Budget Newsletter 2026

RONDOUT VALLEY
CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS EMBRACING INNOVATIVE NEW LITERACY PROGRAM

Students at both Kerhonkson and Marbletown Elementary Schools are learning to read and write in some fun and innovative ways. In Kindergarten through Grade 5, teachers are using the Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) program, which is built on the science of reading, with a focus on deep content knowledge and research-based foundational skills.

At Marbletown, Kindergarten teacher Alice Guillon recently gathered her students for a reading lesson based on a story called "Kit's Mom," which is part of the Amplify curriculum. Guillon read each page aloud first. Then the students proudly read the story together as a class, using their fingers to point out the words.

During the course of the lesson, the class talked about why good readers blend sounds together instead of sounding out letters one by one, and why pictures alone can't always tell the whole story. Students then rotated through various learning centers, where they spelled words from the story and answered questions to show their understanding of the text.

Meanwhile, at Kerhonkson Elementary School, Grade 1 students in Donna Snyder's and Deb Eck's classes recently stepped up to the plate for a lively game of "Sight Word Baseball." The fun, interactive lesson helped students to sharpen their literacy skills through play.

While at bat, students were shown a sight word—one that can be recognized at a glance without needing to be sounded out. Reading the word correctly allowed the batter to advance a base. If a word was missed, the team that was in the field had a chance to read it correctly and record an out. With students confidently calling out word after word, plenty of runs were scored throughout the game. Just as impressive as the reading skills was the excellent sportsmanship on display, with classmates cheering one another on and shaking hands at the end of the game.

The CKLA program, suggests Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Natalie Harjes, is already making a positive impact in Rondout Valley's elementary schools. "In our early grades, Amplify provides a strong foundation through explicit sight word instruction and the use of engaging decodable texts in Kindergarten," she says. "These structured supports, paired with the rich vocabulary and story-based learning, align closely with the New York State Education Department's Literacy Briefs by building both foundational skills and content knowledge. What makes this truly special is the creativity of our teachers, who bring these lessons to life in ways that deeply engage and inspire our youngest learners."





Proposed Budget Protects Programs, Plans for the Future; Meets Tax Cap Criteria

The Rondout Valley Central School District Board of Education is proposing a $82,093,525 budget for the 2026-2027 school year, an increase of two percent over the current year. The proposal maintains current student programs, continues key investments in curriculum and student support, and **remains within the New York State Tax Cap formula for a simple majority voter approval.**

This year's budget was developed in response to several financial challenges, including rising costs and continued enrollment decline. Retirement incentives and a health plan change were successfully negotiated with our labor units, resulting in nearly $1.8 million in savings—helping to preserve student programs while balancing the needs of taxpayers.

"Through careful planning of the strategic use of applied fund balance and reserves, along with collaboration with our faculty and staff, the District closed a significant budget gap without impacting available student opportunities, which was everyone's goal," shared Superintendent Paul Spadaro, Ph.D. "We appreciate the labor units' collaboration on achieving these savings."

In addition to voting on the annual budget, voters will be asked to elect three school board members from among five candidates running for the open positions (see page 4).

In-person voting takes place on **Tuesday, May 19, from 7 AM to 9 PM, at the District Office.** Absentee ballots and early mail ballots are available for eligible voters who are unable to vote in person.

STUDENT PROGRAMMING REMAINS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

The District prioritizes programs and services that directly support students. Approximately 75 percent of the proposed budget—more than $61 million—is dedicated directly to student programming, including instruction, student services, athletics, co-curricular activities, and transportation.

> *"Through careful planning of the strategic use of applied fund balance and reserves, along with collaboration with our faculty and staff, the District closed a significant budget gap without impacting available student opportunities, which was everyone's goal."*
>
> -Paul Spadaro, Ph. D.
> ***Superintendent***

"We remain committed to providing an educational experience that focuses on the whole child," said Spadaro. "Even in a challenging financial environment, this budget reflects our focus on academic excellence, student well-being, and fiscal responsibility."

The proposed budget continues to support important initiatives that enhance student learning and well-being. The District is implementing a more robust Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum to better support the whole child, with costs partially offset through grant funding. These continued investments in curriculum, instructional tools, and student support will strengthen the educational experience across all grade levels.

Students will continue to have access to a wide range of opportunities, including Advanced Placement courses, career and technical education programs, special education services, athletics, and extracurricular activities.

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RONDOUT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL SHOWCASES STUDENT TALENT IN *MATILDA THE MUSICAL*

See page 7

Proposed Budget Protects Programs, Plans for the Future; Meets Tax Cap Criteria

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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

To close the budget gap while minimizing direct impact on students and staff, the District used a combination of strategies: attrition, right-sizing based on current and projected enrollment, and collaboration with employee unions. The District has seen an enrollment decline of 343 students in the past 10 years, and this budget aligns staffing levels with current enrollment. These adjustments were made primarily through attrition, minimizing direct layoffs. Vacancies created through retirements and resignations were carefully evaluated and, where appropriate, left unfilled. The District also worked collaboratively with its labor partners to offer retirement incentives, resulting in significant savings.

Together, these approaches generated more than $1.3 million in additional savings while aligning staffing with declining enrollment.

"Our goal was to be both fiscally responsible and student-focused," said Assistant Superintendent for Business Services Tabatha Biggane. "We looked carefully at every option to ensure we could maintain programs while planning for the future."

MIDDLE SCHOOL RECONFIGURATION

The District is also taking a significant step to support long-term financial stability. With a focus on providing the best possible student experience, enrollment trends, and its responsibility for long-term academic and fiscal planning, the District will be transitioning to a unified Middle School configuration to serve Grades 4-8 in the 2026-2027 school year (pending approval from the New York State Education Department).

This transition is designed to better support students academically, socially, and emotionally while aligning with long-term enrollment trends.

