



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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NEWSDAY -DOE: Lowest proposed school tax hikes in 15 years

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Excerpt from Newsday article by John Hildebrand - April 26, 2012

Efforts to curb local property taxes are having a dramatic effect on Long Island with state figures released Thursday showing the lowest proposed school district tax hikes in more than 15 years.

School tax levies would rise an average 2.6 percent islandwide during the 2012-13 school year, according to district figures released by the state Department of Education. The increase is the lowest since all districts began holding same-day

budget votes in 1996. School spending on the Island would rise an average 2.29 percent, up slightly from last year's 2.17 percent, but still modest compared with most annual increases since 1996. Both spending and tax figures remain below the inflation rate.

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School taxes account for more than 60 percent of all local property taxes statewide. Nassau and Suffolk rank among the nation's most highly taxed counties, with total property-tax revenues projected for next year at more than \$7.9 billion.

"Taxpayers wanted relief. We gave them relief by passing the cap," said state Senator John Flanagan (R-East Northport), chairman of the Senate Education Committee. "Schools needed relief. We gave them relief by raising state aid. The overwhelming majority of districts are living within the cap, and I think that demonstrates their concern for taxpayers."

Matthew Wing, a spokesman for Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who pushed hard for the new state law that imposes tax-levy limits on districts, said, "For too long, New York homeowners and businesses have been driven from the state by the growing tax burden. But now that the tax cap is in place, we are protecting taxpayers and making our state more attractive for business."

Voters in the Island's 124 public school districts will go to the polls May 15 to decide school budgets, races for board trustees and propositions.

The drive to lessen tax increases showed up across New York's 60 counties: Statewide, school taxes are projected to rise 2.37 percent, according to preliminary figures compiled by the New York State Association of School Business Officials. Statewide spending would increase 1.7 percent, the business group estimated.

Fiscal experts said schools' proposals for lower tax growth were fueled both by the imposition of the new cap and extra state financial aid to districts next year averaging 4 percent. The measures were negotiated by Cuomo and state lawmakers with strong bipartisan support.

Local school officials who have trimmed next year's payrolls to remain within the state's cap expressed mixed feelings about the financial outlook. Some districts have saved money and student services by negotiating lower pay scales with

employee unions; other districts and their unions have remained at loggerheads.

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