



# THE BRIDGE

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Issue 2

Serving the students of the Bellbrook-Sugarcreek communities since 1976

BHS Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) teacher, Blake Barnes, inspires STEM learning in the classroom through inquiry and project-based activities.

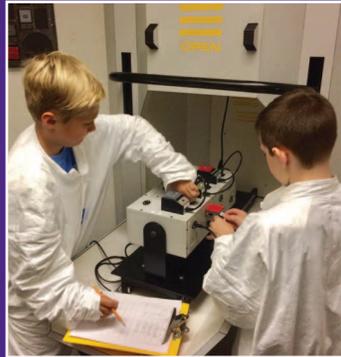


## INSIDE

Message from the Superintendent

District Funding is a Big Challenge

District Adds Two New Board Members



Audit Strikes at Core of our Schools

Social Justice and Community Service

Stephen Bell Students Raise \$ for Habitat for Humanity



Our Mission...Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools empowers our learning community to: Be responsible decision-makers and effective problem-solvers; Persevere in the achievement of life goals; Contribute to communities locally and beyond; and Embrace learning as a lifelong process.



# SUPERINTENDENT

Dear District Residents,

I am proud each and every day of what is accomplished in our schools. Our school district has outstanding, dedicated teachers and staff who do an excellent job educating and supporting our children. The district is consistently recognized for this effort and ranked among the best locally and across the state. There is so much we have to offer, to provide all of our students a high-quality and well-rounded educational experience. For example, I don't take for granted the value gained from the opportunities our students are afforded--the 15 AP courses offered, or the 3,000 service hours given back to the community by our JROTC program, or the extracurricular activities in which 66% of our high school students and over 70% of our 7th and 8th graders are involved. On a recent visit to Stephen Bell, I was truly impressed witnessing students in a first grade STEM class engaged in designing a prosthetic beak for an eagle utilizing 3D print technology. We have to remember that these are the types of experiences – experiences that we want to continue to offer – that help form productive and successful leaders of the future.

But Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools is at a critical juncture, and the single most important issue facing our schools right now is our budget.

In December 2019, our Board of Education took the second of two necessary votes to place a 5.7-mill operating levy on the March 17, 2020, presidential primary ballot. This is due to the fact that our five-year forecast projects a \$1.8 million deficit in the 2021-22 school year. The district has already made over \$2.3 million in budget reductions between summer 2018 and Phase I and II reductions in 2019, as a result of the levy failure in May 2019. These cuts included the reduction of 20 staff positions, half of which are teaching positions, in addition to a pay freeze for all employees in the 2020-21 school year. Over the years the district has seen inflationary increases that are outside its control, including unfunded and underfunded state mandates, in addition to an increase in the cost of doing business. District funding from the state has generally flatlined, with very few increases. Only 27% of our budget is funded by the state.



The district's five-year forecast in May 2019, along with the levy failure, triggered the Auditor of State's Ohio Performance Team (OPT), in consultation with the Ohio Department of Education, to work collaboratively with us to conduct a performance audit of the Bellbrook-Sugarcreek School District. The report has been released. Due to an already lean budget, the auditors found it very challenging to find many areas to reduce without striking at the core of our schools and forever changing the well-rounded and high-caliber educational experience that our students deserve and our community expects. These reduction recommendations total \$11.5 million.

These recommendations only focus on cutting expenditures and cannot take into account an increase in revenue or any additional under- or unfunded state mandates. Without additional funds these reductions will be devastating. Even if the March levy does pass, finances in the district are still very perilous. We will continue to keep expenses to a minimum, while constantly looking for ways to seek efficiencies.

To view the performance audit, go to the Ohio Auditor's website at <http://ohioauditor.gov/performance/Bellbrook-Sugarcreek-2019.html>



Due to the district's long-term financial situation, the district must implement reductions regardless of passage of the March 17 levy. These Phase III reductions will help to push off the need for a future levy for as long as possible.



