

Day to support education

By TU Editorial Board on May 17, 2016 at 3:08 AM



Taxpayers unhappy about high property taxes sometimes voice their anger by voting¹ against their local school budget. This year, it looks like that tactic would be a big mistake.

As voters across the Capital Region go to the polls Tuesday to decide the fate of school budgets and choose members of the local boards of education, they will find tax increases held below the rigid state tax cap. In many cases, area residents will feel no tax increase at all; a few will see a drop in their local tax levy – the amount of school dollars raised from local property taxes.

The simple explanation is that this year's state budget includes increased aid for nearly all districts, with the largest hikes going to the financially stressed urban school systems. For example, taxpayers in the City School District of Albany, which has faced chronic fiscal challenges, will see no tax hike, though spending in the proposed budget is up 4.5 percent. Troy and Schenectady will benefit from similar healthy hikes in state aid.

Another change this year is the end of a choking constriction known as Gap Elimination Adjustment – basically a cut in state aid dating from 2008, when the state tapped school funds to offset recession-era revenue gaps. The GEA, alongside the statewide property tax cap Gov. Andrew Cuomo pushed through in 2011 – tightly limiting increases in local tax levies – has translated into years of struggles. Many districts also faced enrollment drops and rising personnel costs in the forms of higher health insurance, pension and salary costs. Services for children with special educational needs have also put an increasing strain on local education budgets.

Now, after years of struggles, the improved state economy is finally beginning to filter down to the local schools, offering districts a chance to join in the recovery.

Overall school spending in 669 districts across New York will increase just 2.2 percent this coming year, according to the New York State Association of School Business Officials – a reflection of local school boards and administrators watching out for taxpayers while still trying to meet the educational needs of children.

That's not to suggest these are easy times for local school districts, especially in low-income districts that face extra challenges stemming from poverty in the community. There's always more to be done.

But spending on education unquestionably remains one of the best investments we can make. In the short term, increased resources mean improved opportunities for children. In the long term, it can be the difference between a thriving society or a bleak future.

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Mark says:

May 17, 2016 at 5:46 am

Same old Albany.....

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RM: Likely there will be changes to the nominating process by both parties!

Mr. Trump, party crasher (54)

Troy Taxpayer: No arguments there Albert. I was specifically referring to Trumps absurd statements that Mexico was...

Troy Taxpayer: The error people are making here, on all sides is attempting to give credit to the executive branch...

ReepDaggle: Thank you for that. A good read, made better by its brevity, and generally supportive of what I said....

Let everyone use the same bathroom (20)

O.O.D.: "As for Planned Parenthood and it's money making baby parts harvesting efforts..." Keep...

U.S. routinely kills national mammal (1)

Randdy: The same is done with wild horses- mustangs. All done by the Bureau of Land Management at the bidding of...

Day to support education (1)

Mark: Same old Albany..... 230;.....

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