of the cost of the least expensive Cigna program for which they are eligible. Incentives will be distributed at the end of each "calendar quarter." If employees choose to reinstate coverage, unpaid incentives would be "forfeited." Employees must work at least three months to be eligible for the rebate.

The previous incentive plan, started last year, offered 25 percent of the

plan's cost, but the borough received complaints from employees.

Incentives are considered taxable income and do not go towards employee pension plans. Projections indicate the new plan stands to save the borough \$24,000 in benefits costs if all employees participate.

Another resolution allows the borough to accept a bid by Jersey One Auto Sales, Inc. in Jersey City to buy two of the borough's surplus vehicles. The company would pay \$470 for a 1993 Ford Ranger with 71,432 miles last used by the recreation department. Jersey One would pay \$930 for a 1995 Chevy Caprice with 93,029 miles last used by the fire department.

The council approved a raffle application from Soroptimist International of the Greater Westfield area for an off-premise 50/50 raffle and on-premise silent auction.

In other news, Councilman Keith Turner warned residents of "gypsy contractors" approaching homeowners in a "neighboring" community. He said the contractors offer chimney and driveway repair services.

"They will take your money and not do the service or do a poor service," he said, adding that these contractors do not use "proper" driveway sealant.

Mr. Turner asked residents to contact the police if these contractors approach them.

When asked if the contractors must be registered with the borough, Mayor Vigilanti said they only have to be registered if the work requires a permit.

The mayor and council will take part in a Menorah lighting ceremony tonight, December 21, at 7 p.m. on Route 22 next to the borough Christmas tree.

The public is invited to attend the Mountainside Borough reorganization meeting to be held Tuesday, January 2, at 8 p.m. in the borough hall council chambers located on Route 22 at New Providence Road.

Sheriff, Surrogate, Clerk, Dept. Heads Get Raises

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and Times

ELIZABETH — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved salary increases Thursday night for county department heads, as well as for the county clerk, surrogate and sheriff.

The raises for department heads range from 2.75 to 4.88 percent. County Manager George Devaney's salary increased by \$6,059 to \$157,530. Deputy County Manager/Director of Administrative Services Elizabeth Genievich's new salary is \$137,623, an increase of \$5,293, while County Counsel Robert Barry received a \$5,119 pay boost to \$141,619.

Other salary raises are: Public Safety Director Harold Gibson, \$113,793, up \$4,000; Finance Director Larry Caroselli, \$126,377, a hike of \$4,375; Human Services Director Frank Guzzo, \$123,801, a \$4,378 increase; Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director Charles Sigmund, \$116,946, up \$3,130, and Director of Economic Development Al Faella, \$107,375, a \$5,000 increase. Only Director of Engineering and Public Works (DPW) Joseph Graziano, earning \$108,000, who joined the county over the summer, did not receive a raise. He replaced the retired Frank Dann, who was paid \$116,357. Directors' increases are retroactive to January 2006.

Tina Renna of Cranford, president of the Union County Watchdog Association, said department directors should not have received raises because of the deaths of two inmates that occurred while they were incarcerated at the Union County jail.

"People are dead. You don't deserve raises," Mrs. Renna said.

She said the total administrative salaries for the Union County manager and deputy manager, prior to last week's increases, totaled \$273,384 and were second only to Camden County, at \$513,550. New Jersey has 21 counties.

The freeholders approved 3.75-percent raises for County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi, County Surrogate James Lacorte and Sheriff Ralph Froehlich. Their salaries effective January 1, 2007 will be \$138,505, a \$14,500 increase from the start of 2005. The three officials received a 3.75-percent raise last December that was retroactive to January 1, 2005 and another 3.75-percent raise effective January 1 of this year.

The freeholders did not approve raises for themselves as they did last year and 2003. "Obviously, we don't give ourselves raises every year," Al Mirabella, freeholder chairman, said.

The board also approved a 4.5-percent raise for Freeholder Clerk

Nichole DiRado, boosting her pay \$3,712 to \$86,000, an \$11,000 increase since late 2004, when she was appointed to the post.

Bruce Paterson of Garwood said the freeholders need to bring "responsibility and accountability" to county government. He read a wrap-up of county government for the year called "Countdown to Disaster" which included mentions of 5-percent increase in the county tax levy and the Motor Vehicle Commission investigation into Freeholder Angel Estrada for his role as Elizabeth DMV office manager for allowing former Attorney General Zulima Farber's boyfriend's license to be restored "without going through proper legal procedure."

He also highlighted a sheriff's sale whereby Sheriff Froehlich's son "bought \$150,000 worth of cars for \$300" prior to a legal agreement to return the cars for dealership's bid, a sexual harassment lawsuit against Freeholder Rick Proctor and a \$2-million no-bid communications contract to Freeholder Debbie Scanlon's sister.

Mr. Mirabella said Mr. Paterson's comments sounded like a campaign speech, to which Mr. Paterson said he was "a resident who is watching what's going on at the county."

In other business, Freeholders Mirabella and Dan Sullivan said legislation that would create a county administrative school district would not apply to Union County because it has two or more Abbott Districts. The Westfield Board of Education, feeding off information from the Garden State Coalition on Schools, said last week that they heard Union County would be the county in question.

"I think there has been a wild reaction (to the rumor)," Mr. Sullivan said.

Under the legislation, the county selected for the program would be run by a chief school administrator and include an appointed school board. All local superintendents and other school board administrators would be abolished. Local school boards would exist, but only in an advisory capacity.

The legislation, S-8/S-7/A-8, if passed, would require support by the local freeholder board. Mr. Mirabella added that "it's a state issue...Union County couldn't even qualify as a county district."

"There is no talk (of a Union County Administrative School District) because there was no talk," Mr. Sullivan said.

The board approved contracts totaling \$293,950 for This Is It! Concept and Event Productions of Hoboken to promote MusicFest, Kids Traveling Jubilee Tour, and Rhythm and Blues by the Brook Festival.

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