The board also recently approved a list of Phase IV reductions that the district will have to make if the March 17 levy does not pass. The complete list of board-approved cuts are located on this page. Additionally, we plan on forming a community-based committee to look at the state's recommendations in the performance review to provide further input to our board of education.

We urge you to get the facts about Issue 9, the district's 5.7-mill levy on the March ballot. This levy will raise approximately \$3.3 million per year. Remember, a mill is not millions. To find more information about the levy, please visit [www.sugarcreek.k12.oh.us/levy.aspx](http://www.sugarcreek.k12.oh.us/levy.aspx) or email [info@bss.k12.oh.us](mailto:info@bss.k12.oh.us).

We are doing what we must to address our budget issues. Deciding on and making cuts is never easy, and these are never decisions that we take lightly. At the end of the day, any reductions hurt the overall experience that we provide to our residents and their children. But I continue to be proud of what is accomplished in our schools and hopeful about what the future has in store for Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools!

*Douglas A. Cogard*  
Superintendent

### **Phase III Reductions Will Occur Next Year**

Due to the district's long-term financial situation, the district must implement reductions regardless of passage of the March 17 levy. These Phase III reductions will help to push off the need for a future levy for as long as possible, will start in the 2020-21 school year and will total a cumulative \$747,083 over the next two years:

- \* Eliminate STEP (the gifted pull-out program) at BCI
- \* Eliminate world language offerings at BMS
- \* Eliminate 1 English position at BHS
- \* Increase sports participation fees from \$150 to \$200
- \* \$50 of marching band, color guard, winterguard, IPE fees will go to district budget
- \* Increase All-Day/Every-Day kindergarten tuition by \$900/yr
- \* 2 open positions (2nd grade, 3rd grade) filled by involuntary transfers
- \* No parking lot resurfacing or landscape mulch in summer 2020
- \* Delay purchase of Chromebooks for 1 year

### **Phase IV Reductions Will Occur if The March Ballot Issue Does Not Pass**

The board also approved a list of Phase IV reductions that the district will have to make if the March 17 levy does not pass, totaling a cumulative \$2,458,756 over the next 2 years:

- \* Increase participation fees to \$300 for BHS
- \* Eliminate busing for BHS
- \* Reduce transportation to the minimum two-mile state requirement for BMS and BCI
- \* Eliminate:
  - Art at SB & BCI
  - STEM at SB & BCI
  - Keyboarding at BMS
  - Art for 6th grade at BMS
  - 1 Social Studies, 1 English & 1 Science teacher at BHS
  - 2 librarian positions across the district
  - 85 paid supplementals for clubs, extra-curriculars, advisors and athletics across the district (Visit <http://www.sugarcreek.k12.oh.us/PressReleases.aspx> for a complete list.)
- \* Reduce district-wide staff development
- \* Delay curriculum adoptions in Math and Science
- \* Non-renew select electronic curriculum subscriptions
- \* Non-renew contract with our communications consultant, Allerton Hill

# Reasons Why Funding Our District is a Big Challenge

By Kevin Liming,  
Treasurer

## **\*We only receive 27% of our revenue from the state.**

The state average is 44%. We receive a lower amount because funding is in large part based upon district resident incomes and property values. The wealthier the state considers the residents, the lower the funding. There are only three major sources of income for Ohio schools: state funding, local property taxes and school district income taxes. That leaves property tax as the only viable option to increase revenue.

## **\*We are required to spend \$3,639,000 in 2018-19 for unfunded and underfunded state mandates.**

These include the district's cost for College Credit Plus, community schools, special education, gifted education, English Language Learner and preschool, just to name a few. We are required to fund these programs but do not receive funding equal to the costs.