ADDITIONAL COST SAVING MEASURES

The District is also implementing additional cost-saving strategies, including engaging a liquidity and cash flow specialist to maximize interest earnings on District reserves. Additional savings will come from targeted budget reductions, including adjustments to athletic chaperones and substitute staffing. The District has also applied for the School Violence Prevention Grant, which would help fund the SEL curriculum, safety technology, and School Resource Officer salaries.

STRATEGIC USE OF SAVINGS TO ALIGN TAX LEVY WITH THE NYS TAX CAP

The largest sources of revenue to fund the school budget are taxes and State Aid.

The District has a long history of proposing tax levy increases at or below the allowable Tax Cap level. **Since its implementation 15 years ago, the District has never proposed a budget that exceeded the cap. In fact, 11 of the proposed budgets were less than the allowable levy increase.**

This year's Tax Cap formula allows a 3.82% percent increase. Presenting a budget at the Tax Cap level is one of several strategies used to close a budget gap created by rising contractual obligations and State Aid levels that are not increasing at the same rate as costs.

The District also strategically used $4.42 million in fund balance and reserves to help offset rising costs while maintaining programs.

Due to the recent reassessment conducted in the Town of Rochester, projecting the impact on individual property taxes is especially challenging this year. While the District sets the tax levy, it does not control the final tax rate or individual tax bills. Those are influenced by factors determined by the towns, including changes in assessed property values and the overall tax base.

Because updated assessment data is not finalized until the summer—and due to the significant changes from reassessment—there are too many variables to provide accurate projections of individual tax impacts at this time.

Continued on page 4

2026-2027 Proposed Budget

The 2026-2027 budget provides a wide variety of programs for the District. The proposed budget is $82,093,525, an increase of 2.02% from last year's budget. By law, school districts must divide their budget into three components, program, capital and administrative, and compare them to last year's amount.

Program Component

The program component of the budget is $61,743,889 or 76% of the budget. This component includes salary and benefits for all instructional staff as well as interscholastic athletics, co-curricular activities and transportation

Capital Component

The capital component totals $11,929,859 or 14% of the budget. Included in this component is operation and maintenance costs including custodial staff salaries and benefits, and the payment of principal and interest for outstanding debt.

Administrative Component

The administrative component is $8,419,778 or 10% of the budget. This component consists of salaries and benefits for administrators, supervisors and support staff, business operations, personnel, school board, insurance, and legal services.

	Adopted 2025-2026 Budget	Proposed 2026-2027 Budget
PROGRAM		
Instruction	$35,348,234	$35,279,310
Pupil Transportation	$7,673,491	$7,932,696
Other Transfers	$125,000	$125,000
Employee Benefits	$17,261,951	$18,406,883
Total Program	**$60,408,676**	**$61,743,889**
CAPITAL		
Operation & Maintenance	$3,844,187	$3,982,738
Principal/Interest Payments	$6,476,365	$6,369,935
Other Transfers	$261,835	$262,998
Employee Benefits	$1,172,089	$1,314,188
Total Capital	**$11,754,476**	**$11,929,859**
ADMINISTRATIVE		
Central Services	$3,360,957	$3,472,815
Instructional Supervision	$2,276,736	$2,031,310
Curriculum Development	$452,385	$506,309
Employee Benefits	$2,216,886	$2,409,344
Total Administrative	**$8,306,964**	**$8,419,778**
TOTAL BUDGET	**$80,470,116**	**$82,093,525**

Sample Ballot

"RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Rondout Valley Central School District be authorized to expend $82,093,525.00 in the 2026-2027 school year to meet necessary estimated expenses and to levy the necessary tax."

YES _____ **NO** _____

Absentee Ballots and Early Mail Ballots

The steps for obtaining an Absentee or Early Mail Ballot are the same:

To obtain an Absentee or Early Mail Ballot, an eligible voter must first fill out an application, which can be printed from the District's website, be picked up from the District Clerk, or be or requested by mailing a letter to the District Clerk. *Please note, the "Application for Absentee Ballot" requires an applicant to provide a qualifying reason.*

Completed applications may be returned to the District Clerk in person or sent by mail. Upon receipt of a completed application, a ballot will be issued. If the voter is requesting to have a ballot sent to them by mail, applications must reach the District Clerk by **May 12**. If the voter is collecting their ballot in person, applications must be received by **May 19**.

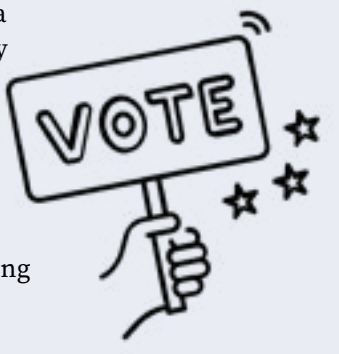
Completed ballots must be received by the District Clerk by the strict deadline of **5 PM on Tuesday, May 19.**

Voter Qualifications

To vote you must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen, and have been a District resident for at least 30 days prior to the vote. Proof of residency will be required.

Proof of Residency

- NYS Driver's License with Physical Address (not Post Office Box)
- Non-Driver Identification Card
- Voter Registration Card
- Board of Elections Notice of Voting Location
- State Income Tax Form Heading with School ID #543



NON-DISCRIMINATION NOTICE

The Rondout Valley Central School District prohibits and condemns all forms of discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, military status, veteran status, disability, use of a recognized guide dog, hearing dog or service dog, or domestic violence victim status by employees, school volunteers, students, and non-employees such as contractors and vendors as well as any third parties who are participating in, observing, or otherwise engaging in activities subject to the supervision and control of the District.

All inquiries regarding the Non-Discrimination policy and/or all complaints regarding violation(s) of these policies should be directed to the District's Title IX Coordinator at TitleIXCoordinator@rondout.k12.ny.us.

From Curiosity to Discovery: Student Science Research at RVHS

For years, Rondout Valley High School (RVHS) has offered "Science Research in the High School," a program sponsored by the University at Albany that allows high school students to engage in scientific research and earn college credits. Currently, 14 students are participating in the program, which is taught by Science teacher Krista Sheehan.

