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SCHOOLS PLAN TO SPEND AT TWICE INFLATION RATE

Fueled by an increase in state aid and higher property taxes, the 669 school districts subject to New York’s property tax levy cap plan to spend 2.8 percent more per student in 2016-17 than they did this year, according to an analysis released today by the Empire Center for Public Policy. Per-pupil tax levies, meanwhile, would increase by an average of 1.3 percent.

The increase will bring the average per-pupil spending for the districts to $24,103, with the highest spending on Long Island at $27,454 and the average in each region of the state exceeding $20,000 per pupil, according to the Empire Center’s analysis of new data from the annual School Property Tax Report Card compiled by the state Department of Education.

The highest regional increase in per-pupil spending is being proposed in the Finger Lakes at 3.7 percent, while the lowest is in the North Country at 2.1 percent. Each region’s planned spending growth exceeds the 1.3 percent inflation rate most recently projected by the Division of the Budget for the state’s 2016-17 fiscal year.

Tim Hoefer, executive director of the Empire Center, noted that the data again project a decrease of 0.6 percent in enrollment. Less than one-third of districts projected any enrollment gain in 2016-17.

“We’ve been publishing the Spotlight since 2008, and we’ve only seen school spending go one way — up,” said Hoefer. “Governor Cuomo and state lawmakers have recognized that property taxes are contributing to the state’s poor business climate. But until the state fixes the mandates that drive up local taxes and spending, this trend is going to continue.”

Thirty-six districts plan to seek tax cap overrides on May 17, but 337 — more than half — will come within $100 of their tax caps, an indication of the tax cap’s effectiveness at slowing the growth of school taxes.

The School Budget Spotlight is the only statewide report focused on enrollment-adjusted changes in budgets proposed by districts that have submitted data for the State Education Department’s (SED) annual school property tax report cards.

The Spotlight provides per-pupil proposed school spending and tax measures for every district in the state as reported to SED, arranged by county and summarized by region.

The Empire Center, based in Albany, is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to promoting policies to make New York a better place to live, work and do business.

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