## **\*The demographics of operating a school district our size in 2018-19.**

With 275 employees, we are the largest employer in the Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Township area. We educate 2,870 students; own and operate 29 school buses; serve 65,045 lunches in kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade (high school lunches are on an a la carte basis); and maintain six school buildings plus a transportation center. The cost to educate a Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools student is now over \$11,000. Although new construction and the Cornerstone Development have brought in additional monies - totaling about 2% of our budget - this is mostly offset by the increased costs of educating additional students and is already incorporated into the five-year forecast.

## District Welcomes Two New School Board Members

Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools is pleased to welcome Karen Long and Kevin Price to the board of education. The district also welcomes back David Carpenter, who was elected to the board for a second term.

Long and her husband, Kevin, have been married for nine years and have two young children attending school in the district. They have lived in Bellbrook since 2012, "moving here for the school system and a desire to live in a community with small-town hospitality."

Long has a master's degree in social work and helps children with autism at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, as a PLAY Project consultant. The PLAY Project is an intervention program that teaches parents effective ways to interact with their children.

She also served in the Peace Corps in Eastern Europe, which she said enabled her to help communities abroad tackle their most pressing challenges.

Long, whose term will expire at the end of 2023, said that her aspiration for the district is to "see our schools continue to be a high-quality, high-achieving school district that provides an education that



**Karen Long**



**Kevin Price**

meets each student where they are."

Price was appointed by the board of education during the January 9, 2020 board meeting, to serve the remainder of Kathy Kingston's term through 2021. Kingston served on the board for more than 13 years, resigning due to health issues.

Price and his wife, Joyce, have been married for 28 years. They have six children, with one attending school in the district. Kevin and Joyce have lived in Sugarcreek Township for over a decade.

He earned his bachelor of arts in English and Spanish secondary education; and his postgraduate coursework was in math, computer science and space studies.

Price is a retired U.S. Air Force pilot, with 29 years of service. He is currently a Civil Service employee at the Air Force Research Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he works on automatic collision avoidance technology for aircraft.

Price said that he is honored to serve as a board member. His hope for the district is "to continue the excellence of the Bellbrook-Sugarcreek school system."

This year's board of education leaders are David Carpenter, president, and Virginia Slouffman, vice president. Their terms expire at the end of 2023 and 2021, respectively. The longest serving member of the board is Mary Frantz, whose term runs through 2021.

# Performance Audit Recommendations Strike at the Core of Our Schools

The auditor of state's Ohio Performance Team (OPT) recently conducted a district-wide performance audit at no cost for Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools.

This type of audit is designed to assist districts that are struggling financially, offering recommendations that can reduce costs and increase operational effectiveness.

"The single most important issue facing our schools right now is our budget. The district's five-year forecast in May 2019 projected a \$1.5 million deficit in the 2020-21 school year," said Doug Cozad, PhD, superintendent of Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools. "That, along with a levy failure in May 2019, triggered the performance audit."

The overall focus of a performance audit is to eliminate the projected deficits without assuming the passage of any new levies.

"Due to an already lean budget, the auditors found it very challenging to find many areas to reduce without striking at the core of our schools and forever changing the well-rounded and high-caliber educational experience that our students deserve and our community expects," continued Cozad. "Without additional revenue through the passage of a levy, the recommended reductions will be devastating; however, even with the passage of the March levy, finances in the district are still very perilous."

The performance audit recommends that the district make \$2,544,578 in reductions starting in the 2020-21 school year, by eliminating over 20 staff members, including 16 regular education teachers, one counselor and a computer support person, as well as implementing reductions in nursing and library staff and eliminating the general fund subsidy for extracurricular activities. If addressed just through "pay to play" fees, this could bring the fee from the current \$150 to \$1,000 or more. These recommendations are in addition to the \$2.3 million in reductions already made since 2018. The audit further recommends additional reductions starting in the 2021-22 through the 2023-24 school years, which will bring the total amount of reductions to \$3,027,500 per year.

