

The

Chalkboard

A Report from the Wattsburg Area Schools

2004/2005 School Year

March 2005

<http://www.wattsburg.org>

School Board Seeks Input from Wattsburg Area School District Residents

School board members have a difficult choice to make and will seek input from community members.

By May 31, 2005, our school board is required to decide if Wattsburg Area School District will participate in Act 72 and be bound by its regulations. As explained in previous editions of the Chalkboard, Act 72 of 2004, also known as The Homeowner Tax Relief Act, allows school districts to accept funds accumulated from a tax on slot machines (gaming funds). However, to qualify for receiving the gaming funds, districts must levy an additional .1% tax on the earned income of all district residents. The districts are then required to reduce property taxes, for those who qualify as a homestead or farmstead, by the exact amount received from the gaming funds and additional earned income taxes. Thus, a portion of the taxes paid by qualifying residents is shifted from a property tax to an earned income tax but the school district receives no additional funds as a result of this change.

Districts which elect not to participate in Act 72 may not impose the additional .1% earned income tax and are not eligible to receive gaming funds for the purpose of reducing property taxes for those who qualify.

Although our school board must make a decision regarding participation in Act 72 by May 31, 2005, distribution of gaming funds and property tax reduction for those who qualify will probably not begin until 2008. The exact amount of property tax reduction is dependent upon the amount of gaming funds available. Even if the property tax reduction is minimal, the .1% increase in earned income tax remains. In spite of the fact that a tax shift will not occur until 2008, other requirements of Act 72 become effective in 2006. The most notable requirement is a mandatory referendum which requires a public vote to approve tax increases beyond a minimal amount, estimated to be about 3%. Since the projected increase required to maintain the programs currently offered in our district is about 8% per year over the three years from 2006 to 2008, the district would be forced to cut programs or services valued at about \$400,000 per year for 2006 through 2008 – unless the voters approved the necessary additional property tax. If forced to make cuts of that magnitude, the district would be unable to provide the wide range of quality educational programs currently available and students could be negatively impacted. Extra curricular and athletic programs could face elimination. Thus, your school board faces a very difficult decision. Which of the following options should be chosen?



March 4 & 5, 2005
March 11 & 12, 2005

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School Board Seeks Input from Wattsburg Area School District Residents

Continued from page 1

Option 1

Participate in Act 72 and be forced to raise the earned income tax by .1% to become eligible for an unknown amount of gaming funds, which would be used to reduce property taxes for those who qualify, and also force a referendum to raise the funds needed to maintain educational programs.

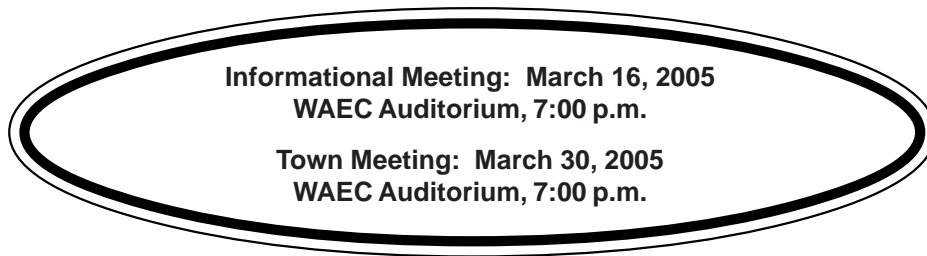
Option 2

Not participate in Act 72, effectively leaving things as they are with an elected school board making decisions regarding the district's programs and property tax.

To further explain the potential impact of Act 72, an **informational meeting** will be held for all residents of the Wattsburg Area School District on **March 16, 2005** at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Wattsburg Area Elementary Center. Please reserve the date and plan on attending to learn more about Act 72. Following this meeting, the board will seek input from community members regarding the decision to participate in Act 72. You may have your voice heard by responding in one of the following ways:

1. Attend a **town meeting** on **March 30, 2005** beginning at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Wattsburg Area Elementary Center.
2. E-mail your comments to bjones@wasd.iu5.org.
3. Call with your comments at 824-3400, District Administration Office extension.
4. Complete the survey form below and mail to:
Mrs. Betty Jones
Wattsburg Area School District – Act 72
10782 Wattsburg Rd.
Erie, PA 16509
5. For those who have children attending Wattsburg Area Middle School or Seneca High School: log on to the LetterGrade system and complete the Act 72 Survey located in the section marked polls.

A tally of all responses will be shared with school board members so an informed decision can be made at the May 16, 2005 school board meeting.



Survey

Act 72

- Wattsburg Area School District should not participate in Act 72. Our school board should continue to make decisions regarding the property tax required to fund school programs.
- Wattsburg Area School District should participate in Act 72. The earned income tax should be raised .1%. Money from gaming funds and the .1% earned income tax should be used to offset property tax.

