

### **How Does the Spending Cap Affect your School Budget?**

**Principals: Please write briefly and specifically how Act 46 Spending Cap (Annual Growth Percentage) has affected your budget this year. What adjustments have you had to make to come under the cap? What have you cut? How will these cuts affect the quality of education in your school? Would you favor delay or repeal? Any comments you could share would be helpful.**

**Springfield High School, Bob Thibault:** We had to reduce a world language (French) and part of an instructional coach (a component we feel has been integral to our improvement over the past several years.)

**Lamoille Union High School, Brian Schaffer:** We are faced with reducing elective offerings for all students, increasing general class sizes, and limiting direct supports to students. The act 46 threshold discussion is surely warranted and has forced a closer inspection of our spending, but at time when we are moving towards raising post-secondary aspirations and installing PBGR, it is unnerving to think how debilitating these cuts will be. The spending cap will have a detrimental affect on the quality of education in our school. I would strongly encourage our legislature to delay or repeal this seemingly arbitrary structure.

**Ludlow Elementary School, Karen Trimboli:** I had to reduce both art and music FTE to .4 and cut mental health clinician completely, reduced school counselors FTE to .6, cut a .5 custodian, reduced IT FTE to .8, reduces k-6 remedial math teacher's FTE to .5, cut individual classroom budget to \$0.00, cut all dues fees (NCTM, NELM, VPA, NGSS, etc,) cut fuel budget, roof fund, all professional development dollars, all food and refreshments, cut extra curriculum...thespian club and cross country, cut technology equipment to gear to 1:1 and replacement computers, etc. by \$19,000, cut stipend out for assistant principal, and cut \$20,000 for new math curriculum and training to align with CCSS. These reductions and cuts are direct result of Act 46. The faculty and staff are willing to roll-up sleeves to meet this challenge and do our best for our students. With the population (58%) FRL and a high rate of students in need of educational service, these cuts will definitely impact instruction and support accommodations.

**Peacham Elementary School, Judy Ross:** Our board is considering eliminating foreign language and a half-time ELA intervention specialist. My position will most likely become a 50/50 Teaching Principal (from the current 80/20) to pick up the slack left

including student access to our libraries, access to reliable tech devices. Teacher demands will increase as support staff are reduced. This component of the legislation has placed significant strains on the process of responsibly crafting a student-centered school budget. I would be in favor of a delay or repeal of this part of the law.

**Mill River UHS, Andy Pomeroy:** We have cut \$426K and are still \$260K over the cap. We have eliminated positions in Math, Social Studies, English, Science. We have reduced positions in TechEd and Family and Consumer Science. We have eliminated our 7/8 summer school program. We cut \$41,000 in departmental supplies. We are able to stay over the cap because we are hoping that our SU merger vote goes through. The merger removes the cap and provides a tax break. At this point, neither a delay nor a repeal will help much as the Board intends to approve a budget tomorrow, 1/6.

**Middlebury Union High School, Bill Lawson:** At UD#3 we could grow by .71 while having an approximate 3% inflation from prior contract settlement. We were ok due to a large number of retirees last year and conservative hiring patterns for this year. We are just under the cap. We are adopting a budget tonight so any action will be too late for this year. However next year will be tougher for us as I will not have that cushion and our count equalized student count will decrease. Once again basing budget growth on per pupil spending is folly—having class size go from 24 to 20 provides minute savings.

**Hartland Elementary School (K-8), Jeff Moreno**

Due to a significant enrollment increase our per pupil expenditures dropped almost \$1000/student. We could spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and still be below the cap. We are already on the high end for per pupil spending...but because of enrollment increasing we are now out of hot water. The system seems to be based on the wrong thing. Since the equalized pupil numbers don't come out until December we anticipated Armageddon and cut almost \$300,000 from our budget and exhausted a reserve fund to stay under the cap (ours was .93%) only to find out we had plenty of room. My biggest beef with the cap is that our SU assessment went up over .5M and we were faced with gutting the K-8 budget to stay under the cap. We were very lucky that our equalized pupils number came back so favorably otherwise we would have been looking at cutting a total of nearly .75M just to maintain the same budget from one year to the next. I'd rather see the system be responsive to how special education (which is legislated) impacts our budgets.

