

## WF BOE Submits \$82.6-Million Budget to County Superintendent

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield Board of Education's proposed and tentative, general fund budget for 2008-2009 is \$82,554,576, as presented by Superintendent Margaret Dolan and Business Administrator Robert Berman during the board's final budget meeting before its deadline of this Friday to submit paperwork to the Union County superintendent of schools, a state official.

Last year's budget was \$82.7 million of which \$71.1 million was raised

through local property taxes. The grand total budget, when debt service and special education is calculated, is \$87.4 million.

"This is not the published budget," board vice president Julia Walker said.

Board member Anne Riegel told *The Westfield Leader*, "This is not what we'll ask the public to vote on."

The board will continue to rework the budget over the next few weeks, even while it's in state hands.

The BOE is also seeking adjustments from the state. They include: \$466,448 for costs of opening a new

school; \$488,200 in pension costs; and \$973,889 in non-recurring revenue.

Ms. Dolan said the national average of state aid is 44 percent, where Westfield only received 6 percent, or \$99,000 on its \$78 million 2007-2008 budget.

She said this is just one of the three challenges that the board of education is facing this year. The state has also obligated the BOE to pay towards pension costs and it decreased the reserve balance to a maximum of 2 percent of the total budget.

State pension costs for 2008-2009 total \$828,200, a difference of \$488,200, from last year, the superintendent said.

"This is what hits us quite a bit," said Ms. Dolan.

The school system's reserves for 2008-2009 total \$1,101,490, a little over half of last year's reserve. The reserve is similar to a savings account.

"We had to pay out to tax relief [last year]. Now we don't have it to use against taxes this year," said Ms. Riegel.

She said three years ago reserves could not exceed 6 percent, than last year it was 3 percent, and this year it is down to 2 percent.

"It creates a challenge," said Ms. Dolan.

The board has made efforts to control costs over last year, she said. Energy costs are flat; it limited the increase of health insurance by changing carriers; last week it settled contract negotiations with the Westfield Education Association (WEA), agreeing to an increase below county and state averages; school and department budgets were kept level or below; and there was no change in staffing from last year.

"Even with all of those cost containments, it's been a tough year for our budget," Superintendent Dolan said.

Board officials said about 70 percent of the budget is from salaries.

An advertised budget is expected

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Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

CRIME STOPPER...Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow, right, discusses how his office combats crime with publisher Horace Corbin at *The Leader/Times* office last Friday. The interview can be seen on the Internet at [goleader.com/video](http://goleader.com/video).

## Cty. Prosecutor Romankow Discusses Gangs and Drugs

By HORACE R. CORBIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow, when asked if law enforcement is winning the war on drugs, said, "No." But, he said, police will keep pressing.

He said gangs are in every town in Union County — whether residents want to acknowledge it or not. The first part of the battle was to get the towns and their police departments to recognize their existence. Gangs need money, and to get money, they sell drugs, buy guns and commit violent crime.

Mr. Romankow met with publisher Horace Corbin in the office of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* on Friday, February 8, to discuss initiatives of the prosecutor's office for the coming year. The video of the interview can be seen on the Internet at [goleader.com](http://goleader.com).

Mr. Romankow was reappointed in December to a second, five-year term by Governor Jon Corzine, with the support of State Senators Ray Lesniak (LD-20, Elizabeth) and Nicholas Scutari (LD-22, Linden), of the majority party, along with the concurrence of Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield) from the minority party. He said this provides him with broad-based support, and he keeps in touch with the leaders on a frequent basis.

In New Jersey, the county prosecutor is the "top cop." Each of the 21 counties has a prosecutor who reports to the attorney general, currently Ann Milligram. The Union County prosecutor oversees all police departments in the county, including the sheriff's office, Union County police and police at Kean University.

Mr. Romankow's office determines policing policy and provides oversight but seldom becomes involved in day-to-day operations; although, if necessary, he could take over a police department. Mr. Romankow said he prefers to consider his office as a law office rather than an investigative operation; although, his staff frequently debates this role.

It is best for the police departments to be empowered with the investigative and on-the-beat responsibilities, he said.

The Union County prosecutor's office, which houses 260 employees, handles 5,000 to 7,000 cases a year, excluding juvenile cases. It serves an important role in plea-bargaining to resolve cases; otherwise, the court system would be jammed, he said. Other cases are sent to the grand jury; if the grand jury indicts, then they are prosecuted in superior court in Elizabeth, which is part of the state court system.

