

# School

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well as a small amount from the professional development funds allotted to her contractually.

Xu began his discussion with the sixth graders by quoting the late Chinese President Mao Zedong. "I'm very happy to see you and I would like to say these sentences to you that the first Chinese President Mao said when he met with some Chinese students just like you. 'You are the sun, the morning sun. The world belongs to you and me, but you will be the world,'" Xu said through his translator. Lukon then compared this to the frequent American proclamation to children, "You are the future."

During his discussion with the sixth grade students, Xu talked at length about the earthquake that occurred last year in China. This was a major earthquake that resulted in over 100,000 deaths. Many of the victims were children, Xu said. He then talked of heroic actions on the part of 11-year-old Chinese children who were instrumental in saving the lives of others. "I am proud of these children," Xu said. "They are heroes who cared more for others than themselves."

Xu then spoke of the rigors of education for Chinese children including school days that begin at 6 a.m. and do not end until 9 p.m., school years that last 250 days and school programs that do not include such standard American staples as art, music

and sports. When Xu finished describing school in China, Lukon asked the students if they thought they might like to attend school in China. The answer was a resounding and unanimous, "No!"

Following his meeting with the sixth graders, Principal Xu agreed to answer some questions about his experience in the United States. When asked what he had learned here in America that he might want to bring back to China, Xu responded with three major points. "Everyone here has been very welcoming: the superintendent, the teachers, the principals," Xu said. "I will take this friendship back to China."

Secondly, Xu referred to the focus on independent study here in America. "Students here learn to work and study independently," Xu said. He pointed out that this is a major difference between the American and Chinese educational systems.

Xu also referred to the fact that students in America all learn to do independent research.

Principal Xu also referred to the abundance of creative outlets available to students in the United States through numerous programs in art, sports and music.

He was especially interested in the elective courses available to high school students. He pointed out that this would be impossible to implement in China as the competition for higher education is fierce. Students in China are only allowed a free education until the ninth grade. After that, students must take a placement exam in order to further their

education. Those that place high on the exam are only required to pay minimal basic costs for their high school education. The lower the student scores, the higher the costs will be, Xu said. Moreover, not every student is afforded the opportunity to continue his or her education. Because of this, he said, the focus in China is not so much on creativity or independent projects, but rather on acquiring the knowledge necessary to score well on the placement exams.

For those students fortunate enough to go on to high school, another placement exam awaits them at the end of their high school years if they wish to go on to a university education, Xu said. The process for acceptance into a university is very similar to the process for acceptance into high school, a placement exam that determines not only who will be allowed to attend but also what the costs will be.

One of the major differences between China and the United States regarding education involves curriculum, Xu said. "In China the curriculum is standardized. Every school teaches the exact same curriculum, whereas here each school teaches differently," Xu said.

Xu said that he is looking forward to hosting the American superintendents in April and sharing the Chinese educational experience with them.

# Keiser

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tate sales. In addition, another \$75,000 has been lost in reduced investment interest on the town's large cash surplus.

Combine those reduced monies with the \$136,000 lost in state aid and the town is down nearly \$300,000 in its annual anticipated revenues, Keiser said.

Keiser plans to make up for that shortfall in several ways, without raising taxes. Here's how:

Keiser said the rate of growth in residential sector in Jamestown did not fall off in 2008, as it did elsewhere. Jamestown had \$20 million new value added to its \$7.75 billion property tax base in 2008.

That new value will generate \$150,000 to \$160,000 in new property tax revenues, Keiser said.

Keiser has also worked with the town's department heads to scale back spending and found another \$30,000 to \$40,000 that could be trimmed from the new budget.

He said the proposed budget will freeze the salaries of all department heads. Three union contracts with the town are set to expire in 2010, he added.

But the biggest savings will come from the using the cash surplus to pay down debt, thereby removing that debt service from the budget "without harming our financial position," he said.

Keiser proposes to reduce the town debt by \$270,000. He said the Town Council has expressed interest in continuing to identify debt that can be paid off through the cash surplus.

Keiser said the budget he will present to the council covers all the necessary basics, including capital improvement. The town will continue to set aside money for affordable housing, road paving, and police vehicles, he said.

"The current economy does not allow us to play by the normal rules," Keiser said of the proposed town budget. "What we hope to achieve is the property tax bill not rising at all."

Keiser cautioned that there are many variables that could make the zero increase budget difficult or impossible to achieve. He's assuming that other state revenues that Jamestown receives will be level funded, such as the \$480,000 from the motor vehicle tax the \$70,000 in library aid.

On Tuesday, Governor Donald Carcieri announced his proposed budget that will use federal economic stimulus funds to help meet the state's projected budget deficit.

Keiser said there were no surprises for Jamestown in the governor's announced budget. Jamestown will lose its municipal revenue sharing money, as expected.

On the positive side, the governor did restore some state revenue sharing municipal funds that had been cut from the current budget year, Keiser added.

State school aid is expected to continue in 2010, Keiser said.

Last week the Town Council and the School Committee met in a joint session to review the proposed school budget. A report on that meeting appears on page 3 in this newspaper.

Keiser said it was up to the School Committee to determine how to spend its money, but the responsibility lies with the Town Council to determine how much money the School Committee is allowed to spend.

Public input on the proposed town budget is welcome. The Town Council will review the proposed budget at a workshop scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, March 30 and 31.

Voters will be asked to approve the proposed budget at the annual financial town meeting in June.

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