

2020-21 School Budget Q&A

Q. What will happen if the budget does not pass?

A. In typical years, the Board and Administration have the option of revising the budget and resubmitting it for a second vote. This year's process does not appear to provide for a "re-vote" so if the budget does not pass, the District will be required to adopt a "contingency budget". This budget will result in an additional \$3.4 million in cuts. The District has already made staffing cuts that had minimal impact on program, further cuts would be much more impactful on program.

Q. Does approving the Capital Reserve increase taxes?

A. No. At the end of the school year, unspent funds replenish reserves and lower taxes for the following year. Some of these funds can be set aside for future facilities needs which allows the District to avoid the need to borrow and pay interest.

Q. What happens if the Capital Reserve proposition doesn't pass?

A. The Capital Reserve proposition is separate from the budget. If it does not pass, it is not created.

Q: If established, how would the Capital Reserve Fund be funded?

A: The Capital Reserve Fund would be funded with savings from the general fund or transfers from other reserves. The Fund would act similar to a savings account. No more than \$5 million could be put into the fund each year, and voter approval is required for the District to use the funds.

Q. How will I know what the Capital Reserve funds are being used for?

A. Any future expenditure from the Capital Reserve will also require voter approval.

Q. Are there sources of comparative data for school district budgets?

A. A new law required school districts to report data in a new format which the [State Education Department](#) compiles for comparison purposes. This data for Syosset will become available starting next year. Until then, the current fiscal profiles data can be found [here](#). Information on staffing can be found [here](#).

Q. Why do school taxes continue to rise. It's hard for seniors on fixed incomes.

A. Schools experience inflationary costs and budget increases are capped by an index linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In total over the last 9 years, Syosset has been at or below this cap by over \$9.5 million. The current 2020-21 budget proposal is \$3 million below the permissible tax cap.

Q. Since I have to sign the "oath envelope" how do I know my vote will be confidential/anonymous?

A. When the "oath envelope" is opened, the folded ballot will first be separated from the envelope and both will be collected in separate bins. Only then will the collected ballots be unfolded and read by the election tellers. The opening and reading will not occur simultaneously.

Q: Does the school district have any savings this year due to the school buildings being closed? What will happen to those savings?

A: Some of the savings from the school building closure was spent to underwrite costs incurred by the shift to an online learning platform. The remaining unspent funds are being used to reduce the tax levy for 2020-21 and are being set aside to pay for up to \$2 million in costs related to COVID-19 that may be necessary to open school in the fall.

Q: What will happen to the capital projects that are currently in-process?

A: As required by law, the District is moving ahead with all capital projects previously approved by voters.

Q: What impact will the staffing reductions have on students?

A: The District was able to preserve all programming for students. All academic, extracurricular and athletic programs have been maintained, and the budget supports a strong focus on student mental wellness. There may be some shared responsibilities among staff members.

Q: Is the District prepared to return to school with additional measures to increase student and staff safety?

A: The State will issue guidelines for reopening in June, which is after the deadline for developing this budget. Therefore, the District allocated \$2 million within the budget to address any additional costs related to COVID-19 preparedness. Those funds will be further allocated once the State guidelines become available.

Q: What will happen if the State reduces support for schools mid-year as Governor Cuomo has warned could happen?

A: The District has instituted a hiring freeze on a number of positions and will delay some construction work until the second half of the year in order to retain the agility to react to a sudden loss of funding mid-year. However, the deeper the cut, the harder it will be to manage.

Q: What is driving the increase over last year of 1.97%?

A: Approximately half of the increase is appropriated for COVID-related expenses. The remaining amount is due to inflation, though the district is able to use reserves to keep the amount needed to cover inflation under the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Q: Are there funds included in the proposed budget for additional investment in the online learning platform?

A: The District is investigating the purchase of additional technology resources that would benefit remote learning as well as teaching in the classroom.

Q: What will happen to the deposits at Hofstra University and the Tilles Center since the middle school and high school graduations will not be held in person?

A: The Tilles Center has agreed to apply the deposit to next year's middle school moving up ceremonies. The District is still in conversation with Hofstra University.