

# School costs & property taxes

**\* Public schools accountability is unmatched by any other level of government.**

- School districts outside the state's Big Five urban areas, elect non-partisan volunteers who are the only governmental leaders required to be trained in their fiscal oversight responsibilities.
- Their budgets are the only governmental budgets voted on annually (with a very high approval rate).
- Their construction projects and use of reserve funds must also be approved by public vote.
- No other level of government works with such stringent oversight or expensive obligations based on 16 volumes of NYS Education laws, SED regulations, and demanding and expensive Federal rules. In spite of this burden of oversight by other levels of government and the administrative duties they impose, school districts maintain lower ratios of administrators to staff than do private businesses.

**\* Superintendents earn their salaries.**

- Market forces affect superintendent salaries; the number of people willing and qualified to take these jobs is small.
- School superintendents are highly educated, function as CEOs, deal with ever-changing laws, and make themselves available 24/7.
- Their salaries are lower than CEO salaries in companies of comparable size, or in major non-profit organizations.

**\* School districts in Monroe County have a long history of collaboration to provide the best programs possible for the least cost.**

- These collaborations contain costs through a health care consortium, energy conservation projects, transportation routing, academic programs, collective bidding, and purchasing, and more.
- Because our Monroe County school districts are responsibly governed, they all have A bond ratings from Moody's that save \$100,000s in interest costs when districts borrow money for needed capital projects.
- (To learn more, download MCSBA's publication "The Best for Less: Cost-Saving Strategies and Shared Services in Monroe County School Districts" from <http://www.MCSBA.org>).

**\* The real drivers of increased costs in public education are the state and federal governments.**

- State and federal laws require our public schools to provide services and comply with regulations that they do not support with sufficient aid, thus forcing local property taxpayers to pay for them.
- Each requirement involves complex regulations and time consuming reports.
- Public school districts in Monroe County are required to provide transportation, special education services, health services, textbooks, library books, student computers and software to more than 9,000 students attending private and parochial schools and 780 charter school students.
- The greatest drivers of costs to school districts are state and federal laws protecting the rights of public employees to fair wages and benefits (health insurance while employed and after retirement, as well as retirement pensions).

**➔ Steps citizens can take to help control education costs::**

- Demand that state and federal governments pay for the expensive mandates they impose by raising the needed funds through their own taxation systems. Income taxes are more equitable and affordable than property taxes. If the state took responsibility for pension contributions, and the federal government funded its Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for example, property taxpayers would see REAL taxation relief.
- Demand that the state streamline the reporting mandates it imposes on school districts.

Contact information for our area's state and federal officials can be found at <http://www.mcsba.org/legislative/rep/index.html>.

Why don't public schools.....	Because the law says.....
Cut salaries, and/or retiree health benefits as private industry has done?	The NYS Taylor Law mandates that school districts negotiate in 'good faith'; the NYS Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) uses trends in other districts to dictate what a district can offer as employee compensation.
Cut contributions to employee pension funds?	The NYS Comptroller, acting alone, determines the level of district contributions to employee pension funds.
Cut the number of staff members?	Districts can and do cut the number of staff members as needed. In some instances, however, state and federal laws dictate class size (special education laws in particular) or the need to provide special services (sign language interpreters, etc.).