Signature

The Two Sides of Act 72

Arguments in Favor of Participating in Act 72	Arguments Against Participating in Act 72
1. A NEW SOURCE OF REVENUE AND A TAX REFORM INITIATIVE	
<p>Act 72 brings a new source of revenue into the school funding mix. While most tax schemes approach “tax reform” only as “tax shift,” Act 72 generates new revenue from gaming as part of the solution. Even though school districts will serve as a conduit for these funds, the arrangement provides some much needed relief to homeowners by generating new money, and school districts should cooperate in the effort. The introduction of property tax reform legislation has been, historically, an annual event in Harrisburg. Finally, we have a major comprehensive statute that addresses many past concerns. This could very well be the last significant piece of legislation we will see on this subject, at least for a very long time. Opting out of Act 72 to “wait for something better” would be a mistake. This law is as good as it gets.</p>	<p>The tax relief offered by Act 72 gaming revenues is overstated. The most optimistic figures associated with gaming distributions assume \$1 billion annual proceeds. That level of revenue requires that an estimated 2 million gamblers in Pennsylvania will each lose \$1,220 per year on slot machines! These figures are not sustainable or believable. The supporting research that supports these huge revenue predictions has not been made available to the public. Without a credible source of new income, the local income tax increase remains as the sole reliable, viable component of “relief.” Act 72 is, in reality, a poorly designed “tax shift.” Lets call it what it is. The advantage of gaming revenue, so called “new money,” intended to compensate for the disadvantages of the Act, is a myth. Without it, only the disadvantages remain.</p>
2. MORAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES	
<p>Pennsylvania citizens are already gambling. They travel routinely to existing facilities in New Jersey, West Virginia, Delaware, and New York. Act 72 merely contains those funds in-state, taxes them, and directs resultant revenue to Pennsylvania homeowners. In that context, government is doing nothing to encourage the vice of gambling; it already exists. As a question of morality, gambling is a personal choice. Individuals will engage in it regardless of the framework in which government places it. Act 72 merely capitalizes on a fact of life. After all, drinking alcohol is considered to be a vice by some, and the State realizes revenue from and controls that activity. Gambling is no different. The State is also involved in horse racing, lotteries, and cigarettes. Local decisions to ignore the availability of gaming revenue are futile gestures. Individual homeowners who object to the program’s funding source may opt out by not returning the homestead application.</p>	<p>Government should have no role in encouraging destructive behavior, particularly in a conservative state whose citizenry attaches moral concerns to gambling. The individuals enticed into slot gambling by its increased availability will be those who can afford it the least. Also, those likely to be captivated by slot gaming could very well be those whom property tax reform has traditionally been targeted to benefit – senior homeowners on fixed income. Moral issues aside, the social cost of gambling in the form of increased welfare, personal bankruptcy, reform and correction, and control will offset the financial gain. Moral and ethical stands are not in fashion these days, but that does not mean they should be avoided. Further, slot gambling is another step towards table gambling, casinos, dog races, sports gambling, etc. The citizens of Pennsylvania do not want their state to become the “Nevada of the East.” Someone must take an ethical position and not allow greed to compromise principle.</p>

The Two Sides of Act 72

Arguments in Favor of Participating in Act 72	Arguments Against Participating in Act 72
3. GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL CONTROL	
<p>The referendum provisions of Act 72 will give greater control of school district finances to the electorate. By means of required ballot-box approval for certain decisions about tax level, structure, and increase, voters will have a say on significant issues that affect public education. This arrangement is consistent with the democratic principles upon which our country was founded. School boards should not act to impede this movement. It has worked successfully in other states where even greater referendum restrictions apply. The underlying principle of Commonwealth government is local control; Act 72 is a step closer to the goal of giving meaningful power to the people. Boards should welcome the opportunity to get direct taxpayer response to their spending initiatives. Act 72 distributes some of the responsibility for hard budget decisions to the taxpayers; it makes governing easier. To boards reluctant to subject their decision making to legitimate and orderly validation we ask, "What are you afraid of?"</p>	<p>Government in the United States was founded on the principles of representative democracy. Voters already have control over public schools, their taxing level, structure, and increase. We call the operative mechanism "school board elections;" they happen every two years. Do state legislators subject their legislative prerogatives to public referendum? In what other form of local government in Pennsylvania is there a movement to strip control of basic governmental functions from elected governing bodies? There are few local issues more complex than public education. Nine individuals are elected for the purpose of educating themselves on the issues and forming learned opinions. The general public could not, and should not, be expected to invest the time necessary to make the kind of informed decisions required for the effective operation of public schools. The public's expectation should be in "end result accountability." If there is dissatisfaction with the fiscal performance of a school board, a ballot-box solution should be exercised to change it.</p>
4. COST CONTROL	
<p>Cost controls must be imposed on local school spending because the current system is not working. Local real estate taxes are spiraling upward with no end in sight. Pennsylvania's voters have made it clear that they want a comprehensive solution to the problem and relief from the unfair burden currently assumed by the homeowner. Many school boards interpret the referendum requirement on tax increases as a slap-in-the-face, an action based on the assumption that they are incapable stewards. This is an unfortunate interpretation and it was not the foundation for the legislation. It is understood that no board sets out to generate excessive spending or raise taxes. Each seeks to execute its fiscal duties responsibly. But school budgets are driven by teacher salaries and associated benefits. In the past, boards did not have the necessary tools at the bargaining table or a statewide negotiating environment that facilitated salary containment. Now they do.</p>	<p>The primary reason for increasing school real estate taxes is proportionately decreasing state aid and increasing state and federal mandates. State support of public education has declined from 50% of total cost to a little over 30% over the past 20 years. At the same time, state and federal governments have required an increasing array of expensive services (e.g., special education, No Child Left Behind) without associated funding. Increased expenditures are the result of increased requirements, not irresponsible spending. State and federal funding has not kept pace with those demands, forcing local boards to make up the difference. The history of school funding in Pennsylvania has been a continued chronology of politically motivated conduct on the part of state legislators, passing the responsibility for tax increases to local school boards. The motivation for imposing index and referendum controls is unfounded. Act 72 is simply another handoff, with no requirement for the legislators to correct past behavior.</p>