Noteworthy are the areas in which there were no recommendations. These areas were considered and

evaluated by the Auditor of State's office, but no savings could be found. For example, the district's transportation practices and routes were found to be extremely efficient. Teacher salaries are below peer districts and will be even lower, due to a pay freeze for the 2020-21 school year. Maintenance and custodial staffing is well below peer districts, which is remarkable, considering the great shape of the district's facilities.

Ohio school districts receive funding through a variety of sources, with the majority of funding coming from local property taxes. For Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools, that is 62.5% of funds collected through tax levies, which are approved by voters within the district.

"This audit demonstrates that balancing the district budget is not a spending issue; it is a revenue issue," said Cozad. "As shown in the report, our community's tax burden, when taking into consideration the income level and property wealth and the actual taxes being paid, is lower than the state, local district and peer district averages."

Only 27% of the district's budget is funded by the state.

"Regardless of how you feel about school funding, these additional reductions would be devastating," continued Cozad. "Couple this with the inflationary increases that are out of our control, unfunded and underfunded state mandates totaling over \$3.6 million in just the 2018-19 school year, and the increase in the cost of doing business, and we are left with a very grim reality for our schools."

Due to the financial situation that we are in and the timing of the March levy, we will begin to examine and implement some of the recommendations from the performance audit.

These recommendations are just that: recommendations. The board of education will ultimately decide which ones to implement. Additionally the district plans to form a community-based committee to look at these recommendations long term and provide further input to the board.

To view the performance audit, go to the Ohio Auditor's website at <http://ohioauditor.gov/performance/Bellbrook-Sugarcreek-2019.html> or scan the QR code above.





## BCI Fifth Grade Buddies Help Define Students' Sense of Self

What started out as a snack cart idea blossomed into building special relationships between students with disabilities and fifth grade peer volunteers. Bell Creek Intermediate (BCI) fifth grade teachers Nicole Otting and Kelly Tompkins worked with Intervention Specialist Sara Moore to develop a better awareness of people with disabilities, promoting a positive aspect within the school. From this discussion Fifth Grade Buddies was born.

BCI's group of fifth grade volunteers instills feelings of belonging, recognition and respect in younger students with special needs. Disabilities may include physical, developmental or sensory impairments.

Once a week the fifth graders volunteer in Moore's classroom to help students with an activity that they're working on. The first project involved creating a snack cart for teachers. From this the kids held their own "Friendsgiving," in which they made a meal and ate lunch together, with their teachers as guests.

Moore said, "It is absolutely amazing to see the progress my students have made by including this peer aspect. They are modeling off the student volunteers and are becoming more independent in their tasks."

Some Fifth Grade Buddies have gone a step further, giving up recess to assist students during adapted PE every Wednesday.

Continued Moore, "Buddy systems promote more than simply warm feelings of friendship and belonging; these programs enhance positive behaviors in both the older and the younger buddies."

## BMS Uses Kindness as a Teaching Tool

Teaching life skills to enhance the social and emotional needs of students is easy at Bellbrook Middle School (BMS) where students are challenged to "be kind" through simple acts of kindness.

"Kindness education teaches students the importance of being kind by instilling basic life skills, including self-esteem, confidence, respect, positive thinking and leadership," said Jeff Eckley, BMS principal. "To be the best, it's a relentless pursuit every day."



Students attend a class meeting each month during their homeroom period, during which principals, teachers and guidance counselors have an opportunity to talk about ways to foster a kinder school community. Students write down acts of kindness on sticky notes that teachers proudly display in their classrooms, to serve as a daily reminder to make BMS the best. So far this year, topics have included respect, gratitude, resolutions and being the best versions of themselves.

## Thinking About Buying or Selling?

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## Stephen Bell Students Raise Money for Habitat for Humanity

By applying problem-based learning strategies in which students focus on solving real-world scenarios and giving students the opportunity to guide their learning, second graders at Stephen Bell Elementary made a lasting impact on their community.

