



Discussion Participants = 47 total

- The “discussion participants” total does *not* include facilitators, Queensbury Board of Education members, administrators and the superintendent. In total, more than 70 people took part in the forum.
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Question #1 If the Gap Elimination Adjustment is not restored in the adopted state budget, the Queensbury Board of Education will likely have to close a \$750,000 budget gap.

- A. What concerns or questions do you have regarding the faculty and staff reductions under consideration to close that gap?
 - B. How would you feel if the 2014-15 school budget proposal exceeded the district’s tax levy cap, as one measure in closing the budget gap?
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Table 1

Part A

- This is a dynamic situation as you have shrinking enrollment and shrinking staff, but it is hard to know which is outpacing without more data on the impact of more cuts.
- The community needs to know if/when we will be "into the bone" with cuts and what these potential cuts mean on the curriculum, academic opportunities lost, etc. More specific examples would help illustrate what might be sacrificed by these additional cuts.
- Concerns were raised about increasing class size, especially given the inclusion of special education students into the regular education classes, Common Core curriculum and APPR requirements.
- Providing more detailed information to the community about the bus proposition is important. Again, the community needs to know the impact of not replacing buses, etc.

Part B

- All at this table were willing to support a tax levy above 1.45 percent as long as it is "conservative" and continues to be fiscally responsible as in the past.
- Kudos were given to Dr. Huntley for his leadership in running the school like a business and being conservative with tax levy increases.
- Communicating well to the public about the facts shared at the forum will be critical. They need to see numbers and other detailed information so they are informed as to why the District needs to go for a super majority.
- The District needs to ask for what it needs. Explain the tax levy history so the public understands that the District could have asked for more in the past, but didn't as to not overburden the taxpayers
- Cutting back on math/science through attrition doesn't make sense as it won't support the new engineering/technology programs.
- Advocacy needs to happen. People need to communicate their frustrations to the Governor's office. No new initiatives. Restore GEA.
- The community may need to demonstrate their frustration by approving a supermajority budget vote -- To send a message that you leave us no other choice.
- Comments about the "tax freeze" proposal - Described as counterproductive and illogical.



Table 2

Part A

- How much more can we possibly cut? We need to find a way to close the gap without touching the staff or programs.
- It seems that there is an increase in the need for additional reading and math skills in Kindergarten; how will we support these services if we're increasing the class sizes and cutting staff?
- If seven teaching positions are cut, what grade level teachers will be affected? Larger class sizes in the elementary school vs. larger class sizes in the upper grades.
- The tax cap doesn't look right. Why is there a big difference from the 1st two years of the tax cap and this year? What are the exceptions that help raise the tax cap? (John DeSanto did explain this to us.)
- Safety concerns were brought up regarding a student in crisis being in a larger class with less staff to help deal with the student.
- Last year we discussed the rates that were charged to outside sources for building use. Were the rates increased and are we generating more revenue?
- The Town of Queensbury/school district partnership seems to work well regarding the recreation activities the town hosts at the school. Does the town pay for the building use or is this a cost that has shifted to the district?

Part B

- It was agreed that we would be in favor of the proposal if there is no other option. Our children's education is a priority. We couldn't find any positions that could be cut without hurting the existing programs.
- Concerns were raised regarding an increase over the tax levy cap and the proposed rebate from New York State. Taxpayers would feel like they are taxed twice, the first with the increase in the tax levy and the 2nd being the loss of the rebate because of the increase of the tax levy. It would be tough to pass.
- Another concern is the reassessment of Queensbury properties and a school tax increase over the cap. Taxpayers may already be worried about their tax rates not knowing what their assessed home value is.
- What are the demographics of homeowners? What is the percentage of retired taxpayers, families with children in the school, etc? How do we get information to taxpayers so they understand our predicament?

Table 3

- Already faced with limited teachers/personnel
 - Increase in class size is a concern.
 - Wide range of students in classes now (special education and special needs student)
 - Large class size impacts how children learn
 - More difficulty in being successful (teacher standpoint)
 - Structure of the classroom is affected
 - Implications with learning common core with less attention from teachers
 - Feedback from teachers is impacted
 - Classroom already share aids
 - Cutting art programs is a concern
 - Not every student is an athlete
- Areas to cut besides personnel?



- Bringing lunches (can't require)
- Sports spending cuts
 - Parents/students buying uniforms?
- Taxpayers feel that there is no end to the tax increases.
 - Feel that the increase is reasonable, but they would like to know that there is an end in sight.
- When the increase is explained in a dollar amount (per property owner) versus the overall percentage it seems more reasonable.
 - From a parent – the \$90 increase sounds less alarming than a 1.45 percent increase.
 - Being a parent may make a difference in support since you are investing in your child's education.
- Looking at the past increases made individuals realize that the District has not taken advantage of increases that it could have in the past.
 - Shows that the District has been as conservative as possible in the past.
 - Shows that this year's possible increase is not high compared to previous years.
- Questions:
 - Is Queensbury a victim because we have been conservative in the past?
 - Why are there no exceptions (when SGF has a few)?

