

Scarsdale Budget Vote Aligns With Statewide Trends

WEDNESDAY, 22 MAY 2013 12:30 JOANNE WALLENSTEIN



The "no vote" on the Scarsdale school budget on May 21 aligns with statewide trends. In Scarsdale, the proposed 2013-14 school budget exceeded the tax cap by \$701,267 which would have meant a 3.93% tax increase, or .55% above the adjusted cap of 3.38%. According to the [NYS School Boards Association](#), 98 percent of proposed school budgets that contained tax increases within the allowable tax cap passed on Tuesday. The relative few districts that tried to override the state's tax cap saw a pass rate Tuesday of just 30 percent.

The New York State School Boards Association says its preliminary analysis shows that more than 630 budgets were approved. On average, they increase the tax levy by 2.8 percent for the next school year while increasing spending by about the same percentage.

Twenty-seven districts asked voters for a tax levy increase exceeding what was allowed under the 2011 tax cap formula. Of them, 70 percent saw their budgets fail.

In Scarsdale, the Board based the proposed budget on "educational goals and fiscal prudence, not on an arbitrary budget or tax limit." However, they may have failed to acknowledge the importance of the tax cap legislation which served to focus voters on this "arbitrary" number. Since 70% of the increase in the budget was due to state-mandated increases in retirement costs, the board and administration had little flexibility to fund programs and new initiatives. They made the decision to exceed the cap and expected voters to override it with a 60% vote of approval. In hindsight, perhaps they did not recognize the symbolism of the state cap or assess the tenor of the community.