**Bellows Free Academy (St. Albans) Chris Mosca:** We will likely have to reduce about 400K due to the cap. This will result in the potential loss of 6-8 teaching positions and or

**Rutland Town School, Aaron Boynton:** Here at Rutland Town School we face having to cut teachers. We have a reduction of supplies across the board, para-educators, and a cut of a science coach in our first draft budget. We have 52K to still cut to meet the threshold. Cutting more staff is all that we can really do. It is not a good situation for what we need to increase student outcomes.

**Vergennes Union HS, Stephanie Taylor (from a letter to her legislators)**

I am writing to lend my voice to the chorus of concern over the Act 46 spending caps. I hope that hearing directly about the impact that the penalties will have on the programs at the high school that serves the students in your districts will influence you to act to temper the impact of this legislation.

Four years ago I was an administrator at another VT high school following the work of VUHS teacher leaders as they led the state in development of Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements. This work was groundbreaking, visionary and transformative. Act 77 and the Educational Quality Standards are directly influenced by the work developed by VUHS teacher leaders. When an opening on the administrative team at VUHS became available, I jumped at the chance to be part of this exciting work. I mention this to demonstrate my commitment to this school community and its efforts towards transforming education for the students in Vergennes, Ferrisburgh, Waltham, Panton and Addison.

While I am absolutely committed to supporting the students and school communities served by VUHS, I also understand the financial constraints that our taxpayers are under. Over the last two years, recognizing that we had a declining student enrollment that had not been addressed and faced with financial difficulties and deficit spending in previous budgets, we have reduced faculty and staff by more than 11 FTEs but worked to maintain the Walden program, extra-curriculars and athletics, the music program and enough staffing to support independent learning opportunities included in our Community Based Learning program. These programs enable VUHS to meet the tenets of flexible pathways and encourage students to engage in personalized learning. This year, even with health care increases of 7.9% and contractually obligated salary increases, the VUHS expenditure budget, which encompasses salaries, benefits, department level supply requests, and day-to-day operating expenses, as well as assessments from ANWSU for transportation, special education and central office services, was well within the spending caps, and represented a reduction over last year's budget. Regardless, because our anticipated revenues are as much as \$800,000.00 lower than last year and our equalized student count is down by slightly

present 2 proposals: a Level Budget and one designed to address the Act 46 Caps. My initial proposal was over \$33,000 dollars less compared to expenditures in the previous year in areas of supplies, dues & fees, books & periodicals, equipment, and software. Some items also had been moved to be part of the ANWSU assessment line such as the copier lease rate, and both the FAST and SRI assessment costs. As you may remember, special education expenses and transportation also was moved last year, as well as some of our Internet costs which are shared among the schools in the district. Unfortunately, when adding the mandated salary increases and the health insurance costs, my budget resulted in a little over a 2.5% increase. Under normal years, this budget would be easily accepted, however we are facing new challenges presented under the Act 46 Allowable Growth Rate, a.k.a. the Spending Cap. To create a level budget, additional cuts and changes were required. We are suggesting not hiring to replace a teacher who is retiring, but instead using one of the math specialists to return to the classroom and moving the math lab paraeducator back to Special Education. This would decimate the new math lab that has been created this year, leaving only one educator available again for supplemental math instruction. Additional cuts in supplies were also made. Clearly, we will we need to rethink supplemental services for math, and possibly for literacy as well.

To create a budget that met the Allowable Growth Rate, much more severe cuts have been recommended. These include: eliminating both soccer and basketball, and associated expenses related to extracurriculars; eliminating all field trips; eliminating the budget for homeless transportation reimbursement as this is extremely difficult to project from one year to the next (ranging in the last few years from a little over \$500 to a high of nearly \$7,000); cutting all supplies for general instruction to only half the amount which would need to be devoted to only the consumable workbooks required with Foundations and the math programs; eliminating anticipated spending for non-special education evaluations; reducing the amount available for new book purchases and equipment in the library; eliminating travel and conference expenses in the Principal's Office; eliminating expenses related to 2 Crossing Guards; and reducing or eliminating completely the Receptionist position.

**Hyde Park Elementary School, Diane Reilly:** We had to use 100% of our fund balance from last year, these funds would have been used on our urgent facility needs. If a facility emergency occurs (which is likely as our building is in great need of repair), we will have to take out an unplanned loan that could substantially impact any current or future budget. In addition, we have staff that are taking a leave of absence for one year.

instructional areas and diminish our capabilities to ensure an equitable educational experience based on arbitrary spending limits.