Table 4

Part A

- How many more position can we cut before the children really suffer?
- The major concern is class sizes that are too large to effectively teach and learn. In a class, 28 students is a lot of handle.
- Concern about support staff and functions critical for children to succeed.
- How long can you keep cutting staff before there is no one to pick up the workload?
- Worries about the snowball effect of continuous cuts years after to year.
- I don't think you can lose any programs, they are all important. Have to have that variety of offerings to meet the varied needs and learning styles of the student population or some will fall through the cracks.
- Concern graduates will fall short of their peers from other schools when it comes to being accepted to college. Without AP courses and clubs on their resumes, they will fall short if Queensbury continues to cut these programs.
- Parents with children who play sports or are in clubs may have to pay more fees.
- Suggestion that teachers accept less pay or lag pay for the good of keeping more teachers from losing jobs.
- Suggestion that the district look into bringing more special education students back to the district to save on BOCES costs. Lots of empty seats on buses headed to special education programs in Albany, also costing money.

Part B

- The entire group of nine believed exceeding the tap cap levy would be OK if the "problem" and sacrifices made to date over years of cuts were kept "simple" for people and "explained well."
- Also need to explain what Queensbury schools will look like if these cuts continue to be made year after year (a shell of what it once was).



Table 5

Part A

- No one at Table #5 was comfortable with the proposed reductions outlined in scenario 1.
- One of the staff members in this group was one of the staff reduced in the 2011-12 budget, but rehired. She is very concerned that the district will make any reductions in staffing. Not only for herself and her family, she says but for the quality of the programs.
- “I’m not sure how you can offer the same types of programs if you cut any more staff,” she said.
- There were questions about how the inclusion model may change if reductions are made. The concern is that some students have or need a 1:1 aide – is there flexibility in this? Will the district reduce core teachers and retain aides?
- A parent asked if teachers are reduced and class size increases, will teachers increase the amount of time they make themselves available to students?
- There was some confusion as to whether all the staff reductions in scenario 1 were due to attrition.

Part B

- Everyone at Table #5 would support a budget that exceeded the district’s “ tax levy limit.”
- “I don’t see how there is any other choice,” said a one of the parents at the table. “Watching class sizes go up – that’s not going to work.”
- The taxpayers at the table who had no children in the district were also very supportive of exceeding the cap, but said that more outreach would be needed to inform other taxpayers.
- “People may come out just to vote it down because we’re going over the cap, so we need to be as transparent as possible,” said one. “Transparency is key to avoid the ‘What are they doing with all that money?’ questions.”
- Another participant said the district should illustrate the partnerships the district has with other organizations in the community and in the county.
- A participant suggested more paper mailings to reach people who don’t visit the website.
- The suggestion was made to “humanize” the district, accentuate the positives that wouldn’t exist if the budget failed.
- Make voting an “event.”
- “Keep up the awareness and ensure the information is accurate,” said one member of the group.

Table 6

Part A

- I have experience with the IB program (other grandkids). It paid off for them in college. I’m concerned IB won’t happen with these reductions.
- The IB program is funded by a grant.
- It’s alarming to think about losing another seven teachers, but the bigger concern is the years after that. Pensions, health insurance continue to increase two to three years from now. Everybody else in the world is held to certain premiums. Should push for more laws to help pressure insurance companies to keep premiums low.
- Class size a concern. There are 25 kids in my daughter’s elementary school classroom. Kids now in kindergarten will be okay because they’re going to grow up with the Common Core. Bigger issue is for the four- and five-year-olds. If you throw a lot more kids in, it’s a huge adjustment. Would be very detrimental.
- This is a short-term plan. There needs to be a long-range plan for 10 years out. The state is not going to fix this. Class size should not be increased. Kids are declining in their ability to communicate. As a person who overseas employees, I’m disappointed in their lack of ability to communicate. Science, technology and emerging majors are important. Don’t ever want to see them get cut. Maybe work regional on a plan with other districts.



- What amount is in the EBLAR fund now? Is it down to zero?
- Need a long-term plan. Funding coming from taxes. The health and success of the community is important. Schools affect that success. There's a brain drain now because graduates leave. Students need guidance with regards to local career paths in the community.
- It's a great plan, but we're in a vicious cycle. The state has made it impossible for businesses to locate without tax breaks.

