

# NWCSD sets expenditure budget and tax levy limit

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Tribune Editor

The ballot is taking shape in the Niagara Wheatfield Central School District for the annual budget vote to be held Tuesday, May 18. The Board of Education recently passed motions setting its expenditure budget for the 2021-22 school year at \$79,222,507, and the tax levy limit to \$34,720,519 – an increase of 1.99% from last year. Both motions were passed unanimously.

Last month, the board also voted to add provisions calling for the establishment of a pair of reserve funds. The board is looking to create a school district transportation capital reserve fund, along with the ability to expend from that fund for the purpose of purchasing maintenance and food service vehicles. Additionally, the district is seeking to authorize the establishment of a school district technology reserve fund to help meet ris-

ing technological needs and demands.

During the budget presentation from the board's April 8 meeting, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Management Allison Davis explained, "The current year budget is being balanced using just over \$2 million in appropriated fund balance: \$800,000 in ERS retirement reserves, \$300,000 in TRS retirement reserves, \$250,000 in workers comp reserves, and \$500,000

in employee benefits reserves. ... It's important to think about, because that number is getting up there now. We want to make sure we have the revenues to support (the budget) moving forward."

Elsewhere, Superintendent Daniel Ljiljanich said he was pleased to announce the New York State Senate and Assembly rejected Gov. Andrew Cuomo's desire to supplement state funding with relief funds from the

federal government. A plan to consolidate expense-aid lines was also rejected.

The district is set to receive approximately \$1.9 million more in total than it would have in the governor's proposed budget. Most of that comes from a \$790,000 increase in foundation aid, \$772,000 in building aid, and a \$125,000 increase to transportation aid.

'In the Loop' with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

## Lew-Port to hold session on school reopening process

BY JODEE RIORDAN

Board of Education President

Since our last edition, things have really progressed on a number of fronts: The state budget was finalized in Albany, and new guidance was (finally) released by the New York State Department of Health, aligning to the updated guidance from the CDC related to social distancing in schools. We have moved quickly to advance both the 2021-22 budget and plans to return students to campus under the new guidance.

Let's get you "In the Loop" on all the developments:

Lewiston-Porter is now moving forward with plans to transition students to a full return to campus. As communicated by Superintendent Paul Casseri on Monday, the New York State Department of Health issued updated school reopening guidance late Friday, based on the information provided by the CDC on March 19. The new guidance allows for schools to reduce social distancing in classrooms to 3 feet without barriers. Mask wearing remains mandated at all times (with specific exceptions, like during meals). The guidance maintains 6 feet of social distancing in most other areas of school buildings, including cafeterias.

For transportation and bus- ing, the new guidance talks about appropriate social distancing and mandatory mask wearing. Prior to making any change to reduce physical distancing to less than 6 feet between students during academic instruction, community input is required and this meeting must be held before any change to the physical distancing in schools can be made. The new plan must then be posted online and sent to local health departments and the state Education Department.

This guidance has been accepted by the Niagara County Department of Health, and we can now move to adopt the new

guidance at the district level. Administration has reviewed the guidance and confirm we can meet all requirements.

The Board of Education met Monday for a busy work session, with a full update and in-depth discussion of school reopening. Classrooms and buildings were prepared over break for a full return and are ready to receive students, and transportation schedules are being finalized.

Superintendent Casseri is advocating that we wait the full two weeks before we make any change in our current student learning models and use Monday, April 26, as our target date for K-5 students. The board fully supports this recommendation. This will allow an opportunity to meet all specific requirements of the new guidance (including an opportunity to gather community input), finalize and communicate transportation schedules, and to closely watch positivity rates.

Given the increasing number of COVID-19-positive students we are seeing each day at all buildings and grade levels (there have been more than 30 positive cases reported since spring break commenced), it is with an abundance of caution that we move forward.

Let's look at each of these key elements: elementary, secondary and community feedback:

- Working within these new guidelines, Lewiston-Porter is looking to bring back students in all elementary grades (K-5) within the next two weeks, with a target date of Monday, April 26. Until that time, Lewiston-Porter will remain in the current learning models. We ask parents to please watch carefully for transportation updates and direct communication from your child's teachers and building principals, and prepare little ones for a five-day per week schedule.

- At the secondary level (middle and high school), the new

guidance specifically requires that 6 feet of social distancing be maintained when (a) community transmission rates at the county level are determined to be "high", according to the CDC website; and (b) If student cohorting is not an option. ("Cohorting" is when groups of students are kept together with the same peers and staff throughout the school day.) Currently on the CDC website, Niagara County is listed as having a high transmission rate. Students at the middle and high school are not cohorting, and moving to student cohorting is not an option at our middle and high school at this time. Moving to this model would require completely new master schedules at both levels, and that would be impossible this late in the school year. At this time, we are not considering any change to the current learning models or schedules at the secondary level (middle and high school), given the current guidelines and local transmission rates. If the transmission rate data changes in the next days or weeks, we will then consider bringing secondary students to campus more often.

- As part of the requirements of the newly updated school reopening process, all school

districts are required to host a meeting to review and receive feedback on the reopening guidance as provided by New York state from the school community (from parents, community members, teachers, staff and local departments of health). This meeting must be held before any change to the physical distancing in schools can be made. According to NYSDOH, "Responsible parties are required to work with to propose and adopt changes. Ultimately, the school/district's decision to move to shorter physical distances will come down to a local community's risk tolerance based on its unique circumstances."

Lewiston-Porter we will host this event from 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesday, April 20, in the high school auditorium. As with the series of reopening forums held this past summer, stakeholders may attend both in person or virtually. We are limited to 100 participants for an in-person forum, so we ask please that only one parent per family attend. If you are interested in attending in-person, sign-up by clicking on the in-person forum sign up form link on our homepage. To attend virtually, please follow the Zoom instructions posted to our homepage:

Zoom webinar link/passcode: Lancers. Following the forum, a recording will also be made available on our YouTube channel.

Next time "In the Loop," we will update you on the community forum, positivity rates and where we are with the targeted return of students. We will also begin a deep dive into the 2021-22 budget, as approved at Monday's work session.

The Board of Education election and budget vote will be held Tuesday, May 18. Voting will take place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Community Resource Center

This year, the Lewiston-Porter Central School District will hold elections to fill two Board of Education positions, each with a three-year term. Interested candidates must submit nominating petitions to the district clerk by 5 p.m. Monday, April 19. Specific details on the Lew-Port Board of Education election and nominating petition packets can be obtained from the school website ([www.lew-port.com](http://www.lew-port.com)). Visit the "Annual Budget Vote & Election 2021-2022" page. Or contact Marisa Barile at 286-7266 or [mbarile@lew-port.com](mailto:mbarile@lew-port.com).



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