

# Schools: \$15/hour would affect 6,000+ workers at \$24.8M



Todd Clausen, @ToddJClausen 5:30 p.m. EDT March 29, 2016



(Photo: CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

School taxes would go up significantly and force many districts to present budgets exceeding the so-called property tax cap if state lawmakers approve a minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour, according to leaders of various Monroe County school districts.

Such a measure — pushed heavily by Gov. Andrew Cuomo as part of the state budget negotiations — would increase the minimum wage through several incremental steps upstate by July 2021, and much more quickly downstate.

"What (Cuomo) doesn't understand is the domino effect of this type of decision," said Kimberle Ward, superintendent at Gates Chili Central School District. "Quite frankly, we can't go there. We would not be able to afford that and it would be a terrible burden on our taxpayers."



[ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE](#)

[NY nears deal on \\$15 wage, paid leave](#)

[\(http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/03/29/ny-nears-deal-15-wage-paid-leave/82390860/\)](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/03/29/ny-nears-deal-15-wage-paid-leave/82390860/)

The measure has been widely criticized because of fears of job cuts and price increases in the private sector. It has drawn opposition from farmers, business groups, nonprofits and Republicans in the state Senate vowing to block the increase in the state Legislature.

School districts are concerned about how increased labor costs might force them to cut programs, jobs or both. School leaders started studying the issue after the \$15 an hour wage was approved last year for fast food workers of large chain restaurants.

Nearly 20 Monroe County school districts, in addition to Monroe No. 1 and Monroe No. 2 BOCES, said going to \$15 an hour would affect roughly 6,050 workers at a cost of nearly \$24.8 million. Clerical, custodial/maintenance personnel, food service workers, teacher aides/paraprofessionals, bus drivers and attendants and per diem substitutes would all be affected by the minimum wage increase.



Kimberle Ward (Photo: Provided)

Ward said without a corresponding state aid increase to cover higher labor costs — which has not been publicly proposed in the Legislature — school districts would be forced to make tough program cuts while presenting budgets to voters above the state-imposed property tax cap.

Budgets with spending increases above the cap, which is 0.12 percent for schools this upcoming fiscal year, must receive at least a 60 percent approval rate from voters. Homeowners in school districts and municipalities under the tax cap are eligible for tax rebate checks, with [about 2 million New Yorkers having received checks ranging from \\$200 to \\$800 in recent months.](#) ([/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/03/11/awaiting-rebate-check-stay-calm-state-says/81659832/](#))



[ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE](#)

[Is raising minimum wage to \\$15 a good idea?](#)

[\(http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/03/12/raising-minimum-wage-15-good-idea/81637708/\)](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/opinion/editorials/2016/03/12/raising-minimum-wage-15-good-idea/81637708/)

Cuomo has repeatedly pressed for a higher minimum wage to help pull people out of poverty and off public assistance. Cuomo has said [2.3 million workers would earn higher wages \(/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/02/10/cuomos-report-tries-build-support-15-wage/80187838/\)](#) as a result, with about 220,000 of those people currently earning less than \$15 an hour in the Finger Lakes area.

"What were they expecting, that there would be no increased costs for labor?" Cuomo said recently during a meeting with the *Democrat and Chronicle* Editorial Board. "There have been eight minimum wage increases over the past two decades; it has never done a pass-along financing for every wage increase.

"If this posed hardships, then it would have to be something we would take a look at."

## Statewide impact

Local school districts began tabulating the impact of going to a \$15 an hour minimum wage last year after the state Association of School Business Officials, a group of business and finance officers at school districts, started to examine the issue.

Roughly 330 school districts and BOCES' organizations out of approximately 700 such agencies across the state responded to the association's anonymous survey.

The measure would change the hourly pay of 33,422 school workers and cost the responding districts about \$102.2 million in new wages, a figure that could balloon much higher when considering the impact for all districts, said Michael Borges, executive director of the association.

If school districts went to \$15 now, the average tax levy increase of those surveyed would be 2.6 percent, he added.



[ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE](#)

[Cuomo's \\$15 wage push scaring nonprofits](#)

[\(http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2016/03/10/cuomos-15-wage-push-scaring-nonprofits/81474352/\)](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2016/03/10/cuomos-15-wage-push-scaring-nonprofits/81474352/)

"The impact is unequal (but) it is going to be significant," Borges said. "It's hard to pin down an exact number, but there is a big differential between upstate and downstate. Downstate, Long Island, the Westchester (and) Rockland areas, most staff make at least the \$15 already. As you go upstate, especially in more rural areas, the impact will be more."

Under Cuomo's current proposal, the minimum wage would increase by roughly \$1 an hour each year until it reaches \$15, spreading the impact over approximately five years in upstate. It is currently \$9 an hour.

"Some people wouldn't get a raise the first year or the second year, well in year three people will start to get a raise," said Cuomo. "What were the school districts planning, that they were going to give no raise ever? They had to take in an expectation of a raise. They are paying teachers, historically, 5 (percent) to 6 percent more every year."



"We get that the impact wouldn't come all at once, but you are still talking about incremental increases for all those different units in order to account for the possibility for that," said Sherry Johnson, executive director of the Monroe County School Boards Association. "I think schools are pretty lean already and I think this is going to be an added issue. You've got to let us make the right decisions on the local level, and basically our hands are tied right now."

