

May 24, 2017

Dear PCSD Community:

Over the last several days, we have received many, many emails, in addition to feedback forms at Monday's meeting, exit polls and community surveys. The first thing I would like each of you to know is that all of the feedback was accounted for and read. We looked at everything carefully, and we are listening to you. We hear you. We understand.

The following are highlights of the 2017-18 proposed budget adopted by the Board of Education:

- Proposed budget increase of 3.6%
- Estimated tax levy increase of 2.7% which is within the NYS Tax Cap:
 - Simple majority support (50% + 1 of voters) is required to pass
 - Based on current information, will be NYS Tax Credit eligible (may vary based on individual)
- Estimated Tax Rate Increase of \$0.45 or 1.8%
- Approximately \$99 property tax increase for average homeowner (\$250,000 assessed value, eligible for BASIC STAR exemption)

It is important for you to know that the feedback contained several opposing views about the District's next steps. And so, I am asking for your willingness – no matter the decision – to commit to unifying our district as we make decisions to move us forward. Pittsford's hallmark is in collaboration, and that has never been more important than today. The future of PCSD is strong, we will remain among the best in the nation, and we can come together as a community.

Various New York State laws have made budgeting and decisions surrounding proposed budgets very difficult. The Tax Cap and the laws surrounding the Tax Cap punish school districts like Pittsford for adding new initiatives, no matter how important. If a district makes a decision to go forward with a new program that requires it to exceed the Tax Cap, residents are punished by having their rebate checks withheld. We are now held back from making major programmatic improvements because of the arbitrarily set Super Majority vote of 60% - even though the majority of our community supported it.

Our school district is further held back because NYS has frozen school district foundation aid, costing Pittsford residents alone tens of millions of dollars since 2008-2009. Additionally, the frozen state aid implications would only allow Pittsford to receive a half-day reimbursement for a full-day kindergarten program. On top of all that, as we budget from year to year, school districts get no advance information from NYS about what the Tax Cap or state aid will be, and we need to take a stand on this.

Having set that background on the environment that we are working in, here's where we stand today:

Since the start of our budget process in September, we have made more than \$3 million in reductions, including staffing due to enrollment and course selections, clerical support, teachers, athletics, travel and conference, and other areas. These reductions have been made away from students and allowed us to present a tax levy increase of 4.7%. Because last year's levy was 0.58% we felt that the community would have supported a higher than typical levy this year, but one that still kept us within a six-year average of 2.5%. We felt that this was the best of both worlds as it would include full-day kindergarten (FDK) and maintain all existing opportunities for our students.

Three years prior to this budget, knowing FDK was a costly but valuable additional program, we were very thorough in our FDK study and in presenting the findings by holding forums, creating a video, commonly asked question sheets, sending newsletters, meeting with local childcare providers, visiting senior centers, and more. We did this work because we are passionate about FDK. The board believes so strongly in FDK, they did not want it as a separate referendum; rather in the proposed budget as an added program.

A week ago we had nearly 7,000 voters come out with a 53.5% Yes vote in support of this budget; while in pre-tax cap law years this would have been enough to pass, the law now requires a 60% Super Majority, causing our budget to be voted down. We had the highest voter turnout in recent history.

After the vote did not pass, we received feedback that suggested we should make program cuts to allow FDK to stay in the budget and be within the Tax Cap. It is important to note that since the inception of pursuing FDK, we heard the opposite. We heard clearly from the community that they would not support FDK if it meant cutting other opportunities.

Moving forward, we agreed that all of our programs were important, and we would not introduce FDK by eliminating opportunities for other students. Programs should not be in competition, as our current programs have yielded tremendous success. The Board of Education agreed during one of our early budget/FDK workshops that we simply would not sacrifice existing programs and extracurricular activities in order to accommodate FDK. Further, we opposed the idea of putting FDK up as its own referendum. Because we are "One Pittsford," we chose to stand together proposing one unified budget plan – not one for FDK supporters and one for everyone else. In order to keep FDK in the budget and stay under the Tax Cap we would need to either reduce or cut a large number of programs, services and extra-curricular activities; all of which we promised we would not do at the onset.

In the event that this second budget does not pass, we will need to go to a NYS imposed contingent budget. Following the law, we would need to make \$6.8 million in reductions (based on last budget proposal); a number that is hard to quantify. Factually speaking, these cuts would be devastating to our community, students and staff. Additionally it would take us years to recover; taking the conversation about FDK away for the foreseeable future. The magnitude of these type of cuts would involve the following:

- Eliminate FDK without the ability to return to this conversation for many years
- Limitations/Restrictions to PCSD Facility Use for the Community – increase fees for all parties or discontinue use – this is a decision the Board of Education would need to make
- Another Pool Closure
- Reductions and elimination in the following areas: Extracurricular Clubs, Athletics, Electives (Music, Art Business, Technology, APs), Professional Development, Field Trips, Security Guards, Administrative Costs, Supplemental reading, writing math supports, gifted and talented programs, school nurse teachers, multiple teacher and paraprofessional cuts (and more)
- All stakeholder groups would be adversely impacted

This next budget is a high-stakes budget that would be catastrophic to program now and well into the future, should it not pass. Given the gravity of this, I am proposing a budget that keeps PCSD within the Tax Cap and maintains current programs.

I know that for the FDK supporters, this is disappointing. It is disappointing to the Board and me as well. I am asking that moving forward you join with us so we can get the funding we are owed and implement FDK in the shortest timeline possible. There is momentum to do this work. We have a commitment from legislators to make this a priority. We have a contribution from Senator Funke to fund \$200,000 against equipment necessary for FDK; reducing the overall costs.

From Senator Funke's Office, "I am also proud to co-sponsor legislative bill 5-700 along with my colleague Senator Carlucci to provide enhanced transition aid to allow Pittsford and a handful of other districts that currently have half-day kindergarten to move toward a full-day model. The bill has a \$37 million fiscal appropriation attached to it, so it will likely need to be pushed during the 2018-2019 budget process next year."

With your help, I would like to organize and meet to advocate for this funding. You have my pledge, and that of the Board of Education, that we will work together to invite legislators to a town meeting. Together we can create a strong and organized advocacy group that provides an environment that makes implementing full day kindergarten, while maintaining program and excellence, a reality without further burdening our taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Michael Pero

Superintendent of Schools