

Budget Booklet Anticipated Questions?

How is it possible to have the budget decline, without cutting programs, when inflation is at 6% and our tax cap is 2.94% ?

Excellent question. You may recall that this year that we had approximately a 10 percent increase in spending but the tax levy increased by less than that, 3.06% was the increase. Next year we are expecting approximately the same tax levy increase at 2.94 % but with a slight spending decrease. The reason for this is that the amount of State and Federal aid (the revenue side of our budget) is decreasing from the amount we received this year. So, what you are seeing is a function of the amount of revenue (primarily Federal COVID Relief Funds) impacting our budget from one year to the next. We have talked before, but it is important to reiterate, that only a very small portion of the COVID Relief money was received up front, which means we have to spend it first and then file claims to receive the rest. There were also specific limitations placed on how, and when, some of the funds were to be spent. Our local share of tax levy, however, is not as volatile and more predictable. We have been doing our best to spend Federal dollars on items that we can eliminate through attrition or by not having to continue them moving forward. It's not easy to do but that has been our plan since 2021. The 2023-24 school year will be the last time that COVID Funding will appear in the budget.

Can you explain why we are spending so much more on Administrative Items next year?

You will recall that we have been transitioning our business office and support services over to a shared services model with our Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES. One of the things that we have been working hard on is re-coding our budget to comply with NYS and Federal reporting requirements and to maximize the state aid that we receive. The best example of this that I can provide is to look at the amount of BOCES Transportation Services we have budgeted this year and compare it to next year's projection. The amount for next year is \$100,000 less (in the Program budget) but that amount is now included in the Business Office BOCES Services (in the Administrative budget). The amount has not decreased, only the area where that is coded. There are many areas throughout the budget where this is occurring (Employee Relations, Food Service, Legal Expenses, Technology, and professional development are a few more examples).

We are hearing from multiple sources that the state and schools will be facing a funding "cliff" due to the decrease in federal funding. How will this impact our schools?

We are certain that this will have an impact on Tupper Lake CSD, as it will with most schools across the state. If you have followed the state budget process this year, you will notice that many of the new money for schools is coming in the form of competitive grants. While we don't believe this is the best way to fund schools, that is out of our control. Hopefully, the multi-year approach that we took too knowing from the start that the federal funds would disappear, will help us avoid a cliff and we will experience only minor adjustments rather than major cuts – similar to what we are experiencing this year. We will also be increasing our efforts to secure some of the grant funding that will be available because we have some additional supports available due to our relationship with BOCES.

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Is there any chance that meals will ever be free for all students again, like they were during the pandemic?

It appears that there is good news on that front. While we are still awaiting final details, it initially feels like the language in the state budget will allow Tupper Lake to qualify for full reimbursement for all meals served to our students – that includes breakfast and lunch. Through the efforts of our new relationship with the Capital Regional BOCES Shared Food Service Program we will now be qualified for the federal Community Eligibility Provision of the National School Lunch Program, and then NYS will pick up the balance of the amount not covered by the federal program.

What if I have other questions?

We would be happy to answer other questions via either email, phone or in person communication. The best place to start is by contacting Dan Bower, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations at either danielb@tupperlakecsd.net or by phone at 518-359-3371.