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Today's Front Page

News

Molinaro talks budgets with school officials

By Paul Crossman

HUDSON — Marc Molinaro continued to make the rounds on his state budget discussions, stopping at Hudson High School Thursday. Molinaro, along with his Chief of Staff Gary Graziano met with Hudson City School District Superintendent John F. Howe and Ichabod Crane Central School District Superintendent James P. Dexter for a roundtable discussion on the current changes in the budget and how they will affect local schools.

Molinaro began the discussion with the admission by saying that he did not vote for any aspect of the current budget, but that he believed it to be a workable solution, at least for the time being.

Dexter voiced his opinion that “in the long term we’re really going to have to look at the structural issues that face education as a whole.”

Molinaro agreed with this wholeheartedly, saying, “My perspective is that the entire structure in New York creates a polarized adversarial relationship, and we don’t see any product because of it. If you don’t reform education and health care, you’re not really seeing a benefit of any kind.”

When asked about how the loss of foundation aid would negatively effect local schools, Molinaro replied that the effect really wouldn’t be negative at all, since the schools are gaining other forms of stimulus aid. “Right now schools are kept held harmless,” said Molinaro. What this term means is that the school districts will receive the same amount of foundation aid as provided in the 2008-09 school year, and taxpayers will not be forced to shoulder the burden of reduced funding for the districts.

“I don’t believe, though,” he continued, “that the current system doesn’t harm schools and taxpayers. The current system is harmful, which is why I will continue to argue for real reform.”

Dexter also voiced at least a partial approval of the current plan, as a decline in this year’s number of enrolled students would have usually meant a slight decrease in foundation aid. With this new plan, however, the aid will stay the same as it was the previous

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year.

“We are very happy to have it stay where it is,” said Dexter. “It acts as an increase even though it really just stays the same.”

Unlike many school districts which stayed the same or had slight decreases in this year’s aid, Hudson’s proposed amount actually increased slightly from the previous year. “Hudson did get some extra funding,” said Howe, “but it’s important to remember that most of it is for the building project.”

Though the new state aid plan isn’t perfect, it at least gives schools an idea of what they will be working with if the economy stays the same for the next few years. “It gives us an opportunity to plan for a new future,” said Dexter. “It may be an uncomfortable future for some, but we need to prepare for it.”

Molinaro also called for either the elimination of, or the full funding of the No Child Left Behind Act, adding that he would prefer elimination. “The state system and the No Child Left Behind Act are running parallel to each other in New York,” he said, “and they are not converging as well as we might like.”

Dexter agreed, adding that the act may work better in other states because many of them don’t have the same rigorous testing as New York.

The discussion also touched on the issue of the STAR Program, and Molinaro made a point to let everyone know that the basic STAR exemption does still exist, and that it is only the STAR rebate check which has been discontinued this year. Many people, including the two superintendents present at the meeting, still have questions about this, and Molinaro promised to issue a memo in the near future on both the program itself and the changes it is undergoing.

Throughout the discussion Molinaro kept coming back to a single theme, which was that while the currently proposed budget may work in the short term, drastic changes need to be made in order for the education system to continue to be effective. He also promised that he will continue to support these changes, regardless of the fact that many people continue to ignore them.

“There will be very little discussion about the possible fiscal disaster in 2011 until at least November 2010,” he said, “because of various poor political reasons. Right now the silver lining is that [the schools] are held harmless, but we’ve got to impress on the government and others that you can’t just breathe a sigh of relief for 27 months and believe everything will be okay.”

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