

# **LYME SCHOOL DISTRICT**



## **NARRATIVE REPORTS 2009**

## **Lyme School Board Report 2009**

It seems it was only a few years ago that people were concerned that Lyme's student population was contracting and would continue to decline. Statistics said the town was "graying" and people believed we would be seeing fewer families with school aged kids due to limited housing stock and buildable land.

So far this year, that wisdom seems to have been turned on its ear. Local realtors tell us that compared with the rest of the Upper Valley, Lyme is an active market, especially desirable for young families. As a result, this year the Lyme School and High School populations have been much more volatile with 15 new names appearing during the year, in addition to the 19 new kindergarteners we were expecting. Not only that, but it at more than one point this past year it appeared that every new family who moved to town brought with it new students into the very classrooms that were already bursting at the seams.

Currently it appears that Lyme and Hanover are seeing net increases in student populations, while most surrounding communities are seeing gradually dwindling numbers. Unlike Vermont, New Hampshire public schools do not receive additional state funding when student population increases.

How has the Lyme School (and our school budget) been able to handle these additions over the course of this school year? At the Lyme School the most important factor has been the creativity, resourcefulness, and skill of our teachers, administrators, and support staff. With a little extra time here, and a little extra help there, great teachers like Nancy Fleming and Steven Dayno have been able to rise to the challenge of classes larger than recommended limits, while Principal Jeff Valence has been able to shuffle resources and work closely with teachers to support student progress. We also have a healthy high school reserve fund, which enables us to cover unexpected high school tuitions as well as smooth out tax increases in years when we have more than the traditional average number of tuitions to pay. Nonetheless, our margin for handling unexpected influxes of students is becoming thinner and thinner.

By comparison, the Lyme school district finished the 2008-2009 school year with a larger than anticipated surplus in the budget – primarily due to a reprieve from some significant special education costs and a need to pay less high school tuitions than expected. This surplus went directly to reducing taxes in a year that had been challenging financially for many in town. As a result the school tax rate dropped to its lowest level in four years. For 2010-2011, even a level funded budget would likely require some tax increase to make up for that "rebate." For that reason we have proposed a very tight budget for 2010-2011, one that will allow us to handle the specific number of students we currently anticipate for the school year. But the budget is not equipped to handle another surprise population increase.

Recently, some people have questioned why the school budget frequently ends up with a surplus. They ask, "Doesn't that mean there was too much money in the budget?" The answer to that is No: sometimes things break the right way, which enables us to return money to taxpayers, as well as contribute to reserve funds to handle future bumps in the road, or sometimes do both. More importantly, since New Hampshire law prevents the school from operating with a deficit budget, in a year like the current one we freeze expenditures to ensure that we have enough in reserve to handle any surprises. Our superintendant Gordon Schnare once joked, "We're thrifty Yankees, I think we'll always have a surplus, no matter how many pennies we have to pinch," but the truism behind this is if we have doubts about our ability to finish the year with enough money, we curtail spending to ensure that we don't spend beyond our resources.

While fiscal responsibility is a necessity, we also remain dedicated to improving the education of Lyme students. Four years ago when the School Board hired Jeff Valence as the new Principal, he was charged with taking the helm of a great school and making it even better. The School Board believed that if we wanted to challenge our kids to be prepared for an ever-changing world, we needed a school that evolved to meet those challenges. We continue to succeed in meeting this challenge, but we cannot do it without your help. Federal and state laws mandate a number of our expenditures, and we cannot continue to succeed if we whittle away, bit by bit, the pieces of the budget that are not state or federal mandates. Today we have a school that our entire community can be very proud of and students whose ability to impact the world for decades to come will be a testament to the trust you put in them. Thank you for your continued support, it truly takes a community to raise, and educate, a child.