The vigorous program is a three-year commitment for students, who have the opportunity to earn college credits as juniors and seniors. As sophomores, students research various topics and potential mentors to discover what they want to investigate. Juniors in the program submit their proposed topics to the local Science Research Committee—which consists of Sheehan, Principal Jessica Torok, Library Media Specialist Tara Thibault-Edmonds, Nurse Joann Redmond, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Natalie Harjes. The program participants then work with their secured mentor and sponsoring teacher to start their research.

Seniors continue to conduct research on their chosen topics. They analyze data, write scientific papers, and ultimately build a portfolio containing all of their research-associated work. The program culminates with a Science Symposium hosted at RVHS, where students present their findings to the community.

Seniors are also given opportunities to present their work to larger audiences throughout the year. Grade 12 student Ruby Powell was recently selected to present at the UAlbany Science Research Symposium. For the past three years, Ruby has focused on researching climate change with the help of her mentor, Dr. Jerry McManus, a professor and chair of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

Ruby's research titled "*Analyzing Oxygen and Carbon Isotope Ratios ($\delta^{18}O$ & $\delta^{13}C$) in Shells of the Planktonic Foraminifera Turborotalita Quinqueloba from Deep-Sea Sediments as an Indicator of Climate Changes in the North Atlantic Ocean During the Deglaciation Following the Last Ice Age,*" looks into interval changes in North Atlantic Ocean in relation to climate change.

Ruby has taken full advantage of the program by also earning college credits through a summer internship. Last summer, she commuted four days a week to the Lamont-Doherty Core Repository in Palisades, New York, to work alongside her mentor and PhD students.

From the coursework and mentorships to the internship and public presentations, Ruby is grateful for all that this program has offered her. "The Science Research Program allows me to gain a professional learning experience that will prepare me for the future," she said. "Climate Change is something I have always been passionate about, and it felt like something that was tangible for me to research."



14 students are currently enrolled in the Science Research program at Rondout Valley High School (not all pictured).

Other student projects are equally as impressive, showcasing the wide range of interests and depth of inquiry within the program. Topics include "down-the-drain pathways" (the routes by which household chemicals, medications, and pesticides enter the environment through drains, toilets, and sinks), microplastics, C. elegans (microscopic roundworms), and paleoart, each reflecting students' ability to connect real-world issues with scientific investigation.

Sheehan shared that one of the most powerful aspects of the program is the sense of community it builds. "With three levels of students, older participants take on leadership roles by mentoring younger students," she said. "It creates a supportive environment where students are constantly learning from one another and helping each other grow,"

Join us for this year's Science Symposium, which will be held on June 4 in the RVHS Auditorium.

Discovering Possibilities at Ulster BOCES

Rondout Valley High School Grade 12 student Alyssa VanLeuven is in her second year of the Criminal Justice Program at Ulster BOCES. Over her course in this program, she has explored the history, structures, and processes of the criminal justice system. Her and her classmates have learned law enforcement concepts and techniques—such as the one pictured here—as well as court and corrections procedures.



"Learning about Criminal Justice is fun because you get to learn how real life cases are solved and how the legal system works. It also helps you think critically and see different sides of a situation," shared Alyssa.

Students have been attending Career Academies at iPark 87–the new state-of-the-art training center in the former IBM complex on Enterprise Drive in Kingston.

Students Explore Interests, Build Connections at After-School Clubs

The learning and fun don't stop at the end of the school day at Rondout Valley Intermediate and Junior High Schools. Throughout the year, students are invited to participate in a variety of after-school activities, ranging from Student Council to the Wayfinder Experience to clubs focusing on art, embroidery, drama, and the environment. This winter, there was even a Snow Club! These after-school offerings give students a chance to explore their interests, discover new talents, and connect with friends beyond the school day.



New Grade 6 Electives Nurture Creativity and Innovation

This year, Rondout Valley Intermediate School introduced a number of new electives for Grade 6 students. The classes are geared toward a wide range of potential interests, touching upon technology, art, and music.



Art teacher Sara Bogart created the elective "School Beautification" to bring together students who are passionate about improving their school environment through visual arts. With the shared goal of creating more warm and welcoming hallways, students considered the role of joy in design, and how people are affected by the aesthetic choices that have been made around them. This student-led, project-based course began with the design and installation of temporary seasonal murals painted on windows in the cafeteria and front office, and the doors in the nurse's office and library. Students also collaborated on a permanent, nature-themed sculptural art installation displayed in a second-floor display case.

In addition, students were invited to paint a mural in remembrance of former Guidance Counselor Deb Marinucci. The mural incorporates Marinucci's own sketches, thoughtfully arranged by Assistant Principal Stephen Protoss (a former Art teacher), into a landscape filled with meaningful imagery.

Music teacher Douglas Friedman introduced the course "Creative Musicianship" this semester. This class brings together elements of music theory, ear training, and composition with the aim of furthering young musicians' understanding of the language of music. The course is designed to train the "whole" musician, building skills that complement instrumental and/or vocal performance and deepen students' awareness of how music is put together. These skills include hearing the sounds of written music before they are played (sight-singing), translating heard sounds into notation (ear-training), and making creative decisions on how to choose and combine sounds (composition). Currently, students are being guided through the completion of creative projects and encouraged to take creative license with the concepts being learned.

New Technology electives include "Solar and Wind" and "Rube Goldberg," which are being taught by Technology teacher Charles Johnson. "Solar and Wind" introduces Grade 6 students to the world of renewable energy, focusing specifically on solar and wind power. Students learn the fundamental principles behind how these natural resources are being harnessed to generate clean electricity through hands-on learning activities. In "Rube Goldberg," students design and construct a Rube Goldberg machine, which consists of elaborate, chain-reaction contraptions that accomplish a simple task in an overly complicated way. The machine uses principles of physics, engineering, and creative problem-solving, ultimately allowing students to learn about simple machines, forces, energy transfer, and the engineering design process.

