



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Commissioner of Education
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May 1, 2017

Yehuda Weissmandl
President, Board of Education
East Ramapo Central School District
105 South Madison Avenue
Spring Valley, NY 10977

Dear Mr. Weissmandl:

As I informed you in my letters of April 17 and 21, 2017, pursuant to Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016, the Commissioner of Education is required to review the East Ramapo Central School District's ("District") proposed budget for the 2017-2018 school year and to present his or her findings to the Board of Education ("Board") no later than 30 days prior to the date of the annual school district budget vote.

Specifically, the law requires that the Commissioner review the budget to ensure that it, to the greatest extent possible, expands educational programming for students, including but not limited to extracurricular activities, course offerings, non-mandated support services, non-mandated art and music classes, programs and services for English language learners and students with disabilities, and maintaining class size. The Commissioner's review of the budget must also ensure that it is balanced within the context of revenue and expenditure estimates and mandated programs.

In accordance with these legal requirements, I reviewed the District's proposed 2017-2018 budget and, on April 17, 2017, I issued a letter to you finding that the proposed budget was balanced and did expand educational programming for students. In that letter, I also made clear that, should the District determine to pursue a possible override of the tax cap, which was not included in the proposed budget presented to me at that time, the District must submit documentation explaining the District's proposal in this regard and the impact on the District's proposed 2017-2018 budget for my review as soon as possible.

By letter dated April 21, 2017, I informed you that it had come to my attention that the proposed budget actually included an additional five days of non-mandated transportation for nonpublic students when the public schools are closed and that the budget presented to me did not include a tax cap override. As we have discussed, it was always my understanding that no additional days of nonpublic school transportation would be included in the District's budget unless there were additional revenues, such as those that would be gained by an override of the tax cap, as described above.

In light of this situation, on April 25, 2017, I met with you, Dr. Wortham and the monitors to find a way to move forward productively to serve all the children of East Ramapo. During that meeting, we discussed the fact that the concept of a tax cap override was first raised by the monitors in December 2015. As the monitors have noted, given the District's six budget failures between 2004 and 2012, the District's total tax levy is \$8.7 million less in local tax money than it

might have been with successful budget passages each year. The monitors have further stated publicly that, at some point, an override would be necessary to begin the process of catching up.

After our discussion on April 25, the District decided to prepare a plan to bring an override vote to the Board this week. At a special meeting on April 26, 2017, the Board approved an override plan that includes the following elements:

- A 1% override is proposed above the dollar amount of the State limit for the District's tax levy (1.48%) for the 2017-2018 school year. The 1.48% will generate \$2.2 million and the 1% override of the \$151.4 million will generate another \$1.5 million. In total, the proposed override is expected to generate \$3.7 million in new local revenues for an anticipated total local revenue for 2017-2018 of \$152.9 million.
- The new proposed budget, which now includes \$505,000 spent on public school programming that the District originally planned to spend on 5 days of non-mandated transportation for nonpublic school students without an override, includes the public school programmatic and staffing gains originally proposed by the Superintendent plus an additional \$100,000 in 2017-2018. 62% of the \$3.7 million in new local revenues generated by this plan in 2017-2018 will serve the public school program and 38% will serve non-public school students. In 2018-2019, this proportion shifts to 89% and 11%, respectively. The additions to public school programming include 12 new teachers, the maintaining of five other teachers who no longer are allowed to be funded with Federal Title II dollars, enhanced instructional support with teacher aides, additional support for teacher collaboration, and after school and summer programs.
- The new budget allows for the reinstatement of bussing for non-public children on 14 days (that do not fall on a Saturday or legal holiday) on which the public schools are not in session (these days were cut in 2011).
- The cost of the non-public transportation days is approximately \$100,000 per day and is subject to State transportation aid at a rate of 73%. With the money levied by the tax cap override, the District will expand its public program by approximately \$2.3 million in 2017-2018, and by at least an additional \$1 million in 2018-2019 and future years to due to additional State aid reimbursement for transportation, and include 14 days of non-public transportation (\$1.4 million).

Based on all of the above, I find that the District's proposed 2017-2018 budget, as described herein, is balanced and does expand educational programming for public school students. Moreover, it includes an override of the tax cap which, if approved by the voters of East Ramapo in accordance with the law, will provide the District with additional tax dollars over time to support all of East Ramapo's students.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Elia
Commissioner

c: Dr. Deborah Wortham
Charles Szuberla
John Sipple