# The Lyme School

Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Serving the community of Lyme, New Hampshire for over 100 years  
(603) 795 - 2125 • MAIN STREET, LYME, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03768

## Lyme School Principal's Report 2009–2010

If you have followed the education debate in the United States you will be familiar with how important education is to national security, as well as how difficult it can be to establish highly effective schools. Considering the lengths towns, states, and cities across the United States have gone to establish schools like this in their municipalities, we can be proud that once again the Lyme School has been recognized as one of the highest performing schools in New Hampshire. In order that we can continue to uphold our responsibility to our students and their future (arguably ours as well) the school identified several strategic efforts to support programs while decreasing costs. The success of three of these efforts, all of which will result in taxpayer savings, has been largely due to the generosity of concerned community members, in cooperation with the efforts of school members.

1) **Decrease the operation costs of our physical plant.** This past spring American Capital Energy, one of the largest installers of solar arrays in the United States, donated a \$100,000, 15-kilowatt solar array, which, as we speak, is producing electrical power for the school and will continually do so for the next 30 to 50 years, saving the school thousands of dollars annually, and tens of thousands over its lifetime. This donation is a result of the fact that the company's CEO, Tom Hunton, parent of three Lyme School students, saw the educational benefits both in what students can learn about alternative power and the benefits that can be realized with the monies saved.

2) **Reduce the cost of our hot lunch program.** Nearly all public school lunch programs operate at a deficit. Four years ago, the Lyme School's hot lunch program deficit was \$20,000 and is now down to \$5,500. When family finances are tight, their ability to purchase school lunch can become tenuous, increasing the chance that their child will go without a hot lunch. Fortunately, this year, \$8,000 in private donations were used to sponsor families in our school in order that they could participate in the hot lunch program, a benefit to families, to the lunch program, and to taxpayers because it maintains a high level of participation which keeps the overall deficit low. In addition to financial assistance, members of the community have been working hard to incorporate a "local farm to school" program which utilizes local produce in lieu of produce that is purchased out of state, resulting in fresher, healthier and more economical options on the lunch menu.

3) **Improve the instructional program at no cost to the taxpayer.** In both of the last two five-year strategic plans, parents and the school board identified language instruction in the primary grades as a critical priority in order that students be prepared to compete as adults in the global market. Numerous studies support this priority and emphasize the importance of language learning during early elementary years—a critical neurological development period for language acquisition. This year, as a result of the efforts of many people, the school was awarded a three-year grant to fully fund a Spanish program in the primary grades. Over the course of these three years, money will be raised to continue to support the total cost of the program in subsequent years.

As significant as these acts are, it is the details—those discrete and almost unnoticed acts that happen each day—that are the foundation of successful schools. It is difficult to convey the significance that results from having a staff comprised of professionals who care so deeply for students, who have experience that has formed their practice such that students learn increasingly complex tasks and concepts effectively and efficiently, to have a school small enough that I can know each student and large enough to provide a rich educational experience.

As a school we have been devoting significant time and effort over the last four years to examining **what** we teach and **how** we teach it. We are working to align our curriculum to national performance standards in order that our instruction can be as prescriptive and effective as possible. Additionally, we are working to articulate the developmental sequence of instruction in order that progress can be demonstrated incrementally as students progress from kindergarten to the eighth grade. In terms of "how we teach" we have been working in two areas simultaneously: within the academic arena, to incorporate current best practices of teaching, and within the physiological area, ensuring that our instructional practices address what the science community is telling us about brain development as well as social/emotional development in children.

As important as techniques and organization of instruction are, ensuring that students, teachers, and parents maintain collaborative and positive relationships is equally as important. To that end we continue to work to maintain an open, understanding, and communicative school culture. Likely the best way to see why the Lyme School has such a strong reputation is to come and visit; our students and school members will make you feel welcome.

Respectfully Submitted,

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*"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children."* —John Dewey

## REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL THETFORD ACADEMY 2010

It's an exciting year at the Academy, as all kinds of transformations are underway. We have ambitious new goals for educating our students along with improving our campus facilities. After years of planning and preparation, our projects are in motion: we're building a new curriculum at the same time we're constructing new spaces for learning.