Together, these new electives expand opportunities for exploration and creativity for Grade 6 students, while also empowering them to take an active role in shaping their learning and their school community.

Board of Education Elections and Candidates

Three (3) seats on the Board of Education (BOE) are up for election this year–i.e., those currently held by Carolyn Peck, Dean Rylewicz, and Patricia Meoli. The three vacancies will be filled by the individuals with the most votes, including write-in votes (i.e., where the voter writes in the name(s) of the person(s) for whom the voter desires to vote). The three candidates receiving the most votes will each serve a three (3) year term commencing July 1, 2026 and expiring on June 30, 2029.

The following statement has been provided by the candidate whose name will be on the ballot and is printed verbatim.

Sidney J. Hymes

Why I am Running for Board: My name is Sidney J. Hymes. I am running for school board to ensure minority students and families that live within the Rondout district have a voice and representation. I am running so my kids understand that people who look like them are part of the decision making process. Lastly, I am running to bring a different perspective to the Board.

Charles Dinstuhl

I am a father of two students in the district. I have a kindergartener at Marbletown Elementary and Fourth Grader at our middle school. I am a certified public accountant, and I work with Elected Comptroller of Ulster County as her Deputy Comptroller. In my spare time I volunteer as treasurer for the Rondout chapter of the American Youth Soccer Organization, and I give bookkeeping assistance to the Rondout Valley Food Pantry. I want to bring my professional experience to this board to improve the district's budgeting process and budget communications to the public.

Matthew Nusbaum

I am a lifelong Stone Ridge resident and a graduate of Rondout Valley High School, where I was deeply involved in student life – as a musician, athlete, student leader, and student representative to the Board of Education. I have worked with young people in and out of schools as a tutor and counselor at two local youth programs, Wild Earth Wilderness School and Wayfinder Adventures. I received by BA from Wesleyan University's College of Social Studies and now work in communications for the Ulster County Executive.

Justin Swisher

I am a lifelong resident of Stone Ridge and a proud graduate of Rondout Valley schools. I currently work as a business teacher at Cornwall High School, where I bring firsthand experience in education and a strong passion for supporting student success. Prior to becoming a teacher 11 years ago, I worked as an accountant, which gave me valuable financial experience. I am committed to advocating for teachers and recognize the critical role they play in building a strong school system. As a father of three young sons, with my oldest attending Marbletown Elementary, I have a personal investment in the future of our schools. I hold degrees in business and accounting and I am dedicated to responsible budgeting and thoughtful financial decision-making.

Patricia Meoli

My career in education spans 34 plus years; after retiring from Rondout as a high school English teacher, I spent 12 years as an instructor at SUNY Ulster teaching Freshman English and Literature. I am proud to say that I am a Rondout graduate. My husband Peter and I raised our family here; our children and our grandchildren are all Rondout grads.

To say I'm invested in this school district is an understatement. For the past three years I have been on the Board and have been a part of: curriculum changes that are taking root in our schools, tax reductions for seniors and EMS, and securing safety for our students and staff.

I believe in giving back to a community that has given me so much, and with your vote I hope to continue.

Proposed Budget Protects Programs, Plans for the Future; Meets Tax Cap Criteria

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WHAT HAPPENS IF THE BUDGET IS NOT APPROVED

If the proposed budget is not approved, the Board of Education has three options: to resubmit the same budget, propose a revised budget, or adopt a contingency budget.

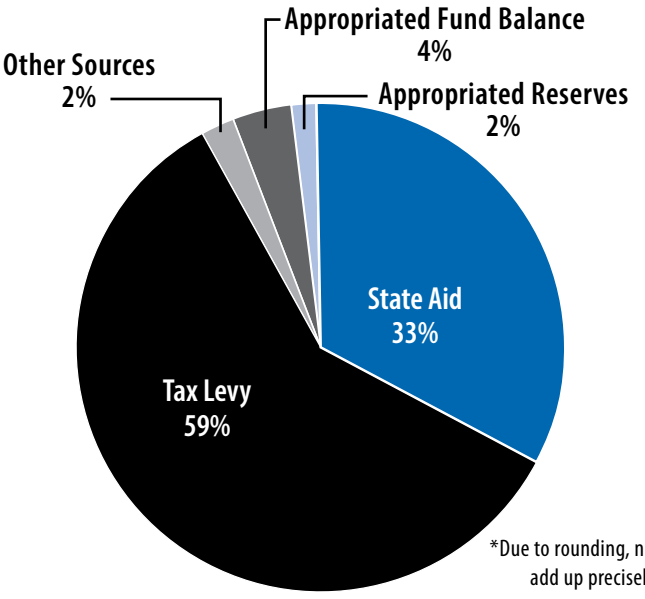
If a second vote is not successful, the District is required to adopt a contingency budget. This would require reductions to maintain the current tax levy and would limit certain expenditures, including equipment purchases, non-essential maintenance, and the free use of school facilities by the community.

BUDGET AND VOTING INFORMATION

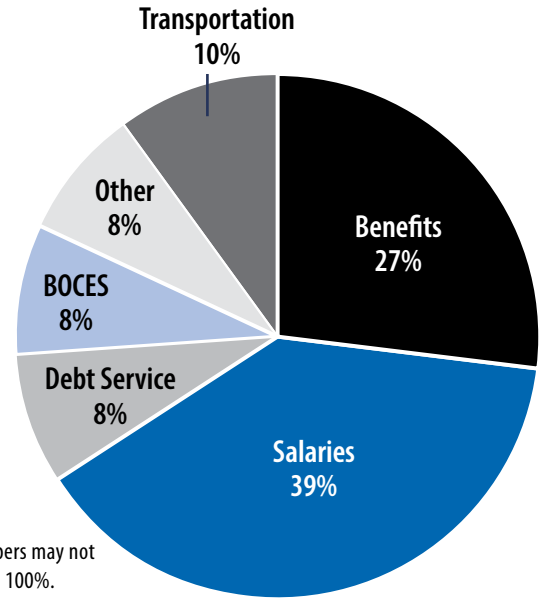
All eligible voters are encouraged to participate in this year's election on Tuesday, May 19. Polls will be open from 7 AM to 9 PM at the District Office, located at 122 Kyserike Road in Accord. For questions about voting, contact the District Clerk, Debra Barbiani, at 845-687-2400, ext. 4803, or at dbarbiani@rondout.k12.ny.us. Anyone with questions about the proposed budget can contact Assistant Superintendent for Business Services Tabatha Biggane at (845) 687-2400, Ext. 4806.

