

CPCS Makes Gains In New State Budget

By LARRY ROBINSON

COLTON - A proposed 8.4 percent tax levy increase at Colton-Pierrepoint Central School next year has dropped to 6.7 percent following word that the recently ratified New York state budget offers more state aid dollars for the struggling rural district than first calculated.

School Superintendent Martin Bregg said CPCS recently learned it will receive some \$61,000 more in state aid than originally calculated in the state's executive budget.

New York state lawmakers in Albany ratified their 2008-09 budget earlier this month.

Bregg said the school board has decided to use the windfall to lower the amount of money

raised by taxes - dropping a projected tax levy increase of approximately 8.4 percent down to 6.7 - a difference of just under 1 percent.

All told Colton-Pierrepoint will now be receiving approximately \$2.7 million in state aid for next year, according to Bregg.

Of the district's proposed \$9,343,000 budget, about \$5.8 million of that amount will be raised directly by taxes, according to the superintendent.

He said of the 6.7 percent tax levy increase now being offered, about 4.2 percent of that figure represents new spending over last year.

"There is about \$373,000 in new spending in next year's budget," said Bregg, who sug-

gested he is often asked to answer questions from district residents explaining the difference between new spending in the budget and the overall tax levy increase.

"I tell people they are two different numbers and they represent two different things," he said.

For example, Bregg says increases in new budgetary spending next year are being driven primarily by the still-rising cost of energy and transportation, as well as the legal need to meet contractual obligations with district employees.

Voters in the Colton-Pierrepoint Central School District will go to the polls on May 20 to cast their ballots on the proposed spending plan.

"We don't anticipate any additional aid at this point and we hope that in the middle of the year we don't receive a reduction in aid," said Bregg. "At this point I am feeling good. I've talked to a few people and they are feeling good as well."

Despite that optimism, Colton-Pierrepoint is continuing to struggle with the hard reality that it has a shrinking student population and a shrinking pool of state aid dollars as a result. State officials calculate the amount of state aid that a district receives, in part, based on the number of students enrolled.

Less state aid means districts have to either trim spending more or hike local

property taxes to make up the difference.

Colton-Pierrepoint officials are anticipating the student population to drop below the 400 student mark in the next handful of years.

To help balance state aid reductions against rising expenses the school district budget for 2008-09 also calls for the elimination of one full time elementary teaching position and the elimination of a half-time home-school counselor position, according to Bregg.

He said teachers are also be asked to cut back on supplies and materials, field trips and staff development in order to save money in next year's budget.