

TAX CAP MODIFICATION

Dear Elected Representative:

As a parent in the Blind Brook-Rye Union Free School District (hereinafter “Blind Brook”), I am deeply concerned about the burden the 2011-enacted Tax Levy Cap has placed on our public schools. The law, as written, has put many New York State school districts, inclusive of Blind Brook, under significant financial stress by mandating the tax levy be capped each year at two percent (2%) or the rate of inflation, whichever is less. The tax levy cap, along with the burden of funding existing state mandates, is making it increasingly difficult for our Board of Education and administrative team to fund the necessary programs and services that are vital to maintaining a high quality public education. I strongly suggest the tax cap be modified to avoid further cuts that negatively impact our children’s education.

Specifically:

- Blind Brook (as well as most other school districts) has been efficient and effective with the public’s funds and has already endured four years of tough budgeting cycles. For Blind Brook, the average spending increase over the last four years has been a mere 1.1%. The prohibitive cap leaves Blind Brook with no other choice than to cut non-mandated programs directly related to providing a quality education to Blind Brook students (i.e., AP courses, music and art, athletics, and the laying off of teachers resulting in larger class size).
- Costs that are difficult – if not impossible – to control, such as pension and health insurance contributions continue to increase. These costs alone make it extremely difficult to conform to the tax cap.
- The Blind Brook-Rye School District’s reserves are depleting. To date, the district has managed to avoid damaging program reductions by relying on its reserves, but this is only a temporary solution.
- No significant mandate relief has been enacted, which is causing Blind Brook and other school districts to cope with outdated, unnecessary and expensive mandates the school is required to provide. Money necessary to comply with these mandates is desperately needed elsewhere in order to maintain important programs and services for our students.

DON’T LET OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUFFER! I request that you make the following easy modifications to the tax cap, which will ease the burden on our District’s budget and help to preserve the quality of our schools:

EXEMPT all TRS/ERS pension and health insurance costs from tax caps on school budget increases. The state should cover all increases associated with these costs, thereby placing a cap only on the district’s expenses in connection with programs and services. For example, Blind Brook projects that the increases associated with TRS/ERS pension and health insurance costs are over \$1 million for the next school year and will result in costs that exceed the total tax levy increase for 2013-14.

EXEMPT all security expenses incurred by school districts. Blind Brook is now faced with additional security issues. A continued tax cap will impede our District's ability to maintain the safest possible environment for all students and staff.

REDESIGN the tax cap to be a cap on a district's expenses rather than on the tax levy.

ALLOW districts wishing to exceed the tax cap to do so by getting a simple majority and not a super majority of the vote.

ELIMINATE the need for a public vote if the district's budget is under the tax cap, as elections are expensive to conduct.

The tax levy cap, coupled with the burden of funding existing state mandates, threaten the quality of our schools. Our district simply cannot continue on this track. Therefore, I write in support of modifying the tax levy cap so that the quality of my children's education does not suffer.

Sincerely,