To accomplish this, Stephen Bell Elementary partnered with Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization that helps build affordable housing, to raise money for a local family who lost their home in the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes. To raise money, students had the opportunity to help friends, neighbors and family through the Chores for Charity program. Created by a high school student, the philanthropic program encourages America's youth to earn and donate money to a charity of their choice. The Stephen Bell

Elementary second graders collectively raised \$500 to donate to Habitat for Humanity.

"I could not be prouder of these students, for the care, dedication and compassion they displayed throughout this project," said Principal Ginger Keeton. "Additionally these students learned that volunteering helps every party involved, as it gives much needed support to those in need, while presenting the children with the concept that they too can make a difference in the lives of others and positively impact those around them."

This spring, students will brainstorm ideas on how to leave a lasting impact on their Stephen Bell Elementary school community, before heading off to Bell Creek Intermediate next fall.

"Problem-based learning has enabled our students – and our teachers – to explore real-world issues and make a difference in their communities," said Keeton.

## BHS: Social Justice and Community Service for a Better World

Changing the world is a hard job; and 50 high school members of the oldest youth service organization in existence are excited to make the world a better place through service and giving.

Key Club, established as an extracurricular program at Bellbrook High School (BHS), is a student-led high school organization whose goal is to teach leadership through philanthropy. Key Club was founded in 1925.

If you want to change the world, start with your local community first. This was the thought of BHS Key Club President Josh Hypes, when he and club advisors applied for a grant last summer and attended training last fall to participate in Magnified Giving, a youth philanthropy nonprofit organization based in Greater Cincinnati.

"Magnified Giving aims to produce philanthropists out of students, as well as serve the community," said Hypes. "I think the organization blends perfectly with our mission statement in the club of finding opportunities for students to lead, serve and build character."

The program is about experiential philanthropy: utilizing an innovative teaching and learning approach that encourages students to study social problems and then invest funds into the nonprofit organizations they consider best aligned to address those issues.

With the grant, students get real money to donate to nonprofits. Students have been researching nonprofits, self-determined by their interest in the following categories: animals, arts and culture, children, disaster relief,

education, environment, equality and social justice, health, hunger, life skills, poverty, senior services and veterans/military health.

The club's goal is to choose the nonprofits that they feel best improve the quality of life in their local community.

"One of Magnified Giving's goals is to empower students to be agents of change, developing tomorrow's philanthropists today," said Jenny Kaffenberger, one of Key Club's advisors. "And that is exactly what I'm seeing with our Key Club members – young people who are inspiring sustainable change not just to make a difference today, but for the future."

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**WHAT  
YOU NEED  
TO KNOW**

The district has made over  
**\$2.3 million in budget  
reductions**  
between the summer of  
2018 and Phase I and II  
reductions in 2019.

The district last  
passed a levy for new  
operating dollars in  
**2015**.

The district is on  
the ballot for a  
**5.7-mill**  
operating levy.

**MARCH  
17**  
Election Day

An operating levy helps  
fund the district's  
**day-to-day operations**,  
such as staffing, utilities,  
transportation, maintenance  
and supplies.

Only  
**27%**  
of the district budget comes  
from the state—compared  
to the state average of 44%.

If passed, the levy would cost  
district taxpayers  
**\$16.60**  
per month per \$100,000  
appraised market value.

**UPCOMING DATES**



**March 4:** Two-hour delay (K-12)

**March 12:** Board of Education Meeting at BCI

**March 13:** Coffee w/ the Superintendent – Winans 7:15 & 9:15 am

**March 17:** Election Day

**March 20:** No School – Teacher in-service

**March 30-April 3:** No School – Spring Break

**April 9:** Board of Education Meeting at Stephen Bell

**April 10:** No School – Teacher in-service

**May 14:** Board of Education Meeting at BHS

**May 16:** High School Graduation – Trent Arena 5 pm

**May 21:** Last Day of School – One-hour early dismissal (K-12)

**Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Schools**

3757 Upper Bellbrook Rd., Bellbrook, OH 45305 P: 848-6251/848-4800



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