The Two Sides of Act 72

Arguments in Favor of Participating in Act 72	Arguments Against Participating in Act 72
5. INDEX CONTROL AND EXCEPTIONS	
<p>Concern over electorate approval of school budgets is an overreaction. Tax increases without referendum are allowable under Act 72. The fuss seems to be on the limitations. Yes, tax increases are limited to an index, but the index is a reasonable and fair reflection of inflation. It considers the statewide average weekly wage increase and a national index linked to the increasing cost of employment in public education. These are meaningful statistics and allow for reasonable increases in school budgets. It does not seem reasonable that public schools should be exempt from the same spending limits that are imposed on taxpayers in the course of daily life. If schools cannot operate within cost-of- living limitations, they should be ashamed to admit it. Further, there are exceptions in place that allow for unusual circumstances. What’s wrong with that? The law does not say that tax increases are prohibited. It merely requires that they be fair and reasonable. Increases are specifically allowed. The only change is that voter approval is required for excessive increases. The public will allow an increase if it is needed. Give the people some credit to do the right thing.</p>	<p>The index argument might work if it was applied to spending and not taxes. The “living within inflation argument” is bogus. School boards could “live within inflation” if given a fighting chance. IF a reasonable index was applied to spending AND state funding, ONLY THEN would the application of an index limitation approach arithmetic fairness. As written, school boards could suffer from continued funding declines and be prevented from raising the local taxes necessary to support mandated programs. The exception provisions in Act 72 are window dressing. The exceptions are written around near catastrophic and dire financial distress. They are useless in addressing the normal stresses that are certain to apply to the routine operation of school districts. Also, many of the exceptions require approval of county judges. These elected officials are not likely to approve tax increases any more than state legislators have granted relief. As to voter approval, districts in states with referendum requirements report that the operative assumption is the referendum votes do not succeed. Circumstances then dictate that program cuts and deteriorating quality of program is the resultant solution.</p>
6. TAX EQUITY AND FAIRNESS	
<p>Local boards, educators, and their professional associations have consistently argued that the most efficient and equitable means of local taxation is through income. Act 72 provides that opportunity. What’s the problem? While boards might legitimately see some disadvantages to the Act 72 package, this single benefit alone should be deemed overriding. Not only does the law provide true reform through the “shift” provision, it gives boards the opportunity to peg a portion of its future revenue stream to income, a consistent reflection of cost of living. Further, the Act gives boards the opportunity to accelerate its own tax reform plan by working with the electorate to increase earned income tax beyond the .1% board imposed increase, or bring personal income into play. More importantly, it keeps community wealth within the community and prevents it from being redistributed to poorer districts.</p>	<p>The link to increased revenue from reliance on income is limited to the increase over the year 1 base. The biggest piece of the “new money” is passed through to the homeowner. This source will have little effect on the big picture of school finance. The “link to a meaningful source of revenue that moves with inflation” is another Act 72 myth. The emphasis of the income tax provisions of Act 72 is on shifting tax burden from property tax payers to income earners. Further, renters are penalized. They must pay the increased income component of Act 72 without any of the “shift” relief or new slot money. The effect of Act 72 is for renters to give money to homeowners because they own homes and renters don’t. What’s fair about that? Also, Act 72 does nothing to address the major issue of equity in school funding. This was a primary reason for the tax reform movement.</p>

The Two Sides of Act 72

Arguments in Favor of Participating in Act 72	Arguments Against Participating in Act 72
7. PROTECTION FROM TAX INCREASES	
<p>Act 72 offers homeowners protection from real estate tax increases and strikes a reasonable compromise with school boards concerned over the issue of local control. School boards may still impose reasonable tax increases at their discretion. The Act simply takes away the unlimited powers that boards currently enjoy, and imposes reasonable limits. This action is needed to address growing concerns among the electorate that will soon rise to the level of a taxpayer revolt! Those who lament that the quality of education in their schools will decline as a result of their loss of ability to tax and spend without limit, should think about the quality of their schools after a hostile takeover by a program-slashing “taxpayer group.” The electorate now has the power to determine if they want high taxes. If they do — OK. If not, then they will have made that decision with an understanding of its effect. The passion of the electorate will be properly directed toward the referendum. The Act insulates the homeowner from runaway taxes and, at the same time, provides a safety valve to protect the quality of education in the community.</p>	<p>The referendum provision of Act 72 was supposed to serve as a protection for taxpayers. This may not be true in many cases. In fact, Act 72 could result in larger tax increases. The unreasonable and poorly thought out timeline of Act 72 requires that budgets be prepared in December. Because vital information will not be known at that time (like state funding levels), a district will <u>automatically</u> include the maximum index increase where it might otherwise hold the line on taxes. A district may not need such an increase, but would include it in the budget regardless. Prudent planning strategy will also dictate that the maximum increase be retained in the budget, even if “not needed” because of the uncertainty of future years. In other words, districts that would otherwise tax less than the index, will now tax at the index whether they need to do so or not. Act 72 guarantees tax increases. Further, districts now have an incentive to raise their taxes as much as possible in 2005-06, the last non-referendum year. Boards may impose large tax increases to build a base year and ensure that their programs will be protected from the ravages of Act 72.</p>
8. INCREASED FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION	
<p>Act 72 will provide much needed funding for education and improve the Commonwealth’s relative position among the other states in its support of public education. Recent highly publicized studies have shown Pennsylvania as having a poor record for supporting public education at the state level. This creates the appearance that Pennsylvania is not a progressive state and does not attach a high priority to education. An effect of this appearance is to discourage industry from locating in Pennsylvania and to encourage a talent drain. Act 72 is an aggressive response to school boards’ cries for increased funding and a restoration of state support to the levels of the 1980s. The legislature is giving school boards what they asked for — more funding.</p>	<p>Act 72 does not provide funding for education. Revenue created by its provisions (gaming revenue) is redirected to homeowners. Not one cent of new money is directed toward education under the Act. Treatment of the flow of slot money as “much needed funding” would be a shameful accounting trick. It may show on state books as payments to school districts and improve the Commonwealth’s relative position among the states, but such a conclusion would be the result of a deception. It would ignore the fact that the money funneled into public schools was forced out for non-educational purposes. Slot money does nothing to improve education. More importantly, the issue of funding equity between rich districts and poor districts is not addressed by this legislation in any way.</p>

