

Report shows sharp decline in turnout for school budget votes

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ALBANY - Turnout for school budget votes has decreased by nearly 50 percent in the last six years, according to a report released Monday by the New York State Association of School Business Officials.

According to the report, 578,000 voters cast ballots in last month's school budget elections, compared to 982,000 in 2010. The decrease intensified with the implementation in 2012 of a 2 percent cap on property tax levy increases, the report said.

At the same time, voter approval of school budgets has remained above 99 percent since the 2014-15 school year, according to the report. This year, 99.4 percent of proposed budgets for the 2016-17 school year passed, the report found.

The number of districts attempting to override the state cap rose to 36 this year compared to 19 in 2015, according to the data. The tax cap was set at 0.12 percent for the 2016-17 school year, driven below the normal 2 percent by the minimal rate of inflation. The cap varies by district, with some districts' caps falling below what was levied last year, meaning they faced a negative cap.

In all, 86 districts faced a negative cap. Of those, 19 sought an override, the majority of which were successful. Overriding the cap requires a supermajority, or 60-percent approval.

In its report, the school business officials continued to push for changes in the property tax cap law that would prevent negative caps, saying it would allow for "more reasonable tax levies" that will "more adequately support education without overburdening tax payers."

Though the majority of budgets passed in May, eight were defeated. When that happens, districts can revise their spending plans and hold another vote in June.

Of the eight districts where budgets were defeated, Canaserga (which had a negative cap), Elwood and Highland districts proposed second budgets that came in under the cap and passed earlier this month. Brockport schools presented the same budget, which was under the cap, and it passed as well.

The Florida (which had a negative cap), Tuckahoe Common and Waverly districts, all of which were attempting to override the cap, saw their budgets defeated in May and again this month.

Read the full report here: <http://bit.ly/2964X74>.