

BIG HOLLOW SCHOOL DISTRICT #38

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OPEN LETTER TO BIG HOLLOW PARENTS

FROM: RON PAZANIN, SUPERINTENDENT

The end of the first grading period, along with publication of the annual State-mandated school report cards, provides an opportunity to review our District's situation. Regrettably, as the newspapers' reports illustrated, Big Hollow does not compare favorably with the other Lake County school districts serving students in grades 1-8 or among all school districts located in suburban Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will Counties.

CLASS SIZE. Big Hollow had the **LARGEST AVERAGE CLASS SIZE** in Lake County with 28.2 students per class. For the present school year, average class size (grades 1-8) is even higher at 28.7. It should be noted that current class sizes in grades 3 and 5 average more than 29 students per section and grades 4 and 6 average more than 30 students per section. Eighth grade has the lowest average with 26.6.

INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENDITURE PER STUDENT. Big Hollow has the **SMALLEST INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENDITURE PER STUDENT** in Lake County, of \$3,654.

AVERAGE SPENDING PER PUPIL. In the six-county area, which has 287 school districts, Big Hollow ranks 269th at \$7,103.

Thus, Big Hollow is identified as having the largest average class size in Lake County and the lowest instructional expenditure per student in Lake County, and is in the bottom 6% of average spending per pupil in the six-county region.

During the past four years, Big Hollow has had to utilize tax anticipation warrants to pay operational expenditures; \$3 million has been budgeted for this school year. School District critics might say there are too many teachers--but the large class sizes dispute that assertion. Next, the critics will cite high salaries, but yesterday's reports identified both Big Hollow teacher and administrator salaries as ranking 254th among the 287 school districts located in the six-county region.

Which raises the question: if the operational expenditures need to be funded with supplemental tax anticipation warrants, and the personnel costs are quite low in comparison with the six-county region, just what are the school district's operational expenditures that exceed local/state/federal funding revenues? Per Big Hollow's 2006-07 school year audit, the following operational items experienced large revenue-to-expenditure deficits:

ITEM	REVENUE	EXPENDITURES
Special Education	\$307,536	\$2,488,463
Operations & Maintenance	\$172,988	\$1,178,340
Regular & Special Ed Transportation	\$1,343,986	\$1,456,766

Finally, the critics will contend that Big Hollow has one of the highest elementary school district property tax rates in Lake County. A review of total tax rates among 29 Lake County elementary school districts does show that nine districts do have lower total rates than Big Hollow. But by examining a bit further, critics would discover that our total tax rate of \$2.424 includes 0.629 designated for building bonds and the legislatively-mandated SEDOL IMRF. Consequently, the OPERATIONAL TAX RATE for Big Hollow is actually \$1.795.

There are only two Lake County school districts with lower OPERATIONAL TAX RATES -- Lake Forest and Rondout.

The financial facts are obvious -- current and future operational expenditures will require revenue that exceeds the School District's current tax rates and local/state/federal funding. Is it realistic to expect operational costs to decrease? Will student enrollments remain identical or decrease? Will heating and electrical bills go down? Just look at your home utility bills (and the School District's utility bills are for over 280,000 square feet). What about transportation costs -- what does it cost to put gas in your car? There are no alternatives to providing mandated State and federal programs such as special education -- and the newly required RTI (Response To Intervention) programming must be implemented by the beginning of the 2010-11 school year. How many students should be in a classroom -- 25, 30, 35, more? How do you define a "quality" academic program? What is the value of "quality" personnel? Is there a correlation between home values and a "quality" school district?

Yes, we are sensitive to current economic factors. But the truth is that Illinois government continues to over-mandate and underfund school district operations. When will our elected state officials find the backbone to address and revise the current system of funding public education and shift the major revenue source away from the local property owner? But the funding argument has no short-term resolution and Big Hollow's 1,500 students need to receive an appropriate education today, next month and in future years. Our needs are obvious and the means to meet those needs is also obvious. Our reliance is on our taxpayers. Do we maintain the financial status quo of using tax anticipation warrants -- until we meet our legal limit? Do we continue our slide into larger class sizes and unfavorable comparisons with other school districts? Will the residents support increased local revenue? Or is the time quickly approaching for a Big Hollow School District "sunset" and reorganization? We don't know what the future hold for the district -- but we look to the community for support.