



Residents vote on Williamsville Central budget at Williamsville North High School May 17. (John Hickey/Buffalo News)

Close to 100 percent passage rate for school budgets

By Barbara O'Brien

News Staff Reporter

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The passing rate for school district budgets in New York was 99 percent this year.

That's the highest rate since 1969, which is when the New York State School Boards Association started keeping track.

And while the passing rate is going up, the number of people coming out to vote is going down.

There were about 982,000 residents voting on school budgets in 2010. This year, there were about 578,000, a drop of 41 percent, according to the New York State Association of School Business Officials, which analyzed state Education Department data.

Voter participation was going down, and that downswing continued after the implementation of the tax cap in 2012.

When voters came out this year, they defeated just 10 of the budgets in 672 school districts on the first vote in May. Six of those passed on a revote, according to the business officials association.

That continues a trend of over 90 percent passage that started in the recession. Thirty-six districts sought to override their tax caps this year, in part because the tax cap was so low. A number of districts had negative tax caps, which meant to have their budgets pass with a simple majority, they had to raise less money than last year.

West Valley Central in Cattaraugus County was the only district in the state to elect to go to a contingent budget after its spending plan was defeated May 17. Nine other districts went for the revote, and three were defeated a second time, requiring a contingent budget.

“This year’s near-zero tax cap forced districts to seek overrides just to make minimal levy increases, or even to avoid a negative tax cap,” Executive Director Michael Borges said. “Districts should not have to achieve supermajority approval to meet such modest requests.”

The association has called on the state to make the tax cap a flat 2 percent, with a floor of zero, so no district has to deal with a negative tax cap.