2026-2027 Budget

Where Does the Money Come From: Revenues



Where Does the Money Go: Expenses



*Due to rounding, numbers may not add up precisely to 100%.

Rondout Valley Central School District Budget Notice

OVERALL BUDGET PROPOSAL	Budget Adopted for the 2025-2026 School Year	Budget Proposed for the 2026-2027 School Year	Contingency Budget for the 2026-2027 School Year*
Total Budgeted Amount, Not Including Separate Propositions	$80,470,116	$ 82,093,525	$ 81,004,374
Increase/Decrease for the 2026-2027 School Year		$ 1,623,409	$ 81,004,374
Percentage Increase/Decrease in Proposed Budget		2.02%	0.66%
Change in the Consumer Price Index		2.63%	
A. Proposed Levy to Support the Total Budgeted Amount	$46,718,816	$48,504,813	
B. Levy to Support Library Debt, if Applicable	$0	$0	
C. Levy for Non-Excludable Propositions, if Applicable **	$0	$0	
D. Total Tax Cap Reserve Amount Used to Reduce Current Year Levy	$0	$0	
E. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy (A + B + C - D)	$46,718,816	$48,504,813	$46,718,816
F. Total Permissible Exclusions	$3,072,844	$3,070,040	
G. School Tax Levy Limit, Excluding Levy for Permissible Exclusions	$43,645,972	$45,434,773	
H. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy, Excluding Levy to Support Library Debt and/or Permissible Exclusions (E – B – F + D)	$43,645,972	$45,434,773	
I. Difference: G – H (Negative Value Requires 60.0% Voter Approval – See Note Below Regarding Separate Propositions) **	$0	$0	
Administrative component	$8,306,962	$8,419,778	$8,163,384
Program component	$60,408,678	$61,743,889	$61,003,889
Capital component	$11,754,476	$11,929,859	$11,837,102

Should the District need to adopt a contingency budget, the administrative component will stay within statutory limits. The Board of Education would determine the non-contingency items that would need to be removed from the contingency budget. The tax levy of the contingency budget would be equal to the prior year's tax levy.

** List Separate Propositions that are not included in the Total Budgeted Amount: (Tax Levy associated with educational or transportation services propositions are not eligible for exclusion and may affect voter approval requirements)

Description	Amount
No Separate Propositions	

	Under the Budget Proposed for the 2026-2027 School Year
Estimated Basic STAR Exemption Savings [1]	$463

[1] *The basic school tax relief (STAR) exemption is authorized by section 425 of the Real Property Tax Law.*

The annual budget vote for the fiscal year 2026-27 by the qualified voters of the Rondout Valley Central School District, Ulster County, New York, will be held at District's Administrative Office in said district on Tuesday, May 19, 2026 between the hours of 7:00 am and 9:00 pm, prevailing time in the Rondout Valley Central School District, at which time the polls will be opened to vote by voting ballot or machine.

LIGHTING UP LEARNING: MARBLETOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S "GLOW NIGHT" SUCCESS



This winter, Marbletown Elementary School hosted its second annual Family Engagement Night, titled Glow Night, offering a variety of STREAM (science, technology, reading, engineering, art, and math) activities in a building that glowed with neon lights and excitement. During this memorable evening, students eagerly moved from learning station to learning station alongside their families.

Glow Night was a culmination of ideas from Engagement Coordinators Katie Turer, Kristen McKeever, Katie Hamor, Veronica Freyvert, and Felice Digennaro. The team members capitalized on their respective areas of expertise to plan the event, which resulted in a wide range of stations, including Sight-Word Glow Bingo, Heggerty in the Dark, Secret Story Adventures, Flashlight Reading, Bowling with Differentiated Math Task Cards, and Glow You School Ozo-Bot Coding.

The night also included a writing/poetry activity, which was hosted by local poet and author Joseph Olsen. Olsen wrote *Lock Away The Monsters*, which offers an entertaining glimpse into the myriad things that can occupy a child's mind–including monsters, robot parents, flies, ladybugs, bullying, and even doing good deeds–and reminds us all what it's like to delight in our imaginations.

Principal Andrew Davenport expressed his gratitude to the many people responsible for the success of Glow Night. "I am so proud of the way they came together to create an event that brought together our extended Marbletown community," he said. "We want to extend our thanks to the MES PTA, faculty, staff, and custodians for helping to make this event a reality. A special thanks goes out to our Family Engagement Coordinating Team."

The event not only provided engaging learning opportunities, but also strengthened connections between home and school by allowing families to experience the curriculum in a fun, interactive way. With continued enthusiasm and community support, Marbletown Elementary School looks forward to building on this tradition in the years to come.



Kerhonkson Elementary School Hosts V.I.P. Readers

Kerhonkson Elementary School (KES) invited a number of very important people from the community to read to students as part of their V.I.P. Readers Week event in March.

"Reading and discussing books fosters a love of learning among our students while also providing valuable exposure to a wide range of careers and personal interests," said Shannon VanNorman, KES Reading teacher and PTA vice president.

VanNorman reached out to various community members, and many agreed to generously volunteer their time to participate as guest readers.