Part B

- I'd feel fine. Don't think we have a choice. (Several participants echoed sentiment.)
- How about a referendum on a 3 percent increase every year for over the next five years?
- District might be afraid of that. It scares people.
- I would consider it.
- Biggest issue is the elderly.
- Sounds like they'd be okay with 2.93 percent. That got a lot of support last year.
- Kids seem to be coming back after many years. Majority of people who live here realize what a gem it is, come back and become vested. Looking at 2.93 percent, is it worth it? Yes. In the broad scheme, it's not a lot.
- A counterpart to that question. We feel pretty sanguine about going out over the tax cap. In community, I think there would be a lot of resistance. Would be a hard sell.
- What are the demographics of our community? Look at that to determine if you should go over. Add question to budget vote survey about how many people have grandchildren.
- Last year at this table, people said we don't have enough faith in our community. We've one of the lowest per pupil expenditures in the region. My kids get a great education. I'm shocked we don't ask for more.
- I was shocked at the 77 percent support. How many turn out? Those that take the time to come out, majority are doing it for a good reason.
- Also, there are parents who forget to vote.
- Do like exit poll for the future. Make sure you ask everyone. Last year, my husband was asked, but I wasn't.
- (Participants asked superintendent for more information on demographics.) Retiree demographic is increasing, parent demographic is decreasing. You can see it just from the type of buildings being building, more apartments and townhouse than large family homes.
- I would support it because Queensbury is so response, but it can't be a crutch. What else is going to be done besides looking at taxpayers?
- Looking at it long term, 3 percent is okay now, but going forward, it's not sustainable. What can people really afford? Everybody is working as hard as they can. There are not a ton of jobs. Retirees are on a fixed income and may not have the means.
- At some point, New York needs to get away from funding schools through the property tax levy.

Table 7

Part A

- I am concerned about the possibility of class sizes increasing. If class sizes increase, particularly at the kindergarten and elementary level, it will be harder to meet the needs of all students.
- Would an increase in class sizes in grades 7-12 be as much of an issue? Particularly for high school students who will see class sizes of 200+ at the college level.



- Other countries have virtual classrooms where a teacher presents lessons to numerous students in different locations. This might work for higher end students, who would be successful with this type of learning and the guidance of a teacher.
- Increasing class size raises concerns about meeting the needs of remedial level students. Would remediation services be cut? How would those students receive extra help?
- Another concern is the student who is in the middle of the pack and might fall off the radar. It seems like higher level and special education programs will be OK. Students in the middle need support and attention as well.
- Students at the younger level require one-to-one attention and nurturing – that would be lost with increased class sizes.
- I have a concern about faculty reductions. When my daughter went from sixth to seventh grade, the class sizes jumped from 23 to 28 students in a class because of reductions, and she struggled with it.
- We have already lost a lot of enrichment opportunities. This is a disappointment for my child. It's harder to supply enrichment in a class full of students with a broad range of learning abilities.
- I am always amazed to see what Queensbury is doing with what they do have. I would be sorry to see the loss of any programs. Is the answer to take a little bit out of each program to make ends meet?
- Sports are expensive – coaches, insurance, transportation. What about getting company sponsorships/support to pay for them? Schools are here to educate. What percentage of kids play sports? It seems that only a small percentage of students get any benefit for the amount of money spent.
- Queensbury has great programs – art, drama, music and sports – for students. These are important opportunities for kids and meet a wide variety of interests. I don't want to see programs cut.
- The school does receive some support for student activities through the Queensbury Parks & Rec Department, which has helped expand after school programs. Queensbury schools are the hub of our community. Visit the school any spring or fall afternoon and the fields are filled with students involved in various sports and activities. There are more kids involved in after school activities than many think.
- I'm happy to see the trend of more career-oriented educational opportunities.
- Another concern with the loss of personnel is potential support staff reductions. Support staff is essential to school running efficiently and to classroom teachers. Cuts to support staff at the kindergarten level would make classroom management more difficult, especially if paired with an increase in class size.
- What about non-personnel reductions?
 - Answer: non-personnel reductions have been exhausted. Budgets for supplies, etc. are at a bare minimum – nowhere left to go.

Part B

- I'm OK with exceeding the cap. Based on the information tonight it appears that leaders are making tough choices. Just need to know that they continue to make good fiscal choices. This has to be communicated well.
- It's likely that parents will support exceeding the cap, but taxpayers without children and elderly property owners will be more cautious.
- I'm worried about the impact of the property reassessment underway in Queensbury. A \$90 increase in taxes isn't a lot, but how much will it be after the reassessment? Will the district receive more money as a result of the reassessment?
 - Answer: The reassessment won't increase the tax levy – that is determined by residents at the school budget vote based on the approved budget. The reassessment may redistribute a property owner's share of the tax levy based on a new property value if it changes as a result of the reassessment.