**Sherry Johnson** (Photo: Provided)



Beth Wainwright of Gates, working for the past year as a substitute at Gates-Chili High School, fills portions of tortilla chips for the first lunch shifts. Beth Wainwright of Gates, working for the past year as a substitute at Gates Chili High School, fills portions of tortilla chips for the first lunch shifts. "It's a good job to have as a mother," said Wainwright, who has a daughter at Paul Road Elementary School. (Photo: CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

## Local numbers

The number of school workers impacted by an increase in the minimum wage varies by district in Monroe County, according to information collected by Monroe No. 1 BOCES and the Monroe County School Boards Association. The Rochester School District did not participate in the survey.

An increase would impact 450 workers at Rush-Henrietta at a cost of about \$2 million, and increase pay for 550 workers in both the Webster and Brockport school districts, resulting in \$1 million in additional labor costs at Webster and about \$1.24 million more for Brockport.



[ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE](#)

[\\$15 wage may get slower upstate start](#)

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/03/28/15-wage-may-get-slower-upstate-start/82344814/>

The Greece school district said raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would boost pay to 800 workers and cost nearly \$3.8 million. Its tax levy, if the minimum wage went into effect tomorrow, would increase by 3.6 percent. The district has about 3,100 workers overall and a budget of roughly \$217 million, said Romeo Colilli, assistant superintendent of finance and administrative services.

The average pay of those workers in Greece earning less than \$15 is \$11.50 an hour, Colilli said.



[ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE](#)

[Clausen: \\$15, one way or the other](#)

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/money/business/2016/03/18/clausen-15-come-hell-high-water/81790442/>

Colilli said bringing everyone up to an annual salary of \$31,200, based on a 52-week, 40-hour workweek, would force the district to look hard at the salaries of an additional 310 workers who make just above that \$15-an-hour mark.

"I've been here seven or eight years and I'm at \$15, so now what do you do?" said Colilli. "I'm a new teacher making \$35,000. I've gone through all the education requirements. You've got this individual coming in at (about) \$31,000. I'm only making a few thousand more. You've got salaried people that haven't weighed in yet, saying, 'OK, wait a minute.'

"You can see how that would all pan out."

It could force the district to reopen contract negotiations with some of those groups, Colilli said. Regardless, bumping the pay of those 310 employees would add an additional \$2.1 million in labor costs, he added.



Gov. Andrew Cuomo (Photo: Mary Altaffer, AP)

Cuomo said the schools would be given time to adjust to increases in the minimum wage with his plan to phase in the \$15 an hour wage over five years.

"It sounds like you are saying 800 people will get a raise in the first year. That is not a fact," Cuomo said. "How many years before they will even be affected? That depends on what the phase-in schedule of the raise is."

In upstate, the minimum wage for fast food workers would go up to \$10.75 on Dec. 31, 2016; \$11.75 on Dec. 31, 2017; \$12.75 on Dec. 31, 2018; \$13.75 on Dec. 31, 2019; \$14.50 on Dec. 31, 2020; and to \$15 on July 1, 2021. A similar schedule is expected for schools.



ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Top earners in NY state government up 8%

(<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/local/2016/01/29/new-york-state-salaries-top-earners-union-suny/79525982/>)

## Workers on board

Union groups, fast food workers and their supporters gained the attention of Cuomo in recent years through a variety of protests across the state. He decided to appoint a three-person wage board when he was unable to get the state Legislature to approve a higher all-encompassing minimum wage.

The board eventually recommended a \$15 minimum wage for fast food workers, adding that a boost in the minimum wage would help lower dependence on public assistance programs. It was also a way to bridge a huge pay inequality among rank-and-file workers and their Fortune 500 CEOs.

Workers have lauded that increase, saying it will help them support their families and provide a needed boost. Several attempts to contact school workers at multiple districts in Monroe County for comment for this story were unsuccessful.

CSEA Monroe County Local 828 represents about 3,500 workers at 21 different public agencies throughout Monroe County, including Gates Chili, East Rochester and East Irondequoit schools. CSEA negotiates on behalf of represented and non-represented workers in districts outside Monroe County too.



ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Cuomo: Minimum wage boost about 'dignity and justice'

(<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/03/15/cuomo-minimum-wage-boost-dignity-and-justice/81823626/>)

"You would think anybody who wants to work full time would have the ability to at least raise a family and take care of their bills," said Ove Overmyer, a spokesman for the local CSEA unit. "The fact of the matter is that is not happening, especially in school districts and other public entities.

"Someone is going to pay ... whether it is through the employer or our taxes. It's going to happen."

Districts and workers could find out soon, with Cuomo and the state Legislature trying to finalize the state budget by Friday. Cuomo has been trying to get a higher minimum wage approved through the budget process, but also said recently that he could appoint industry-specific wage boards to settle the matter.

"We have one proposal downstate and we have one proposal upstate," Cuomo said. "We are very sensitive to the economic impact on upstate New York. Where it comes out with the Legislature is anyone's guess."

*TCLAUSEN@Gannett.com*

## **Key Findings**

- Monroe County school districts fear a tough road ahead if the minimum wage is increased to \$15 an hour for all workers in New York state.
- Bringing everyone up to \$15 an hour would affect roughly 6,050 school workers at a cost of nearly \$24.8 million, according to the Monroe County School Boards Association and information supplied by Monroe No. 1 BOCES.
- Greece Central School District said it would cost roughly \$3.8 million to bring 800 workers to \$15 an hour. An additional 310 workers making slightly more than \$15 now may also see a pay hike.
- Almost 290 people would be affected at the Pittsford Central School District, where the cost increase has been estimated at \$582,000.
- Clerical, custodial and food service workers, teacher aides, bus drivers and others would receive a bump in pay, according to school districts.

Read or Share this story: <http://on.rocne.ws/1MQJtVk>