In addition to encouraging a love of reading, V.I.P. Readers Week allowed students the opportunity to engage with individuals from diverse professional backgrounds. This year's participants included a pilot/aviation specialist, an ecological restoration specialist, a baker, a farmer, 4-H representative, a karate instructor, a police sergeant, a software engineer, a nurse, a dentist, a musician, a flight medic, a wildlife biologist, business owners, a photographer, retired teachers, an author, and even the superintendent of the Rondout Valley Central School District, Dr. Paul M. Spadaro!





"Gander Treasures" Providing Learning Opportunities and Community Support

This year, Rondout Valley High School (RVHS) students created a thrift store and food pantry called "Gander Treasures" in the basement of their school. The shop, which is staffed and run by members of Kristine Jarvis' class, takes in donations from the community and is open to anyone who may need them. All items are free of charge. "Students have been working hard since it opened just before winter break," says Jarvis.

Students, who are tasked with stocking the shelves, keeping the store clean and organized, and running the cash register, are learning both life and employability skills as part of this venture, Jarvis notes. They handle other tasks as well. "For example," says Jarvis, "when clothing donations come in, they are washed and hung up, or folded, and sorted according to size by our students."

Students also help locate items for orders. Lisa Ciccone, a social worker at RVHS, has coordinated packages of food and other items for local families in need. To maintain the anonymity of recipients, she drops off a shopping list that the students work together to fulfill from items in the store. As a result, Gander Treasures is now connected to the local food pantry and is able to be a regular sponsor.

Many students and staff members contribute donations. In addition, students often stop in for a snack, or to check out what new clothing items the shop has received. "We have a lot of students who come down during their lunch or their study hall," says Jarvis.

Gander Treasures truly is a treasure, offering learning opportunities while building community!

Kindergarten Registration Has Begun!

Do you have a child who will turn five years old on or before December 1, 2026? If so, they are eligible to start Kindergarten in September 2026!

Registration Options:

- NEW - Register Your Child Online
- Register Your Child Using a Paper Packet
- Visit our website for either option: https://bit.ly/rondout-registration

If you already have a registration packet, please submit it as soon as possible. There are lots of exciting things in the works for our upcoming kindergarten students!







LEARNING EXPO RETURNS TO RONDOUT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

On March 12, Rondout Valley High School welcomed more than 250 students, families, and community members for its second annual Learning Expo. The event, which was dedicated to celebrating student achievement across all subject areas, transformed the school into a vibrant showcase of creativity, curiosity, and hands-on learning.

The hallways were filled with interactive displays and engaging projects that highlighted the depth and diversity of student work. Visitors explored everything from family recipes and live WISE (Wise Individualized Senior Experience) journaling demonstrations to innovative science projects, including one that used LEGO models to visualize biological cells.

Students in Kayley Bouton's Anatomy and Physiology classes focused on the integumentary system (the body's outer layer) by creating their own skincare brands. They developed sunscreen and deodorant using scientifically supported ingredients, researching how each one protects and supports the skin before formulating their products. The project emphasized creativity, critical thinking, and communication, as students designed branding, explained ingredient choices, and presented their products as if entering the real marketplace. Support from the Kerhonkson-based Damn Good Honey Farm helped connect this work to potential real-world applications. "One of the main goals was to help students see how biology connects to everyday life while building engagement through student choice and creativity," said Bouton.

Across multiple Social Studies courses taught by Kristine Dorrian, students explored how systems, geography, and enduring ideas shape both past and present societies. In her Law Studies class, students studied the branches of government and made trading cards based on the Bill of Rights, while her Global 9 students chose a region and created an ancient trade route for it, including topographical maps. Global 10 students took a current issue and showed how it related to one from the past, highlighting the continued relevance of history in today's world.

Principal Jessica Torok expressed her gratitude to the many individuals who contributed to the event's success, including teachers, counselors, service providers, teaching assistants, club advisors, student volunteers, clerical staff, the custodial team, and members of the building leadership team who had been preparing for this event since September.

"The Learning Expo was more than just a showcase—it highlighted the power of engagement,



relationships, and meaningful learning at RVHS," she said. "Plus, we sold 400 Brooks' BBQ chicken dinners, which will help support our FFA [formerly the Future Farmers of America] program!"

The event captured the energy of RVHS, including student voices, student creativity, and real-world learning in action.

Students Immerse Themselves in Colonial America





Kelly O'Connor's Grade 7 Social Studies class at Rondout Valley Junior High School immersed themselves in Colonial life this spring, creating historical fiction narratives and documents to deepen their knowledge of our nation's early history. They then presented their projects at a Colonial Fair held at the school in March.

Each student was assigned a race, gender, and age for a character that could have lived during Colonial times. The students researched what names were popular then, and chose which colony they wanted to live in based on real estate ads made by O'Connor. These details set up the parameters of their individual projects.

O'Connor assigned six topics for students to research and write about: family, economics, slavery, grievances against the king, culture, and taxes. They were given different assignments for each topic. The students were also asked to write a letter from their current-day selves to their characters about slavery.

The characters' cultural perspectives were shaped by what was happening where they lived at the time. Some students, for example, explained how the French and Indian War had affected their characters. Students also had to figure out how their characters would have earned money, and what jobs would have been available to them at that time.

Reflecting on her project, student Sophie Farrell said, "I learned a lot about the French and Indian War, and the details of what people went through were very interesting." The end result of all the reading and research she did for her project was an impressive portfolio of documents, featuring numerous hand-drawn illustrations, which resembled a graphic novel.

One of Sophie's classmates, Desirae Knapp, was also enthusiastic about the assignment. "It was really fun and it was also time consuming, but we had a good time working on this," she said. "I loved coming up with new stories for my character."

A World of Stories Comes Alive at Marbletown



Monkeys, turtles, coyotes, oh, my! Marbletown Elementary School students recently took audiences on a journey around the globe with their lively performance of *Folk Tails: Animal Stories from Around the World* by Lisa L. Abbott.