The Two Sides of Act 72

Arguments in Favor of Participating in Act 72	Arguments Against Participating in Act 72
9. ACT 72 ALLOWS FOR AN ORDERLY TIMELINE OF TRANSITION	
<p>Act 72 provides an orderly timeline for decision making with deadlines imposed to allow for responsible local and state level planning. The budget development timeline gives citizens, PDE, and the courts an opportunity to help school districts control their expenditures. It even gives boards the opportunity to adjust their tax levels in 2005-06 in advance of the 2006-07 referendum requirement. It uses the May primary as a focal point for budgetary decisions, allowing boards nearly six weeks to adjust their budgets in accordance with the electorate's wishes and the entire summer to plan for any required adjustment in programs. Yes, it will require school districts to accelerate their budget calendars. But vocational-technical schools and intermediate units are already operating on similar preparation calendars with no apparent problems.</p>	<p>The Act 72 timeline is one of its most untenable features. It requires a "drop-dead" decision to participate before significant information is known about the reliability of the gaming estimates. Boards are forced to make crucial decisions about the fate of their programs without knowing the facts. Even under the most optimistic scenario, gaming information will not be known by the May 31, 2005 deadline for a board level decision on participation. Further, as a practical matter, the timetable requires that the budget be completed in December, months before critical information is known about State funding, enrollment, program requirements, etc. Unreliable assumptions must be made simply to complete the necessary forms. If a referendum is sought, it will necessarily be based on inaccurate information.</p>
10. ACT 72 WILL SAVE PENNSYLVANIA TAXPAYERS MONEY	
<p>First and foremost, Act 72 will save homeowners money by lowering their real estate bills, with new money as a major reason. It will further save by controlling the rate of future increases. Board directors voting to deny these constituents tax relief put themselves in a politically indefensible position. They are using their votes to deny money to their constituents so that the directors can retain the right to impose unlimited real estate tax increases in the future! How can a board director vote against lower taxes by turning down state funding? Further, directors would be voting to retain an archaic tax system based on ownership of property and ignoring a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to exploit a tax system based on earning potential. Further, most of the conversation about "tax shift" centers on protection for senior citizen homeowners on fixed income. Act 72 is custom made to address this problem. With the exception of denying boards the degree of taxing authority they enjoyed in the past, everyone is a winner under Act 72!</p>	<p>Homeowners must balance their purported "savings" against factors Act 72 proponents conveniently ignore. The major component of the "savings" is the distribution of revenue from the "slot fund." That source is highly suspect and appears to be grossly overstated. What savings there is from this source must be offset by the "tax shift" component. For many school districts, the net savings has been shown to be less than \$100 per year for an average homeowner! If the slot fund does not materialize as predicted, many homeowners could actually lose money in the exchange. Renters are certainly not winners under Act 72. More importantly, the referendum provisions of Act 72 will certainly require program cuts by participating districts. School system quality is a major determinant of property values. Property values in a participating Act 72 district are likely to decline. For the sake of a few hundred dollars of savings in property taxes, homeowners could very well see their property values decline by tens of thousands of dollars. Everyone is a loser under Act 72!</p>

Wattsburg Area School District Honored for Academic Achievements

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has honored Seneca High School and the Wattsburg Area Middle School with an award for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for two consecutive years. AYP is measured only at the middle and high school levels.

The keystone-shaped award, which can be displayed indoors or outdoors, has been given to schools across the state where the students have exceeded the math, reading, and other standards required by the state's accountability system and the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

To meet AYP in the 2003-04 school year, 35% of students needed to be considered proficient in math and 45% proficient in reading. In the current school year, the percentages will be increased to 45 and 54 percent, respectively.

The Wattsburg Area School District has utilized an ever-growing slate of tools to lay the groundwork for sustained, substantial improvement. These include school improvement and district strategic planning frameworks, a guide for using data to improve teaching and achievement, an item bank of PSSA sample questions and student responses, and a comprehensive set of Assessment Anchors that clarifies the information to be covered in the PSSA and identifies a core set of standards used on the assessment.