**Academics:** Changes in teaching and learning have established higher levels of challenge for all students. The new ninth-grade, our Class of 2013, is the first group expected to meet new standards for high school graduation, and they're doing well so far. As predicted, students entering this year from the Lyme School have arrived well prepared to take up the challenge with classmates who began learning the new system last year at TA. There are two main elements of this program:

- **New Graduation Standards:** The Thetford Academy Graduation Standards ("TAGS") require all students to master vital skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Through a series of projects, tests, and other assessments as they advance through the years, students must demonstrate proficiency in skills essential to lifelong learning: writing, reading, inquiry, expression, reasoning and problem solving. Our standards also expect students to show an active commitment to community service and citizenship, and to develop responsibility and reflection in their work habits. Results from first semester are encouraging: students are showing a higher level of performance and commitment, especially to the process of revising to achieve their best work.
- **Personal Learning Plans:** All students are developing Personal Learning Plans ("PLPs") this year, under the guidance of their teacher advisors. The purpose is for students to take charge of their own education as they set annual goals, identify strengths and needs, and reflect on their progress. The plans take a different form each year as students advance, leading to a senior plan that helps graduates leave high school with a clear vision for their future.

**Leadership Transition:** In order to support these initiatives, the Board of Trustees has approved a plan to modify my retirement schedule. Rather than retiring this coming June as originally planned, I'll continue in a part-time role through June 2012. For the next two years, I'll be part of a transitional leadership team with current Assistant Head David McGinn serving as Head of School. I will focus on continuing curriculum design and faculty development, as well as development and admissions. We'll also continue building our strong team of teacher leaders, who work collaboratively with us in administration to support positive change. This group will assist with the transition to a new Head of School in July 2012.

**Building Project:** By mid-June last year, our long-planned project was "shovel-ready" at last. As soon as school was out, we held a groundbreaking celebration. The big machines rolled in the next day and the work has been steady ever since. You can view photographs of the progress at <http://www.thetfordacademy.org/about/projects>. We

expect to move into some of our new classrooms this spring, and the whole project should be complete by the time school opens next fall. At that point, we will celebrate the following:

- A fully renovated science building with modernized labs, expanded classroom space, and new greenhouse.
- Expanded performing arts space, with a new 220-seat theater and scene shop
- Renovated space for a cafeteria and student center, along with improved facilities for food service to allow expansion of our Farm to School “localvore” program
- A new gymnasium, fitness room, locker rooms, and physical education facilities

The financial plan behind the building project has remained sound. The project cost is estimated at \$8.5 million with 30% of this amount to be raised from non-tuition- based resources. Generous lead donors—our First Hundred—have already given more than half the fundraising goal. This winter we will move to the next phase, inviting broad involvement in our capital campaign from community members, alumni, parents, friends.

**Budget:** The Academy’s budget for the coming year shows an 8.1% reduction in total operating expense, including new construction debt service, with spending reduced \$464,946. Personnel reductions will account for most of budget cuts, as a projected lower enrollment will mean a need for fewer positions; as student numbers are expected to decline by 9.5%, with a smaller middle school population entering from Thetford, staffing will be reduced by about 10%. The current curriculum will be preserved without loss of programs, however, as we plan to reduce multiple sections of courses rather than eliminate course offerings. The tuition rate will increase 4.5%, to \$16,960, reflecting a greater projected decline in tuition revenue than in operating expense. The primary cause is a higher proportion of students choosing technical programs, since a portion of their tuition goes to Technical Centers. Our students have access to two excellent Centers, River Bend in Bradford and the Hartford Area Center, as well as distance learning opportunities with the Springfield River Valley Center.

**Partnership:** We continue to value the Academy’s partnership agreement with the Town School District of Lyme, guaranteeing admission to all Lyme students who choose our school in ninth grade. We continue to find them well equipped with academic skills and ready to learn. We hope to work with Lyme School teachers to give eighth-graders more orientation to our standards, so those who enter in the future can have an even better start. Students who come next fall will be the first to benefit from our newly renovated campus along with well-established programs for personalized, challenging learning. We look forward to their achievements. With 94% of this year’s senior class planning to attend college and early-decision candidates achieving their admission goals, we have high hopes for our graduates’ success. We’re encouraged by the statement from a visiting Penn State professor: “I was so impressed with your school, the faculty, and the students. Thetford Academy is a rare treasure.... Any college or university will be lucky to have any of your students.”

Martha Jane Rich  
Head of School