



GREAT MEADOWS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

MICHAEL MAI

Superintendent of Schools/Director of Special Services

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April 29, 2025

Dear Residents of the Great Meadows Regional School District Community,

On Thursday, May 1, 2025, the GMRSD Board of Education will hold its Budget Hearing for the purpose of adopting its 2025-2026 General Operating Budget. The District recently approved, by a 5-4 vote of the Board, utilizing a Tax Levy Incentive opportunity provided by the State of New Jersey through which the District can increase the Tax Levy beyond the 2% cap without going to a public vote. As this is a polarizing issue, the Board wishes to ensure the residents of Independence and Liberty are informed of the FACTS about this important matter:

Actual Numbers:

2% - Standard School Tax Levy Increase Statutory Limit

1.05% - Banked Cap Additional School Tax Levy Increase

3.45% - BOE Approved Increase Above the Cap limit

6.5% - Total Proposed School Tax Increase for 2025

In Dollars:

\$17,254,700.00 – Proposed 2025 Tax Levy *

\$16,201,597.00 – Actual 2024 Tax Levy

\$1,053,103.00 – 2025 Increase

* This tax Levy does not include the State Aid Contribution and is not reflective of the total school budget.

Background: Governor Murphy in his current budget plan has approved, for certain school districts, the ability to exceed the 2% cap and increase the local tax levy (the amount paid by the local residents of the town) by a maximum of 15%, depending on the district; GMRSD was able to apply for an additional 8.5% increase, of which it requested 3.45%.

SOME IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The BOE and the school administration had already planned their budget around the 3.05% tax levy increase prior to Governor Murphy's offer to increase the tax levy beyond the approved limits. That budget included the elimination of four positions and the reduction of two, and would have brought the total number of staff lost since 2018 to 27.

- Regarding a drop in enrollment and its subsequent impact in State Aid, GMRSD saw its Average Daily Enrollment (ADE) decrease from 714 in 2016-17 to a low of 613 in 2020-21 (a 14% drop).
- As of April 28, 2025, the ADE for Great Meadows Regional is once again 714. Ten percent of this increase is due to expanded preschool, and the remaining four percent is in K-8. During this same time period, State Aid was reduced 67.5%, or \$3.85 million.
- GMRSD's reserve accounts are **NOT** fully funded to their statutory maximum allowed limits. Capital Reserve, *which may be used solely for large-scale facilities work*, is funded to approx. 33% of its maximum allowance and will be lower due to upcoming projects. Maintenance Reserve, *which is often used when major repair work is needed*, is funded to approx. 85% of its maximum allowance. Tuition Reserve is funded at 100 percent annually, *with the funds removed annually to offset some of the tuition paid to Hackettstown High School*. Emergency Reserve has been funded at 100 percent since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Reduction in State Aid has resulted in the loss of 27 staff members (not 27%). Fifteen of the 27 were certificated teaching staff and, as noted above, the decrease in enrollment no longer exists. This has led to increases in class size and decreases in reading proficiency and standardized testing scores.
- The GMRSD per student cost for the original 2024-2025 budget was \$18,902. The average in Warren County schools is \$21,032 per student. GMRSD ranked 19th lowest of the 23 Warren County districts in per pupil spending in the current fiscal year. ****In the GMRSD 24-25 revised budget, as of Feb 1, 2025, the per pupil cost for 2024-2025 is \$17,867.00, which is 22nd lowest out of 23 Warren County districts.**
- The additional 3.45% on the tax levy will increase the per student cost for 2025-26 by \$783.18. Overall, the per-pupil cost in the 2025-2026 Operating Budget is projected (with the levy increase) at \$18,007, which would currently rank 21st out of the 23 Warren County districts.
- With the additional funding, the District will be able to lower class sizes and provide support for academics and students' mental health needs with the following positions:
 - Kindergarten Teacher
 - 2nd Grade Teacher
 - 4th Grade Teacher
 - PE Teacher
 - School Counselor
 - Intervention Teacher
 - Language and Learning Disabilities Teacher
 - Part Time Speech Therapist

As the factual data shows, the Great Meadows Regional School District has been negatively impacted by State Aid cuts in a myriad of ways. It is truly unfortunate that a tax levy increase is the only avenue that Boards of Education across New Jersey are being given to reinstate some of their lost resources. We thank you for your attention and invite you to our Public Meeting on May 1 at 7 p.m.

Sincerely,

Michael Mai
Superintendent
Director of Special Services
Great Meadows Regional School District