District and School Report Cards

The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires each school district to complete Report Cards for school buildings and for the district in general. This year, Report Cards were created for the Wattsburg Area Middle School and Seneca High School. An elementary school Report Card is not required at this time. Data contained in these Report Cards for the 2003-04 school year include staffing information, fiscal charts, assessment reports, professional qualifications of teachers, and Adequate Yearly Progress toward proficiency on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

The Report Cards will be posted to the WASD website at www.Wattsburg.org in March. They may also be viewed in any of the school libraries or in the District Administration Office.

SHS Alumni Receive Recognition

Seneca High School recently received a letter of commendation from Penn State Erie. The following Behrend students have graduated from Seneca, and have been named to the Dean's List at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, for the Fall 2004 semester.

Amanda Gilkinson	Joseph Piazza	Jesse Stimpson
Jodie McMann	Julie Kosin	Jordan Gilmore
Jared Magoon	Steven Barnett	
Joseph Van Riper	James Mooris	

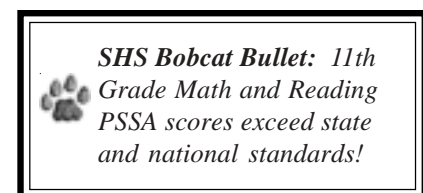
Congratulations, students, on a job well done!

LetterGrade – *What Is It?*

It has been the Wattsburg Area School District's continued goal to use technology to improve communications among students, parents, and teachers. We believe that offering parents and guardians online access to their child's attendance and grading records increases communication and encourages parental involvement. The Wattsburg Area School District is pleased to offer online access to student attendance and grading information.

To deliver this system, the district has partnered with the web development firm, LetterGrade. The LetterGrade system is a website that teachers use to record daily attendance, exam and project grades, and homework assignments. Teachers use the LetterGrade system as a replacement for paper attendance records and gradebooks. When parents access the system, they will see attendance records and grade information for their child or children. Currently, the LetterGrade system is for parents with children in grades 5-12.

Letters to parents with children in grades 5-12 were mailed on January 24, 2005. These letters explained how to access the system and also provided the login username and passwords. Students were given their letters on January 25, 2005. Parents and students each have their own unique username and password.



High School Highlights

Seneca Welcomes the Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps

Seneca High School has been appointed an Air Force Junior ROTC unit beginning in the 2005-06 school year. The AFJROTC program provides citizenship training and an aerospace science program for high school students. ***The program is not a recruitment tool for the military and a student is not required to pursue the military after graduation.*** The AFJROTC program is being offered as part of the Regional Choice Initiative (RCI), which allows interested students from other high schools in the county to attend the program as well.

The mission of the AFJROTC is to build "better citizens for America." Seneca's program, not limited to Seneca High School students, but open to any student in grades 9-12, offers training in citizenship and life skills, promotes community service, instills responsibility, character and self-discipline through character education, and provides instruction in air and space fundamentals.

The AFJROTC program is designed for those students who want to become better citizens and leaders – confident, self-reliant, and self-disciplined.

The 4-year curriculum is a balance of aerospace science and leadership education that counts toward high school graduation. Classroom study includes the heritage of flight, development of air power, contemporary aviation, the aerospace environment, human requirements of flight, aerospace vehicles, principles of aircraft flight and navigation, the space environment, space programs, space technology, rocketry, propulsion, and the aerospace industry. Students are also introduced to military customs and courtesies, flag etiquette, citizenship in the U.S., the elements of survival, first aid, wellness, health and fitness, basic drills and ceremonies, communication, management, human relations, and life after high school.

AFJROTC facilitators are retired Air Force commissioned and noncommissioned officers. The officers maintain Air Force standards and are trained through the Aerospace Science Instructor Course.

Community service is a major part of the cadet experience and helps instill a sense of civic pride and citizenship. Cadets are also very active in drug abuse prevention education.

Cadets who choose to continue their education may receive special considerations for AFROTC scholarships. The scholarships pay for 3 or 4 years of tuition, books, and fees at numerous universities and colleges and allow cadets to pursue studies in various technical and non-technical majors. Cadets completing 2 years of the AFJROTC program and continue in ROTC in college, may waive one term of the Air Force Senior ROTC program. Cadets who complete 3 years of the AFJROTC program in high school may receive credit for a full year of college level Air Force ROTC. Cadets entering the military immediately after graduation are eligible to enlist in any branch of the service, one or two pay grades higher than other enlistees.

There are currently 744 AFJROTC units in high schools across the United States, Europe, the Pacific, and Puerto Rico. Current enrollment in JROTC exceeds more than 103,000 cadets.

If you'd like more information on the program, please contact the Seneca High School Guidance Dept. at 824-3400, ext. 509.



Music Notes

Congratulations to Rob Yaple for being selected to represent Seneca High School at Regional Band at Harborcreek High School in February! Rob also participated in the Susquehanna University Honors Band in February. He has chosen to attend Ithaca College in the fall, majoring in Music Education.

The following Seneca students were chosen to participate in the Tri-State Honors Band at Mercyhurst College: Rob Yaple, Aaron Lucore, and Katrina Good.

Because of the renovations to the Seneca auditorium, the Spring Choral and Band concerts will be presented in the Elementary Center auditorium on May 17th, 19th and 20th.



Good and Evil Face Off on Seneca Stage

Seneca High School is proud to announce that this year's spring musical is *Jekyll and Hyde*.