Thirty-one students participated in the production, which featured a collection of six amusing animal tales, each rooted in cultural folklore that had been passed down through generations. From clever monkeys to wise turtles to sneaky coyotes, the stories brought a cast of entertaining characters to life while highlighting important morals and life lessons. Both actors and audience members were invited to reflect on the stories' messages and to connect them to their own experiences.

This memorable event was made possible by the guidance of Advisors Danielle Waldron, Julia Jeon, and Chris Llanes, whose efforts were key to the production's success. Special thanks also go to Marbletown Elementary School PTA President Vanessa Greene for her continued support, and to Rondout Valley High School student Ryan Helm for providing audio assistance that enhanced the audience's overall experience.

The performance was a true celebration of storytelling, culture, and student talent!

MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Continued from page 1



Despite some challenging winter weather, crowds flocked to see the Rondout Valley High School (RVHS) production of *Matilda the Musical* on February 20, 21, and 22. Families, friends, and community members thoroughly enjoyed this entertaining and inspiring show.

Based on Roald Dahl's beloved children's novel *Matilda*, with a book by Dennis Kelly and music and lyrics by Tim Minchin, the musical tells the story of Matilda Wormwood, an intelligent and imaginative young girl with a deep love of reading and learning. Ruby Focarino starred as Matilda, whose curiosity and brilliance are anything but appreciated by her dismissive parents, played by Laurelin Joy Allatta and Graham Palmentiero. Though small in stature, Matilda possesses a powerful sense of justice and an unwavering determination to stand up for herself and others.

When Matilda begins attending school, she forms a close bond with her kind-hearted teacher, Miss Honey, portrayed by Perle James. She quickly discovers that the school is ruled by the fearsome headmistress, Agatha Trunchbull, played by Owin Simmons. As Matilda and her classmates endure Trunchbull's cruel punishments, Matilda finds the courage to challenge injustice and help those around her.



The production featured spectacular songs and high-energy musical numbers that wowed audiences, thanks to vocal direction by Juliana McCarthy and choreography by Mia DeYoung. Powerful messages of kindness, imagination, and finding one's voice were seamlessly woven throughout the show, enhanced by sharp comedic timing and impressively authentic British accents under the direction of Kim Bowles and Assistant Director Dylan Bowles. The pit band delivered an outstanding performance under the leadership of Conductor and Producer Randolph Loder.

"The cast and crew should be incredibly proud," said RVHS Principal Jessica Torok. "Their hard work and passion were evident in every scene. This production was a wonderful showcase of our students' creativity and talent."

The set design was equally impressive, featuring larger-than-life books, multiple levels, and creative props brought to life by the dedicated backstage crew and Theatre Arts Club Advisor Marianne Hawryluk and set support from Nick Bodnar, and all the others who helped bring this show to life. Together, the student cast and crew delivered a dynamic, high-energy spectacle that beautifully captured this much-loved story about bravery, books, and believing in yourself.

The performance was made possible by these generous sponsors: Ulster Savings, executive producer; High Falls Cafe and Sampson Corporation, producers; and Benny's Pizzeria, co-producer.



2019 CAPITAL PROJECT SET TO FINISH, 2024 CAPITAL PROJECT UNDERWAY

The 2019 Capital Project is nearing completion. Phase 5 is almost finished and includes the installation of control systems for mechanical heating and cooling equipment at the High School. Phase 6 of the project included the replacement of the playground at the Intermediate and Junior High Schools. The remainder of this work will be completed this Spring. This phase also included the installation of window security film in all schools across the District, which has been completed.

Work on the 2024 Capital Project is now underway. Phase 1A includes the installment of new clocks, public address systems, and lockdown systems in all schools across the District. Phase 1B began over Spring Break, starting with the High School fitness center.

Phase 2 is currently in the design phase, with construction expected to begin in Spring/Summer 2027.

FRIENDS NAMED VALEDICTORIAN AND SALUTATORIAN OF RONDOUT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL



Leading the Rondout Valley High School (RVHS) Class of 2026, Hudson Paley, with a grade point average (GPA) of 101.14, has earned the distinction of valedictorian, and Harris Kyaw, with a GPA of 100.67, has been named salutatorian. Hard work took these two to the top of their class, but friendship is what carried them all the way to the finish line. They proved that while achievement may set them apart, it's the bond they share that made the journey truly meaningful.

Hudson, a resident of Kerhonkson, is the son of Deanna and Matthew Paley. He will graduate with 32.5 overall credits, including Honors, Advanced Placement, and Collegiate course credits. He has earned 17 college credits through SUNY Ulster by taking college-level courses offered at RVHS. He will graduate with an Honors Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation and Mastery in Math and Science.

In addition to receiving the College Board National School Recognition Award and the Rural Small-Town Award, Hudson was named a Commended Student by the prestigious National Merit Scholarship Program. Among his other academic achievements was earning the New York State Seal of Biliteracy in French as a junior.

Demonstrating his talent for leadership, Hudson serves as president of the National Honor Society and treasurer of Student Congress. He is also a member of the Special Education Advocacy Committee, as well as a peer leader in the Newcomers Uplifted Program.

A talented musician, Hudson plays the saxophone in the RVHS Band and Jazz Band, and was selected for All-State Jazz Band.

Hudson is also a multisport athlete, serving as captain of the Varsity Golf team and competing on both the Indoor and Outdoor Track teams. He is also a member of the Unified Bowling team.

Hudson is still undecided on what college he will attend this fall, but plans to study something in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) field such as Chemical Engineering or Data Science.

Reflecting on who has inspired him over the years, Hudson mentions his brother Jackson, who, he says, has been a "guiding figure" throughout his life. He also praises Math teacher Katrina Rubino for sparking his passion for math.

When asked to share some words of wisdom with underclassmen, he said, "Don't underestimate the importance of a good night of sleep!" He also gave a shout-out to Taco Bell for helping him to get him through long nights of studying.

