



New Jersey School Boards Association

Strategies for the Proposed School Budget

Annual School Election • Tuesday, April 17

2007 BRINGS CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT SCHOOL BUDGETS

- Pending legislation will place a 4 percent cap on the local school property tax levy, beginning with proposed 2007-2008 budgets.
- This differs from past practice when the *entire* budget – those parts funded through state aid, federal aid and the local property tax – was capped.
- The new type of cap will give local school boards less flexibility in dealing with increased costs, maintaining existing programs or establishing needed programs.
- The legislation that creates the 4 percent tax cap (A-1) includes additional changes in how school districts develop their budgets. Some of these changes have an impact on 2007-2008 budgets; others will affect future years' budgets.
- Even though A-1 is not yet law, the state Department of Education based its 2007-2008 budget guidelines on the legislation.
- For more information about A-1, visit the Tax Cap Resource Page. The page includes a video presentation by NJSBA's experts on the impact of the property tax cap.

NJSBA offers this reference to help school board members communicate about their budgets.

1. HOW TO EXPLAIN THE PROPOSED BUDGET

Program reductions:

- How the board reached its decision.
- Why only certain programs may be considered for reduction.
- Savings to be realized.
- What the district is losing.

Staff reductions:

- How the board reached its decision.
- Connection between staff cuts and program reductions.
- The impact on class sizes.
- Cost savings.

Elimination of maintenance/capital projects:

- How the decision was reached.
- Impact of delaying such projects.
- Savings that will result.

Program additions:

- How the board reached its decision.
- Other changes, if any, needed to make program additions possible.
- How program additions are possible in light of budgetary constraints.
- Potential benefits of new program(s).

2. IMPORTANT POINTS TO MAKE ABOUT THE BUDGET

State aid:

- What, if any, increase the district received.
- How the change in aid was determined.
- Any increase in state aid follows several years of flat funding. Due to the new tax cap and limitations on cap adjustments, aid increase will not necessarily avert cuts.

Second ballot questions:

- How the board reached its decision to ask voters to approve a second question.
- Voter approval dedicates the proposed funds to the specific item(s) listed in the second question
- Defeated second questions are reviewed by the municipal governing body. There is no further appeal.

REMINDER:

Second ballot questions must include additional wording if the proposed expenditure would affect budgets in future years.

3. STRATEGIES TO DELIVER THE BOARD'S MESSAGE

Printed Materials:

- Distribute newsletters to all constituents.
- Share information with local newspapers.
- Send letters and/or flyers to remind citizens of polling date, times and locations

Web site:

- Provide budget facts.
- Link to www.njsba.org for Property Tax Cap information.
- List polling date, times and locations.
- Post absentee ballot request form and the deadline (April 10) for applying for absentee ballots.

Direct outreach:

- Meet with local governing body to explain the budget.
- Schedule budget presentation for district staff.
- Present budget facts to community groups.
- Establish telephone hotline for citizens to ask questions about budget.
- Develop a phone chain to encourage voting.
- Distribute a list of Frequently Asked Questions about the budget.

REMINDER:

Taxpayer dollars may not be spent for the production or distribution of materials that urge people to vote yes or no on the proposed school budget or second questions.

Additional guidance is available through your NJSBA Field Service Representative (FSR). For contact information, visit www.njsba.org/Field_Services. At the top of the page, go to the icon for your region (north, central or south).

March 29, 2007