Jekyll and Hyde is set in late 19th century London and is loosely based on the well known story of Dr. Henry Jekyll, a brilliant young doctor and research scientist who, distraught over his father's mental illness, embarks upon a quest to isolate the dual elements of good and evil that are constantly struggling for supremacy inside every human being. However, when his experiment backfires, Jekyll inadvertently gives life to Edward Hyde, his evil alter ego, a murderous being who will let loose a reign of terror on the city of London and those who had ridiculed Jekyll's research.

The show stars Seneca seniors Rob Yaple as Dr. Henry Jekyll/Edward Hyde, Anne Zielinski as Emma Carew, Jekyll's fiancée, and junior Helene Waldemarson as the promiscuous Lucy Harris, the lady of the night with a heart of gold. The cast of 27 is directed by Mr. Matthew Weaver,

with vocal direction by Erie Playhouse Board Member, Mrs. Mary Jo Laupp. This musical was Mr. Weaver's Erie Playhouse mainstage debut in June 2002 as General Lord Glossop. The local private school, Mercyhurst Prep, will also be performing this show approximately one month after Seneca closes theirs. The Seneca cast encourages everyone to check out both renditions.

Despite popular criticism about the complexity of this particular show which many do not believe a high school is capable of performing, these young actors are up to the challenge. Seneca is currently in rehearsal six days a week and is ready to astound people with four amazing performances.

Due to renovations at the high school, this year's show will be performed at the Wattsburg Area Elementary Center auditorium, located just up the hill from Seneca High School. Show dates are March 4th, 5th, 11th, and 12th. Show times are



7:30 p.m., except for the final matinee performance on the 12th, which will be at 2:00 p.m.. Seating is limited to approximately 280 people per show, so please call 824-3400, ext. 500 for advanced ticket sales and additional information.

Jekyll and Hyde is rated PG-13 for some mild sexual overtones and violence. Parental discretion is advised.

Seneca Renovation and Update

The new construction area has progressed quickly in the past few weeks. The structural steel is now in place, and the walls and roof are expected to be completed by the time this publication goes to press.

The fitness center is completely enclosed. The floor is poured and much of the supporting HVAC, plumbing, and electrical work is done. The fitness center is on schedule, to be completed by the end of February. The school will be able to utilize the facility sometime this month.

The auditorium is almost completely demolished. The refurbished auditorium is slated to be finished by

June 1st. Our first graduation in the new auditorium is planned for June 9, 2005. Everything in the auditorium will be new, including 640 cushioned seats!

The students, faculty and staff have been absolutely wonderful through the first half of the school year. The corridor to the gym was demolished early and students have had to go outside at the change of classes to get to and from the main building. The students lost one of their parking lots close to the gym and many have had to walk from the overflow lot daily. Inside the building there have been areas off limits to students and staff

where construction work has been done. The student lockers were moved from the downstairs locker area to the commons and the first floor hallways. A Social Studies class was moved into the Media Center.

Through all of this, the students, faculty and staff have kept a positive attitude and have respected the decisions that had to be made. The Seneca community has been strengthened by coming together to overcome these obstacles. We look forward to 2006 when we will have a building that will facilitate the needs of our students and community for many years to come.

Middle School Mania

A Trip Through Time

The sixth graders at the middle school have begun their integrated medieval unit. In social studies classes, students will learn about heraldry and the origin of their names as they create their own coats of arms on shields. Students will learn about several games played during this time as well as other recreational activities that people of the Middle Ages enjoyed. In science, students will research the causes of the plague (Black Death) which decimated the population of Europe during the Middle Ages. They will learn the basics of dome construction and why it impacted the architectural designs of the churches throughout this time period. In language arts class, the students will study castles, knights in shining armor, chivalry, stained glass, calligraphy, medical practices, educational opportunities, clothing, crime, punishment, and entertainment of the Middle Ages. They will cook medieval recipes, listen to medieval music, and speak and write in Middle English.

Students will tour two of Erie's most historic and architecturally different churches, St. Patrick's and St. Peter's Cathedral. The unit will culminate with an authentic medieval feast.

6th Graders Show Christmas Spirit

The "Caring Tree" and "6th Grade Craft Sale" were two projects that filled the WAMS students with the Christmas spirit this holiday season!

Student Council sponsored the Caring Tree activity in which homerooms collected monetary donations to purchase gift cards for various stores. The gift cards were distributed to families in the district during the week of December 20th. The total amount collected from this project was \$710.00!

Meanwhile, sixth grade students and reading teachers, Mr. Jim Logan, Mrs. Darlene McNulty and Mrs. Sharon Szymanski, created handmade crafts as a culmination of their interdisciplinary unit on advertising. They held a Christmas Craft Fair for the entire school.

The sixth grade students also held a raffle of gift baskets, donated by the Wattsburg Area Middle School Action Group (WAMSAG). Winners of the baskets were Mandi Milani, Doug Baker, Brian Johnson, and Adam Rossi. The total profits from both the craft fair and raffle was \$852.05.

Many families in our district were aided by the generosity of the Wattsburg Area Middle School students and staff.

Flat Stanley Tours America

Wouldn't it be wonderful to learn American geography by traveling to every state in our country? Well, Mrs. Ward's 5th grade Social Studies classes have been doing the next best thing. Due to the budget constraints of a field trip across America, we have sent a rather flat representative to do the work for us. In the original book by Jeff Brown, a young boy named Stanley is flattened in his sleep by a falling bulletin board. One of the advantages to being flat is that his parents can put him in a large envelope and mail him for visits throughout the country. In our project, we have mailed our own Flat Stanley to every state in America. Since November, Flat Stanley has been returning to our classroom with information about his adventures throughout the United States.