**Lake Region Union High School, Andre Messier:** We have not had to eliminate or reduce services. Our Board approved budget has a Total Ed spending which will be approximately 3.5% below the cap %. This is largely due to two reasons: an unanticipated surplus of \$330,000 and an increase in student population of 25 students over last year and a projected increase of another 25 for next year. We understand that we are an abnormality in our situation. Without the surplus, we would have had to make reductions in order to stay under the cap. I also would like to continue to advocate for the Ed Committees to look at school choice students and how the receiving school can receive some compensation or at the very least be able to count the students they are educating on their equalized pupil counts when it comes to the spending caps....For the past three years, Lake Region has educated over 20 school choice students annually with no system to recognize that fact.

**Marlboro Elem School (K-8), Francie Marbury:** At last night's board meeting, the board made a preliminary decision to approve a budget that exceeds the cap by 50k. Despite the penalty this will incur, our town tax rate will go down and the board was not prepared to make the severe cuts to our programs that would be required to stay within the cap. If the cuts had been made, they would result in the loss of our Spanish, artist in residence, and after school programs and reductions in staffing of .2 FTE, in custodial time, and in budgets for technology and other instructional materials. These cuts would decimate the program that has repeatedly received high marks from the community. Some might call this enrichment. This community sees them as essential. I would favor a repeal of the AGR to give the legislature time to develop a more equitable and better researched approach to cost containment.

**Marion Cross School, Norwich, Bill Hammond:** At present it appears we'll have to cut another \$100,000 to be under the cap. Half of that amount I've offered to cut from art supplies, elective supplies, general school supplies, textbooks, tech equipment, SDC money for teachers and support staff, mentors, assemblies, administration books and software, and building improvements. The other half comes from cutting one teacher in one grade level (which puts class sizes up to 23 and 24). I'd prefer to make decisions based on what would be best for students' learning.

**Fayston Elementary School, Fayston, Jean Berthiaume**

We have had to eliminate a .6 FTE Literacy Teacher/Coach to be under the cap. This position has been an integral part of our MTSS system to support all students and to

**Newton School (K-8), Greg Bagnato:** We are allowed to go up 1.4% per pupil. With 3% salary increases, 7% health insurance increases and more students in High school (where tuition is typically higher than state “average”, this means cuts must be made out of K-8 operations and instruction. With so much attention and energy to the importance of early intervention, this seems to make little sense. We will have one less paraprofessional, 10% across the board cuts on supplies, books, technology (which is inadequate), we are also looking to outsource food service and cut transportation to cut additional costs. On the positive side, our ADM was up a little and we have a substantial tuition reserve fund (for large high school numbers) which will probably be completely spent.

**Ferrisburgh Central School (K-6), JoAnn Taft-Blakely:** In order to reach the cap, I was asked to further reduce a budget that was \$64,142 or 1.79% less than last year’s by another \$168,000. We are a declining enrollment school. Last year I cut three classroom teaching positions and we are just squeaking by in not exceeding our class size policy.

In order to meet the cap, I have a proposed budget that eliminates student supports at all levels. I have eliminated a literacy intervention position who then riffs one of the best and brightest new teachers I have in the building. I have eliminated our enrichment program, a technology teacher position, band as well as all field trip admission and transportation, our morning recess, cafeteria supervision and teacher leader stipends, as well as our meager extracurricular basketball program. Other reductions come from technology equipment, classroom supplies and upgrades to the school for safety concerns, building repairs and not increasing our secretarial support for the school, which was also reduced a few years ago, but there is a new principal coming on board next year and this additional support could be very necessary. .

**Northfield Middle & High School: Ryan Parkman**

I’ll share one way in which the Excess Spending Threshold is not “fair”. Two years ago we had a fund balance and put \$100k toward the upcoming budget to help the taxpayers and tax rate. This lowered our per pupil education spending by close to \$200. Now we do not have a fund balance to bring forward and as a result our per pupil spending appears to be growing “excessively”. We are now faced with spending \$160k in “penalty”. If we are already spending too much in the eyes of the state, why on earth would they make us pay more! Just let the voters decide if the budget is too high. I believe 240 of 253 districts passed their budgets on the first vote last year, so who has the problem with the current level of education spending. (please correct my numbers if anyone has the exact ones)