

Fought

Continued from page A1

bined.”

He said an administrative court decision in 2011 recommended a funding ratio of 67 percent from pupil enrollment and 33 percent property valuation. George said since the court decision was made, North Haledon has saved approximately \$1 million annually, however, he is still not satisfied and the community still continues to move forward with its fight.

“Right now, North Haledon is responsible for 12 percent of the students sent to the regional school. We feel we should be paying 12 percent of the cost instead of the 33 percent we’re paying now,” George said. “We’ve been in this fight for over 15 years and this is the closest we’ve ever been, but it’s still not completely fair.”

No one, it seems, is completely happy with the outcome.

Haledon Mayor Domenick Stampone said as a result of the court decision, the tax burden on his community and

Prospect Park has increased dramatically. He said the change to the funding formula was inconsistent with the current state standard for regional districts and has placed a burden on two communities that already struggle to provide education to their youth.

“For every dollar (North Haledon) saves, is a dollar we have to spend,” Stampone said. “We’ve had to try and boost our school aid to meet that shortfall, because we don’t have the funding.”

Stampone was unable to provide the precise financial figures, but said Prospect Park was impacted the most by the court decision.

The borough currently sends 314 of the roughly 925 students at the regional school, according to superintendent, Dr. Richard Ney. Haledon sends 403 students while North Haledon sends 107. Patterson also sends 100 students to the regional school, but on a tuition basis as part of the choice school program.

Prior to the court deci-

sion to change the formula, Stampone said North Haledon filed a petition with the Department of Education to withdraw from the regional district. The referendum was approved by North Haledon residents, however, in 2004, the appellate division shot down the withdrawal proposal on the basis that North Haledon’s continued participation in the regional district was necessary to maintain the ethnic and racial balance of Manchester Regional’s student population. As a result, he said numerous North Haledon residents began sending students to surrounding private schools like Eastern Christian High School and DePaul Catholic High School on a tuition basis.

“They chose to send fewer students and then were upset about having to pay the most out of the three boroughs,” Stampone said.

Stampone said once the recession hit, however, they began noticing more North Haledon students coming back to Manchester Regional.

While George believes it is unfair for North Haledon to be paying the highest cost for the lowest number of students sent to the school, Stampone believes the original funding formula was put in place for a reason.

“What’s fair is getting the kids the education they deserve,” Stampone said. “We understand North Haledon’s position, but the formula was based on equalized property value and the ability to pay

so smaller communities with less funding would not take the cost burden and get their students the same strong education as other children.”

George said Attorney Vito Gagliardi represented North Haledon in the court case in which the formula was changed. Gagliardi is also attempting to help Cape May City change the funding formula at the Lower Cape May Regional School District. He is also representing Oradell in its fight to lower the taxes they pay to the River Dell Regional School District.

According to school records, Oradell taxpayers paid approximately \$20,360 per student in 2012 while River Edge paid \$14,330. Oradell was sending 653 students to the school district, while River Edge sent 1,024 students.

Frank Campbell, the attorney representing River Edge, said Administrative Law Judge Leslie Celentano signed a decision on April 5 recommending that the funding formula for the River Dell Regional School District be changed. Campbell said in order for the change to occur, the recommendation will need to be approved by the state Commissioner of Education, Christopher Cerf. So far, the recommendation has not been approved.

If approved, under the proposed tax formula, the average River Edge homeowner would pay \$540 more in annual school taxes, while Oradell homeowners would save \$622 based on a formula of 80 percent per pupil cost and 20 percent property value. According to Campbell, the judge recommended the formula be phased in over a two-year period.

Campbell said the two com-

CORRECTION

In the July 17, 2013 edition of the Cape May Star and Wave, we incorrectly identified Mayor George “Skip” Stanger as a member of the board of Crest Savings Bank. Mayor Stanger is on the board of Capital Bank of New Jersey out of Vineland and has no such affiliation with Crest Savings Bank. The Star and Wave regrets the error.

Additionally, quotes attributed to Stanger regarding the Supreme Court ruling on the Harvey Cedars dune case should have been attributed to Solicitor Brock Russell.

Furthermore, Stanger indicated that for 37 percent of the time, during the first six months of the year, the Department of Public Works had just two full time employees working.

The Star and Wave also regrets these errors.

munities are very similar, however, Oradell has a higher average property value. He said because the lots are typically larger, Oradell’s homes are worth around \$100,000 more on average than properties in River Edge. According to the 2010 U.S. Census and City-Data.com, River Edge has roughly 11,300 residents with an average income of \$109,000 and an average assessed home of \$436,000. There are approximately 8,000 residents in Oradell, with an average household income of \$147,000, and the average property is assessed at \$531,722.

“If someone in River Edge owns a \$500,000 and someone in Oradell has a \$500,000 home, the property owners would pay the same tax rate, because legislators based the formula on equalized property value,” Campbell said.

“Many people, especially in wealthier communities think taxation on a per pupil basis is fair, like buying a movie ticket – everyone is charged the same rate. It’s not actually fair when one community is wealthier than the other and we’re talking about the education of children.”

Campbell noted the decisions from 1973 to 1976,

in “Robinson v. Cahill,” the New Jersey Supreme Court held that the state constitution’s “thorough and efficient” education clause requires the state to ensure an equal educational opportunity for school children. The court decided that the state’s revised school finance system was constitutional, on its face, because it afforded local districts a means of overcoming budget shortfalls and addressed disparities in per-pupil expenditures.

“Some people look at it as a progressive way toward funding schools, but it’s fairer (compared) to tax based on property value,” Campbell said.

Seaside Park, which is also still in the litigation stages of its attempt to lower school taxes, paid \$112,000 per student in 2012 sent to the Central Regional School District. According to Gagliardi, who also represents Seaside Park, said this led to a \$4.4 million pay out to send 40 students to the district.

It was because of Gagliardi’s involvement in these cases that Cape May City chose to hire him hoping to lower its annual payment to Lower Cape May Regional School District. Gagliardi and his team of experts recently presented Cape May City Council with a feasibility study that includes several potential options to lower the amount of school taxes paid to the regional district.

Cape May is currently spending almost \$80,000 per pupil sent to the district, nearly double what was spent six years ago. Lower Township, which has the majority of the students attending the district, pays a text levy of less than \$8,000 per student.

At the July 2 meeting, city council passed a resolution

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24	9:55	10:16	3:36	3:46
25	10:47	11:05	4:25	4:40
26	11:39	11:56	5:13	5:35
27		12:31	6:02	6:31
28	12:47	1:26	6:51	7:30
29	1:41	2:22	7:42	8:31
30	2:38	3:19	8:35	9:33
31	3:38	4:16	9:28	10:33

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