This year, Flat Stanley has been visiting our family and friends, state governors, and a fifth grade class in Virginia. Some of Flat Stanley's adventures over the past few months have included a helicopter ride over Louisiana,

visiting three national parks, admiring the glaciers in Alaska, and cheering for the Pittsburgh Steelers at a football game in Jacksonville. He has also been able to visit George Washington's childhood home, enjoy Cajun cooking in New Orleans, rebuild homes destroyed by recent hurricanes in Florida, and take in the view from the Seattle Space Needle.

We have received many enlightening letters that included information such as climate, landforms, population, and state symbols. We have also been able to see what many states look like through pictures, brochures, and maps. The students are thrilled to receive their personal letters and share their information with the class. Flat Stanley is helping us all to learn more about our great nation in an exciting manner.



Erie County Fair Princess, 2004

Katie Bobrowicz, 6th grader at Wattsburg Area Middle School, is the 11 year-old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Bobrowicz. Competing at the 120th Erie County Fair, Katie was voted most photogenic, and received the title of Erie County Fair Princess, 2004. Katie enjoys participating in school musicals and chorus. In her leisure time, she dances at the Dance Company where she began dancing at age 2 1/2. Katie has been a member of the Dance Company's competition team for 7 years. Katie looks forward to her year as Erie County Fair Princess by participating in local parades and by making appearances where she can promote her community.



*Katie Bobrowicz
Erie County Fair Princess, 2004*

Middle School Student Makes the Big Time!

Congratulations to Courtney Hunt, a fifth grader in Mrs. Ward's class. The International Library of Poetry has selected one of Courtney's poems for semifinalist status in their International Open Poetry Contest. Courtney's poem, "If I Had Three Wishes," will be published in a hard-bound volume.

Again, congratulations, Courtney!



*Courtney Hunt
"If I Had Three Wishes"*

If I had Three Wishes

If I had three wishes, what would I wish for?

I would wish for some wings then I'd fly out the door.

My second wish would be to grow big or shrink small, I'd be the best at hide-and-seek, I'd be the fastest of them all!

My third wish would be just to be the way I am, I would not like to be a boy, or have my name change to Albert or Sam.

If I had three wishes this is what I would be wishing for, If I had three wishes I'd wish nothing more.

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Middle School Students Learn About Hockey

On January 17, 2005, seventh and eighth grade middle school students had the opportunity to meet several members of the Mercyhurst College men's and women's hockey teams. The visit was arranged by Wattsburg Area Middle School teacher, Mr. Ron Gibbons, who is an avid hockey player, himself. During the first part of the assembly, middle school students were selected to participate in an exciting game of ball hockey with the college players while the other students watched the stirring competition. At the conclusion of the hockey match, the students listened to the players talk about what it takes to be a college level athlete. The hockey players also entertained questions from the students.



Mr. Gibbons poses with members of the Mercyhurst College Hockey Team

Sports Day Turns 20 Years Old!

This winter marks the 20th anniversary of Wattsburg Area Middle School Students heading out into the greater Erie area to embark on "Sports Day." This is also the 20th time that middle school physical education teacher, Mr. Curt Spicher, will organize the event. During a recent interview, Mr. Spicher recalled how Sports Day began. He explained that the original idea started with a proposal to take physical education classes cross country skiing at Wilderness Lodge. During the planning for this field trip, students suggested that they should also go downhill skiing. From there, Mr. Spicher and former physical education teacher, Mrs. Donna Kennedy, expanded the field trip idea to involve the entire middle school. Their main goal was to involve as many students as possible in physical activities. They also thought that taking a healthy break in the middle of the winter would improve students' focus and the school atmosphere.

Mr. Spicher commented that one of the most popular destinations of students on Sports Day is Peek 'n Peak where the students can spend the entire day skiing, snowboarding, and tubing. He mentioned that he has seen a shift in the popularity of downhill activities away from skiing in favor of snowboarding and tubing. Bowling, roller skating and ice skating are also extremely popular with the students. When asked what the impact of sports day has been over 20 years, Mr. Spicher said, "It has been very successful in encouraging lifelong wellness activities for faculty and students." He also noted that the success of the event each year would not be possible without the hard work of the entire faculty.



WAMS Bobcat Bullet: In 2004, 74% of 8th grade middle school students exceeded the State Standard for Reading proficiency!

Elementary School PTO

The PTO continues to be extremely supportive of the elementary center's teachers and students. At the beginning of the school year, the PTO gave each teacher a \$150 allowance to purchase extra supplies and teaching materials. During the fall, the PTO also supplied tables, tape recorders, and headsets to support the children's language arts instruction. The PTO purchased a spectacular ten-foot tall artificial Christmas tree, which graced the elementary center's main entrance during this holiday season, and also helped to sponsor holiday parties. The Wattsburg Area Elementary Center is very fortunate to have a supportive PTO which provides these and many other benefits to the children and teachers of the elementary center. In turn, we are lucky to have such strong community support for all of the PTO's fundraising events.

