
IMPORTANT SCHOOL BUDGET MESSAGE

Pursuant to Executive Order 202.26, Governor Cuomo has established June 9, 2020 as the revised date for the 2020 annual budget vote and board election. Voting will be exclusively by absentee ballot. There will be no in-person voting. If you are a registered voter, an absentee ballot will be sent to you automatically.

The 2020-2021 Blind Brook-Rye School District Budget has been adopted by the Board of Education in the amount of \$50,409,032, an increase of \$4,119,414 or 8.9% over the amount of the 2019-2020 Budget. The major driver of this increase is the need to budget for an additional \$3 million in new construction debt service payments in 2020-2021. This budget provides for a tax levy that is \$106,450 below the maximum allowable tax levy limit for next year.

For the past three months, the Interim Superintendent of Schools and Board of Education have publicly discussed the development of a school district budget for next year. While this is an extraordinary year for budgeting on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and new construction debt service payments starting in 2020-2021, they are pleased to announce that the 2020-2021 Adopted Budget meets the Board's two longstanding budget goals:

- adopt a budget that maintains all core instructional programs and school activities, and
- adopt a budget with a tax levy that is at or below the maximum allowable levy limit.

If the proposed budget adopted by the Board of Education is not approved by District voters on June 9th, the Board would have the option of either resubmitting the original or revised budget for a second vote at a later date*; or the Board may, at that point, adopt a Contingency Budget. If the Board decides to submit either the original or a revised budget to the voters for a second time, and the voters do not approve the second budget submittal, the Board must adopt a Contingency Budget and the 2020-2021 tax levy cannot exceed the total tax levy of the prior year.

If a Contingency Budget were in place for the 2020-2021 school year it would require more than \$3.85 million in expenditure cuts to the Adopted 2020-2021 Budget. To put forth a Contingency Budget with a 0% growth in the tax levy, the District would be forced to reduce the proposed 2020-2021 expenditures by at least \$3.85 million. This would result in devastating cuts to educational programs, athletics and co-curricular activities, and result in the elimination of 35 to 40 positions districtwide.

In summary, the Interim Superintendent of Schools and Board of Education believe the Adopted 2020-2021 Budget will appropriately support the District's educational program ensuring that every student continues to receive an excellent education. It also provides the necessary funding to pay all District financial obligations next year. In the days ahead, Blind Brook residents are encouraged to review the financial plan and ask any questions that may arise. Please feel free to contact the Superintendent of Schools at cbyrne@blindbrook.org, or the District's Business Official at jross@blindbrook.org.

Please remember to mail-in your absentee ballot so that it arrives on or before Tuesday, June 9, 2020.

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INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Colin Byrne

** As of the date this letter was prepared, there was no guidance from New York State as to whether the District would be permitted to have a second vote this year.*

Budget Proposal & Bus Referendum FAQs for June 9th Election

Budget Proposition:

1. **What is the proposed budget for the 2020-21 school year? How much has it increased from last year?**
\$50,409,032, which represents an 8.9% increase from 2019-2020
2. **Doesn't NYS have a 2% tax cap? How can the budget increase by 8.9% year-to-year?**
2% is the starting point for calculating the tax cap, but the actual number can be higher or lower based on certain "growth factors" and exclusions determined by NY state each year.
3. **Is the 2020-21 budget under the tax cap?**
Yes! The budget could have increased by as much as 9.2% this year, so the actual budget is over \$100,000 below the tax cap. This is the 8th year in a row that the District did not exceed the tax cap.
4. **What costs are driving the increase?**
In 2017, voters overwhelmingly approved the District issuing a \$44.7 million bond to fund our much-needed renovations to BMP Ridge Street School and Blind Brook MS/HS. The first \$3 million payment on these bonds comes due next school year.
5. **Are there other factors besides the construction project that impacted the budget?**
Yes. The COVID-19 pandemic created a ripple of events that hit the bottom line of school districts across NY state and the country, all of which directly impact the budget:
 - o **Reductions in state aid due to NY's budget woes**
 - o **Lower Westchester County sales tax revenues**
 - o **Reduced tax revenues collected from local businesses**
 - o **Loss of revenue from groups renting school facilities**
 - o **Lower interest rates and stock market declines**
6. **What would happen if the budget proposal for next year were to fail?**
The Board of Education would consider additional cuts and re-submit the budget for a second vote.
7. **What would happen if the budget revote were to fail?**
The District would be required by law to adopt a "contingency budget" at a flat amount against the 2019-2020 school year, resulting in nearly \$4 million in devastating cuts. A reduction of this magnitude would be unprecedented and would impact every facet of operations across Blind Brook's schools.

8. What are some examples of programs and personnel that would be cut under a contingency budget?

In order for the District to find these massive savings, the following is likely:

- o Cuts of up to 35-40 administrators, teachers and staff
- o Elimination of academic programs
- o Increased class sizes
- o Elimination of all athletics programs
- o No clubs and co-curricular activities

9. Should community members without children currently attending Blind Brook public schools be concerned about these potential cuts?

Absolutely. Our outstanding school system is foundational to Rye Brook's identity and serves as a primary driver to attract new families to our community. If the District must operate under these restraints, there will be an immediate, drastic impact on the quality of education provided by the District, which impacts the reputation of the Village. This in turn could directly impact property values.

Bus Referendum:

1. Why does the district need new buses?

The District had two school buses taken out of service since last December as a result of catastrophic engine damage and whose repair costs would be much more than the present value of the buses. The buses need to be replaced to maintain an adequate number of buses available to transport students to in-district schools each day and to handle all athletic bus trips throughout the year.

2. Can the district wait until next year before purchasing new buses?

No, it is too risky to do this. The buses need to be purchased now to meet existing school transportation requirements. It is important to note that because of the overall age of the Blind Brook fleet, two school buses will need to be purchased each year for the next four years.

3. Would it be more cost effective to hire an outside company to provide district transportation than to operate its own fleet of buses?

It is more cost effective for Blind Brook to own and operate its own fleet than to contract out with a private bus company. Blind Brook has safe and very reliable school bus drivers who also serve as maintainers of its buildings and grounds. For decades, the high quality of services provided by these District employees in this hybrid role have been invaluable. Additionally, Blind Brook school buses are inspected and maintained in a cost effective manner by the Southern Westchester BOCES at its Cooperative Bus Maintenance Garage.

4. If the referendum to buy new buses were to fail how would the district manage? Would the alternative be more or less costly than if the referendum were to pass?

The Superintendent of Schools is likely to request that the Board of Education pass an emergency resolution authorizing the purchase of two school buses using funds from the District's unassigned fund balance. The use of fund balance would not cost taxpayers anything in the short-term but reduces the Board's flexibility in the event of future needs. The referendum provides for financing the two 72-passenger school buses over five years at an annual cost of \$46,985 in principal and interest payments.

5. Other than to provide transportation to and from school, what will these new buses be used for?

They will be used for academic field trip transportation and athletic trip transportation throughout the school year. They may also be used to transport students who attend out-of-district schools.

6. Does the Board of Education have the option to eliminate busing altogether?

The Board of Education does not have this option. Education Law requires that non-city school districts provide transportation for all children in grades K-8 who live more than two miles from the school they legally attend and for all children in grades 9-12 who live more than three miles from the school they legally attend, up to a distance of 15 miles. Transportation for distances outside the mandated limits must be approved by the voters of the district. In May 2004, Blind Brook voters authorized limits for grade K-5 students who live more than .75 miles from school and for grade 6-12 students who live more than 1.5 miles from school. Changing these eligibility limits would require voter approval once again.