Salutatorian Harris is the son of Zan Nang and Moe Kyaw of Stone Ridge. He will graduate with 30 overall credits from Honors, Advanced Placement, and Collegiate classes. He has earned 13 college credits through SUNY Ulster by taking classes offered at RVHS. In addition, he is participating in the Early Admissions Program at SUNY Ulster, taking Calculus II in his free time. He will graduate with an Honors Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation and Mastery in Math and Science.

Other accomplishments include earning the New York State Seal of Biliteracy in French during his junior year, and being named a QuestBridge Finalist–a recognition that demonstrated that he is well-prepared to succeed at a top college. While Harris is still undecided on which college he will attend, he plans to study Computer Science.

Harris is the captain of the Robotics Team, a student representative for Student Congress, and a member of the National Honor Society and the Science Olympiad club. He also competes on the Track team.

Musically talented, Harris plays clarinet in the RVHS Concert Band, and earned a spot as an alternate in the All-State Band. He also participated in the Pit Band for school musicals, including *Bye Bye Birdie* and *The Addams Family*. Harris is also a member of the Community Band at SUNY Ulster, which earns him college credit.

During his senior year, Harris took on a passion project, building a website to help students better understand Desmos (an online math tool) for the SAT. This project, which was carried out through collaboration with Principal Jessica Torok, will launch in the coming months.

Offering advice to his fellow students, Harris said, "Don't hesitate to take any opportunities" –advice that he certainly followed during his own years at Rondout Valley.

Hudson and Harris co-captain the Math Team, which qualified for the New York State Mathematics League Championship in their senior and junior years. This is just one of the many ways they have bonded since their friendship started in Grade 5. Reflecting on the impact his longtime friend has had on him, Harris said, "I'm a very reserved person, and he's helped me open up a lot over the years."

Principal Torok expresses deep admiration for the two. "Hudson and Harris are outstanding students, but what truly sets them apart is how they've supported one another along the way. Their friendship, humility, and shared commitment to excellence reflect the very best of Rondout Valley High School," she said. "They are deeply involved, always working to make our school a better place, and they bring a positivity and sense of humor that lifts those around them. I couldn't be more proud."

RONDOUT Valley CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Grade 6 Students Learn About the Impact of Choices and Actions Throughout History

On March 5, Grade 6 students at Rondout Valley Intermediate School had the honor of learning about the life of Holocaust survivor Alexander Jacoby through recorded interviews and stories shared by his daughter, Dr. Leslie Green. Dr. Green, an eye surgeon in Orange County, is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors; for this presentation, she focused on her father's story.

Students listened with rapt attention as Dr. Green described her father's experiences. They watched videos in which Mr. Jacoby recounted his life before his homeland of Czechoslovakia was invaded, and answered questions about his attempts to flee, as well as his eventual imprisonment in slave labor and concentration camps. He was in a coma by the time World War II ended in Europe and was liberated by Allied forces.

"A person is a person and shouldn't think they are a better race than others—we are all people," was the message Mr. Jacoby shared in his videos.

This important lesson was part of a unit titled "Beliefs, Freedoms, and Rights," in which students spent time learning about the Revolutionary War and the Bill of Rights, as well as exploring the five major world religions. Finally, students examined the events that led to the Holocaust.

In addition to Dr. Green's presentation, Grade 6 Social Studies teacher Lora Kishel hosted a workshop titled "Humans in Need – The Courage to Act." Kishel explained, "During this culminating activity, students learned about individuals who fought back against hate, evaluated the choices people made as bystanders, upstanders, and perpetrators, and drew conclusions about what the Holocaust teaches us regarding the impact of our choices and actions."

SUCCESSFUL SEASON FOR INDOOR TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES





Following a successful Divisional meet, where the Girls Track and Field team defended their crown and the Boys Track and Field team captured their second-ever championship title, the athletes returned to the United States Military Academy at West Point for the Sectional tournament, where both teams delivered record-breaking performances.

In addition, the Girls team claimed the 2026 Sectional Championship—securing points in 12 out of 17 total events. Their excellence was particularly evident on the track, where they picked up points in every single running event.

The Rondout Valley female distance runners anchored the team standings, led by several top-three finishes: Madison Shanley (first place, 600m and third place, 300m); Beatrice Wilhelm (second place, Race Walk); Shawna Whittaker (second place, 55m Hurdles and third place, 55m Dash); Lola Sherwood (third place, 1500m); Hannah Chapin (third place, 3000m); and River Bauer (third place, High Jump).

In addition, the Girls 4 x 800m Relay team, composed of Hannah Chapin, Lola Sherwood, Gypsy Wish, and Gabby Castro, earned second place overall, contributing vital points to the championship win.

Competing in a massive field of 25 teams, the Boys team earned a fifth place finish. The effort was highlighted by a first place overall finish by the 4 x 400m Relay team of Jacob Kraft, Owen Shaffer-Sermini, Zach Mickelson, and Ethan Allen. Individual medalists included Jacob Kraft (first place, 600m); Owen Shaffer-Sermini (third place, 1000m); and Robert McGrath (third place, High Jump).

Athletes on both Rondout Valley teams came home with new school records. Record breakers included Robert McGrath (High Jump); Shawna Whittaker (55m Hurdles); Owen Shaffer-Sermini (1000m); Hudson Paley (Triple Jump, Tied); Gypsy Wish (1500m); Hannah Chapin (3000m); and the Boys 4 x 400 Relay team of Jacob Kraft, Owen Shaffer-Sermini, Zach Mickelson, and Ethan Allen.

Congratulations are also due to the following athletes, who qualified to compete at the Nike Nationals held at the Armory in New York City on March 12, 13 and 14: Hudson Paley (Triple Jump); Logan Myer (60m Dash); Owen Shaffer-Sermini (1600m); and Josh Friedlander (Middle School Long Jump).



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