Fighting street gangs, drugs and crime are major parts of Mr. Romankow's office's activities. He said his office prefers to attempt to stop the distribution of drugs at the source, what he feels is the most effective approach, rather than only pursuing the "street urchins."

Mr. Romankow said he would visit the attorney general in Columbia in March to enhance cooperation in fighting the influx of drugs.

Union County is home to more than 1,900 gang members. Roughly 1,600 live here; some are in jail, and others have left the state.

In the fight against gangs, information is gathered and put in a database. He said gangs are "proud" of their indicators — specific colors, body markings, scars or clothing — and University.

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SWINE FLEW...At the "Pigs Will Fly" rally in Trenton last Friday, Sen. Tom Kean of Westfield speaks to the crowd in opposition to Governor Jon Corzine's controversial financial restructuring plan.



David Samsky for The Westfield Leader

SEEKING THE BEST FOR HIS SWEETHEART...Joel Yudkovitz from Westfield sorts through many options in making his Valentine's Day selection for his sweetheart at Baron's Drug Store in Westfield on Sunday afternoon.

## O'Malley Resigns at Mountainside; Takes Aberdeen School Supt. Job

By MARIA WOEHR  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Chief Administrator of Mountainside Board of Education, Richard O'Malley, announced his resignation at Tuesday night's BOE meeting.

Mr. O'Malley will leave the district in June to take a position as the superintendent of schools for the Matawan-Aberdeen Board of Education. He will begin serving the Matawan-Aberdeen district this Tuesday on a part-time basis through May.

According to an *Asbury Park Press* article on Tuesday, Mr. O'Malley will be paid \$750 per month through May when he will be released from his

Mountainside contract, which runs through the year 2012. His yearly salary as Matawan-Aberdeen superintendent is \$173,000.

Mr. O'Malley was hired at \$130,000 per year as Mountainside CSA in March 2005. He replaced Gerard Schaller, who resigned.

Matawan-Aberdeen is a kindergarten to grade 12 regional district, with a high school, middle school, four elemen-

tary schools and a pre-school. "I am going to miss him a lot. He did a lot for this school district," Scot Worswick, BOE member, told *The Westfield Leader*.

Board member Raymond Haggard added that, "I think he has done a great service to the district and I understand his reason for leaving us."

*The Asbury Park Press* reported that the Matawan-Aberdeen board voted 6-3 Monday night to hire Mr. O'Malley. Three board members voted against the appointment, ob-

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Richard O'Malley

## WF-BOA Rejects Two Fence Variance Requests

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Adjustment denied two of three fence variances sought by homeowners during its Monday night meeting.

Janet Smith of 202 West Dudley Avenue was denied a reopening of her case from May 14, 2007, because the board deemed her application was not significantly different from her prior application for a variance. She built a non-conforming fence of six feet, two feet over the allowance for a corner lot's street side yard setback, and had wanted the board to grant a variance.

She continued to propose a six-foot fence, though this time she proposed a graduated incline from four to six feet, due to topographical sloping, thereby making the top level.

Stan Paylago of 516 Hillcrest Avenue was denied a variance to build an eight-foot fence at his rear property line, as the board saw no hardship to the applicant.

This fence would replace an existing, deteriorating six-foot fence, and the maximum height allowable for a rear yard. Mr. Paylago said his hardship was due to the situation of his property being next to a parking a lot and also North Avenue.

"My hardships are to minimize garbage and debris from coming over

the fence and a safety issue of glass coming over the fence," he said.

The board thought an extra two feet would not help the predicament.

The board also thought that the widening of gaps between the fence boards due to aging have caused some of the debris to come through the fence and not over the top, and that replacing it with a conforming height fence that had tightly-knit boards would solve most of the applicant's problems.

The board did approve a standing, non-conforming fence for property owned by Michael and Marcie Yates at 266 Kimball Avenue, an historic district.

The fence was part of a renovation completed in 2004. The design of the fence changed from the original plans. However, the town's historic preservation commission was charged with approving many of the design plans given the historical nature of the property and neighborhood. The commission approved the fence, though it didn't comment on the height, only its appearance, according to Mr. Yates.

The open-design of the fence is styled with a repeated column arrangement, where the fencing in between the piers varies in height from four feet, six inches to four feet, 10 inches, where four feet is the maximum allowed. The posts also exceed

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Christina Hinke for The Westfield Leader

FENCING IN...The Westfield Board of Adjustment was strict on granting variances Monday night, but Michael Yates was permitted to keep his non-conforming fence built on historic property on Kimball Avenue. Neighbor Thomas Nobile, left, speaks on Mr. Yates' behalf.

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