



Jim Schultz
Superintendent
jschultz@bhbl.org

50 Cypress Drive
Glenville, NY 12302
www.bhbl.org

Voice: (518) 399-9141, ext. 5002
Fax: (518) 399-1882

Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Central Schools

Ensuring
opportunities
for learning,
personal growth
and social
responsibility.

Board of Education

Joe Pericone, *President*

John Blowers

Elizabeth Herkenham

Timothy Kelliher

Patre Kuziak

James Maughan

Robert Speck

March 12, 2010

Senator Hugh Farley
LOB 706
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Senator Farley:

The Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Board of Education and administration have been following developments on the economic crisis at the state and federal levels closely. Here are several key requests that will enable us to limit the tax implications of the current crisis on BH-BL residents.

1. Minimize cuts in education aid in the state 2010 budget.

We understand that these are unusual times and that state money is desperately tight. Our taxpayers are hurting, and Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake stands ready to do its share to address this unprecedented situation. We recognize that the “rainy day” we have been saving for is here. As requested by the Governor, BH-BL plans to apply half of the district’s undesignated fund balance to the 2010-11 budget and half to the 2011-12 budget. We have asked our bargaining units to make concessions. In addition we have prepared a list of staffing reductions that would get the district’s 2010-11 budget to a contingency level if necessary. Those reductions come to the equivalent of roughly 30 full-time positions or 5 percent of our total staff.

The potential loss of 30 staff on top of the 16.8 full-time-equivalent positions that were already cut in the current year’s budget is draconian and would be extremely painful. It could undo years of work to develop academic programs that make BH-BL one of the best performing school districts in the Greater Capital Region. We hope we will not be forced to reduce academic offerings, restructure summer school, reduce sports programs, and increase class sizes. However, all of these appear likely without more state aid. None of this is what we want, but we accept that some cuts will be necessary this year.

What we ask in return is that state legislators make every effort to restore some education aid. Proposed reductions in state aid are a particular concern for school districts like BH-BL that have very limited commercial property. When less than 10% of your taxable property is commercial, every dollar of state aid that you lose must be made up by an additional 90¢ from the wallets of local residents.

Often when aid is restored, it goes only to high-need school districts. So we remind you that average-need school districts are facing severe hardships too.

2. Support real mandate relief & oppose the Governor’s new unfunded mandates.

We applaud the mandate relief outlined in the Governor’s budget proposals. We note with frustration, however, that while calling for no new unfunded mandates the Governor actually included TWO NEW unfunded mandates for schools in his budget. We urge legislators to oppose any actions that would pass new costs now paid by other governmental entities onto schools. We ask our legislators to:

- Oppose shifting \$85 million in summer school-age special ed. costs from the state to schools, and
- Oppose shifting some preschool education costs from the counties to schools.

If the state Legislature is ready to get serious about mandate relief, here are two areas that would create significant cost savings for school districts all across New York:

- A. ***Reform the Wicks Law quickly!*** This is something we have been requesting for many years. Wicks requirements continue to inflate the cost of school renovation and construction projects by 15-20% with no appreciable gain. This is unconscionable. Three months ago BH-BL voters approved a \$12.9 million referendum to renovate our schools, save energy, and reduce heating costs. Repeal of the Wicks Law would effectively give BH-BL taxpayers an additional \$2 million to use to replace old leaky windows, doors, and roofing — at no additional cost to either the state or taxpayers. This is a



specific, tangible example of how action by the Legislature could directly benefit thousands of residents, and we urge you to act on it quickly since our projects will go out to bid in the next few months.

B. Re-examine special education mandates. Special education costs rise every year, due in part to the large number of New York State special education requirements that far exceed Federal Regulations. Cumulatively, these state requirements significantly increase district budgets. Citing just a few examples, NY imposes excessive meeting, paperwork and reporting requirements, which consume the workdays of both special education district offices and individual teachers, therapists, and psychologists. At a time when all governmental agencies are being urged to find new and creative ways of meeting needs without spending more money, schools often cannot do this due to the rigidity of New York laws.

3. Reform the Triborough Amendment.

School districts and other governmental bodies in New York should not be required to pay increments on staff salary schedules after the expiration of those negotiated agreements, as currently stipulated under the Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law. The Triborough Amendment should be modified to provide a level playing field for both sides of the negotiating table.

4. Maintain the guaranteed minimum STAR exemption at its current level.

To reduce the state budget by \$40 million, the Governor’s Executive Budget would significantly lower the guaranteed minimum STAR exemption. But this supposed “savings” would come right out of the wallets of local property taxpayers across New York, who would be left to pick up the \$40 million. This is nothing but a cost-shifting proposal, and we strongly oppose it. We are particularly upset that the Governor would propose this additional cost to local taxpayers when less than six months ago the value of STAR exemptions fell by 11% plus the Middle Class STAR rebate was abolished. BH-BL taxpayers are still smarting from those additional costs and don’t need more.

5. Pass an on-time budget.

The impact on various governmental bodies when the state budget is late is enormous — but this is particularly true of school districts since we are the only NY entities whose budget is voted on by the public. Without an on-time state budget, we will have to guess at state aid and tax increases, which will significantly confuse and anger our residents in what is already an exceptionally difficult year.

In summary, we remind you average needs school districts are facing severe problems in this unprecedented crisis too. We urge you to consider the points listed above as ways to help New Yorkers get through this tough economy as best we can. Thank you for all that you do to partner with the BH-BL Board of Education and community in providing a bright future for our children.

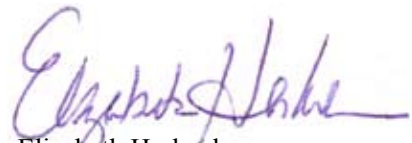
Sincerely,



Joe Pericone
President



John Blowers



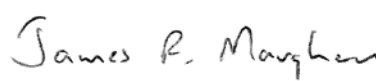
Elizabeth Herkenham



Timothy Kelliher



Patre Kuziak



James Maughan



Robert Speck