*It is not true that we have only one life to live;
if we can read, we can live as many more lives
and as many kinds of lives as we wish.*

—S.I. Hayakawa (1906-1992)

Elementary Excitement



Justin Sommers demonstrates electricity at the 4th Grade Science Fair



Jordan Hewell, Katie Kern, and Erica McCandless offer homemade goodies from Colonial days

Science Fair

Fourth graders held their annual science fair in the halls of Wattsburg Area Elementary Center on Wednesday, January 19, 2005. Each fourth grader completed a science project based on one component of the fourth grade science curriculum. Parents, students, teachers, and community members circulated among the children and their displays as the fourth graders shared what they learned. Children demonstrated their learning in a variety of ways. All children were required to write a report about their project. Some children created display boards with texts and illustrations, while others shared models and experiments. The children incorporated math skills by creating bar graphs and line graphs to depict the results of their experiments.



WAEBC Bobcat Bullet: *The Elementary Center's 4th grade class continues to receive notes of thanks and appreciation from soldiers in Iraq who enjoyed the care packages that the 4th graders sent in December.*

A Day at School 1873

The students in Mr. Pearce's 4th grade class have recently celebrated a museum opening for their exhibit titled, "A Day at School 1873." The exhibit is housed in the Erie County History Center, located at 417 State Street in downtown Erie. The project tells the story, using written paragraphs, photos, drawings and period artifacts, of what a typical day at school was like in the latter part of the 19th century. The display also features several "hands-on" components. The idea for the project actually began last year, when members of the Erie History Museum attended another student project, "The Lewis and Clark Exhibit", here at the Elementary Center. The quality of our students' work made such an impression on the museum staff, that they wanted to collaborate on a project with our students. The research and construction of this recent project began in October and installation at the History Center took place in December. The opening was hosted by the Erie County History Center on Saturday, February 26th, and was attended by parents and friends of the Elementary Center, as well as local dignitaries and the local media.

The next big project for this group of students is an exhibit reflecting the History of Coal Mining in Pennsylvania. They hope to have all the work for this project done and the exhibit ready to welcome visitors sometime in April. This event will take place here on the WASD campus.

Wattsburg Area School District 2004-05 Second Semester Calendar

Wattsburg Area Elementary Center	
March	8 PTO Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 17 Kindergarten Registration 12:45 - 5:15 p.m. 18 Kindergarten Registration 9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. 19 Family Fun Day 24 Spring Celebration, 2:30-3:00 p.m. 25 Easter Vacation 28 Easter Vacation or Snow Makeup Day
April	4-8 PSSA and Achievement Testing 5 End of 3rd Grading Period 12 PTO Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 14 Parent/Teacher Conferences Early Dismissal, 11:30 a.m. 15 Parent/Teacher Conferences No School for Students 22 Vacation Day or Snow Makeup Day
May	4-6 Mother's Day Sale 10 PTO Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 30 Memorial Day Holiday
June	3 Kids Fun Day 9 Last Day of School for Students

Wattsburg Area Middle School	
March	1 WAMSAG Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 10 End of 4th Grading Period 25 Easter Vacation 28 Easter Vacation or Snow Makeup Day
April	4-15 PSSA and Terra Nova Testing 5 WAMSAG Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 13 6th Grade Science Expo 13 5th & 8th Grade Art Show, 6:00 p.m. 14 Act 80 Day, Early Dismissal, 1:00 p.m. 15 Act 80 Day, No School for Students 22 Vacation Day or Snow Makeup Day 27 End of 5th Grading Period 29 8th Grade Spring Fling, 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.
May	3 WAMSAG Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 13-15 8th Grade Trip to Gettysburg and Harrisburg 17 Tentative Spring Chorus Concert 19 Tentative Spring Band Concert 24 5th & 7th Grade Honors Program, 6:30 26 7th & 8th Grade Honors Program, 6:30 30 Memorial Day Holiday
June	7 WAMSAG Meeting, 7:00 p.m. 9 Last Day of School for Students

Seneca High School	
March	1 Music Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 4, 5 Jekyll and Hyde Musical 9 Sports Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 11, 12 Jekyll and Hyde Musical 15 Winter Sports Awards (at WAEC) 25 Easter Vacation 28 Easter Vacation or Snow Makeup Day
April	4-15 PSSA Testing 5 End of 3rd Grading Period 5 Music Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 13 Sports Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 14 Act 80 Day, Early Dismissal, 1:00 p.m. 15 Act 80 Day, No School for Students 22 Vacation Day or Snow Makeup Day
May	3 Music Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 7 Prom at Zem Zem Mosque 11 Sports Boosters Meeting, 7:30 p.m. 20 Spring Concert, 7:00 p.m. (at WAEC) 30 Memorial Day Holiday
June	9 Graduation 9 Last Day of School for Students

The Chalkboard

A Publication of
Wattsburg Area School District
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A Family Valentine Breakfast

Red hearts adorned the walls with pink flowers as centerpieces as the aroma of hot buttermilk pancakes and warm maple syrup and country sausage poured out of the kitchen of the Elementary Center. Three hundred fifty-five students and



family members filled the cafeteria for our first Valentine Breakfast. Everybody came in out of the cold to start the week off with a warm, friendly breakfast served by Ms. Kristen English and her cafeteria staff who were all dressed in red for Valentine's Day. Parents had the opportunity to share a hot breakfast with their children before sending them off to a day of educational inspiration, and the children savored precious extra minutes so often forgotten so early in the morning. When all was said and done, all that echoed the cafeteria was, "When can we do this again?"

Valentine Breakfast at the Elementary Center