

INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE FOR THE FEBRUARY 2018 MEETING

MERGER STUDY PROCESS DISTRICT NEWSLETTER WINTER 2018 EDITION



The school district's winter 2018 edition – the **second** of this school year's **three** special edition newsletters focused on the merger study process that's underway with Elizabethtown-Lewis Central School District - is slated for mailing to district residents the first half of this month.

This school year's segment of the merger study process features a **twenty-member advisory committee** that provides guidance and insights to the consultants and the school superintendents of the two school districts. And the advisory committee helps to ensure the consultants address **key questions and issues** identified by the advisory committee as warranting consideration and examination by the two school districts.

The final two merger study advisory committee meetings are **February 28, 2018** to focus on financial aspects of the schools, hosted at Elizabethtown-Lewis; and **April 25, 2018** for the final meeting that will focus on the advisory committee examining and giving feedback on a preliminary draft report of findings and prospective recommendations from the consultants. That final meeting will be hosted at Westport. Residents of the two school districts are welcome to attend these meetings, which feature a 'public comment' segment at the end of the meeting.

UPDATE ON STATEWIDE BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Last month, Governor Cuomo proposed a statewide \$769M increase in school aid. That is roughly **one-half of the \$1.5B increase** in state aid recommended by the **New York State Educational Conference Board** comprised of representatives from the NYS School Boards Association, NYS Council of School Superintendents, NYS Parent-Teacher Association, NYS Association of School Business Officials, NYS United Teachers and the NYS Association of the Big Five Cities. That **\$1.5B increase** was identified as **necessary** for the State's public school districts to **sustain current school programs and services into next year**.

The New York State Division of Budget's November 2017 early forecast had projected a January 2018 proposal of a \$1.1B school aid increase. The significant drop from \$1.1B to \$769M in the Governor's January 2018 proposed statewide school aid increase is **one indicator of how formidable the winter-spring 2018 state budget development is shaping up to be** for the Governor and Legislature. Local government agencies such as public school districts, counties, towns, villages and cities rely on state aid as a prime source of revenue. **Westport CSD is no exception** to that.

As part of its January 31st testimony to the State Legislature, the NYS Parent-Teacher Association [NYSPTO] testified that while acknowledging the predicted state deficit, and challenges posed by federal uncertainties, the State's constitutional obligation to fund a high-quality public education for each and every New York child remains.

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The NYSPTO also testified that unfortunately, state aid as allocated in the Executive Budget proposal is woefully insufficient to address student need - especially when considering deferred maintenance, and program and personnel eliminations stemming from years of the Gap Elimination Adjustment [GEA] and low tax cap levies (mandated by the State's property tax levy cap on local governments and municipalities).

The NYSPTO asserted the conservative calculations by the Educational Conference Board make clear a \$1.5B increase is needed just to keep the State's public schools providing the **same level** of programs and services for students **next school year** as is being provided **this school year** for students.

EXPENSE-DRIVEN AID – MERELY ONE EXAMPLE OF EXTENSIVE TESTIMONY

The proposed cap on school district expense-based aids is strongly opposed by the NYSPTO, which pointed out in testimony that expense-based aids are critical and necessary funding streams for many schools, especially since many of the State's public school buildings are old and in dire need of repair. Replacing outdated school buses, repairing faulty plumbing lines and heating systems and replacing equipment as absolutely necessary is an ongoing need, especially given that many school districts deferred such expenses during the **GEA years** that New York State imposed on school districts. The NYSPTO testified that capping promised reimbursement on this category of school district expenditures would break the fundamental funding contract with our State leaders. The NYSPTO stated such expenses are essential, not selective.

PREDICAMENT: TOUGH COMPETITION FOR INCREASINGLY SCARCE REVENUES

In a nutshell, **here's my forecast**: This winter-spring's statewide budget development process will be exceedingly complex, unpleasant and challenging, given the growing need for State funding of essential services to its citizens, its local communities and its own branches of public service such as P-12 public education, higher education, transportation, public health, law enforcement, environmental protection, food inspection and public infrastructure systems. **Problems** are most often readily identified and addressed definitively. **Predicaments** are characterized as more complex situations that are more challenging on individuals and organizations than a typical problem. **This budget season** is shaping up to be a **predicament**.

WEIGHING KEY BUDGET FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WESTPORT CSD

Westport CSD's preliminary forecast of next school year's revenues and expenditures suggest a predicament for our school district: A January 2018 preliminary estimate suggests our revenues next school year will drop slightly associated with state aid, yet that same January 2018 preliminary estimate suggests that sustaining current instructional programs and staffing into next school year calls for an expenditures increase of roughly \$229,000 which is a large "gap" between forecasted revenues and forecasted expenditures for a school district with a \$6M operating budget and student enrollment of **176 resident students** and **38 non-resident students**.

Respectfully submitted by A. Paul Scott, Interim Superintendent of Schools