Question #2 *In May voters will consider an infrastructure capital project to address issues with aging roofs, health- and safety-related infrastructure, energy efficiency, and facilities used by students.*

- A. What questions or concerns do you have about the project?*
 - B. How would your concerns affect your willingness to support the project?.*
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Table 1

- All viewed the infrastructure capital project as the only way to maintain district assets.
- Nothing unreasonable - nothing flashy.
- Kudos for the energy efficiency improvements.
- Will need to provide details to the community so they understand the importance of this proposition. Need to help them understand this is an investment and necessity.
- No concerns about supporting this capital project.
- The question was raised as to whether or not this project could help with the tax levy formula in the future as an exemption.

Table 2

Part A

- The capital project is overdue. We need to invest in our structures to avoid bigger issues later on.
- It's important that the taxpayers know the project is aidable and doesn't increase the tax levy
- Are bathrooms at the football field a part of this project? They are needed.
- Can we add locker rooms in the elementary school as part of the project?

Part B

- The group agreed that the project is a necessity, and we would support it.

Table 3

- Unanimous at the table that after looking at the capital project spending, everything is needed.
- Nothing "fancy" everything necessary, but it seems like a "harder sell" because of the large dollar amount.
- There were questions regarding digital recording.
 - Some individuals took it as entertainment equipment, not security equipment.
- Security in the elementary school was brought up.
 - Dated and parents would like to see a buzzer system like we have in the other buildings.
- It might help for voters to see a breakdown of what the capital project money will be spent on.
 - Energy returns
 - Would help to get past the overall cost and realize that updates are necessary.
 - Making sure this information gets to the general public through *Connections* district newsletter, Facebook, *Post Star*, Twitter, etc.
- Seems like the district just went through this with the updates to the middle school.
 - Since there was just a big project, there might be more concern and less support.
 - What in this project will be for the middle school?



- Questions and concerns regarding the roof repairs and the solar panels.
 - How will the solar panels be affected and will replacing the roof cost more because of the solar panels (labor to take them off and put back on)?

Table 4

- It might be a hard sell for some people given the budget gap the district is facing. People may ask, “How can you be borrowing money for building improvements when you don’t even have enough money to fund the normal operations of the district?” A clear distinction between the two budgets has to be made and explained well.
- Suggestion that the problems with the roads in Warren Co. that developed from “putting off” the work could be used as a parallel to the school project. Roads are now in bad shape ... do you want that happening to your schools, too? Learn from the situation.
- Should push the energy efficiency component of the capital project, i.e., everything being done will save money in the long run and help the environment. Many of the energy improvements will end up paying for themselves down the line.

Table 5

Part A

- Everyone at the table is very supportive of the work and feels it is necessary for sustaining the quality of the district’s facilities.
- “Why are we even discussing this?” asked one taxpayer. “You have to replace your roof before you wind up having to replace everything underneath it.”
- One member of the group wondered how the district could motivate the community to support run-of-the-mill repairs. “How do you make roof repair sexy?”
- Staff member explained that the middle school bell system runs off of 3.5” floppy disk, which is just old. It’s old.
- One taxpayer noted that it’s very important for a school to have working, synchronized clocks. “You’re the only business where your clientele moves nine times a day,” he said.
- Everyone agreed that investing in technology provides opportunity for safety upgrades and energy savings.

Part B

- There were minor concerns over things like carpets in kindergarten classrooms, air conditioning in the high school and the desire for more natural light in hallways, but none of these were deal-breakers for the people at the table.
- Most of the concern felt at Table #5 was over how the district was going to motivate the public-at-large to support the project, particularly if it’s done in conjunction with a budget that exceeds the tax levy limit.
- Most people at the table felt the messaging should be less vague than “begins work towards achieving community’s vision for local schools.”
- “Make these things concrete needs,” said one community member.
- The suggestion was made to maybe categorize the items in the capital project by general type: safety, roofs, technology, etc., so taxpayers who don’t have children in specific buildings could digest the project a little easier.
- There was also a minor concern that if the district proposes a budget that exceeds the tax levy and a \$9 million capital project, some members of the community may vote one of the two down.
- To that end, the district should educate the community that not only do the two have different funding sources, but the community is also only responsible for about 30 percent of the total cost of the project.



Table 6

- How was the \$300,000 determined?
- The specific information on the handout is great.
- All work is very needed.
- Plain and simple, we need to keep up on maintenance. Don't want to end up in a downward spiral.
- At a basketball game, they had to stop the game because the roof was leaking. I'm so proud of this district, but we've got to fix that.
- The way people react to proposals has to do with the district's responsibility as a steward of public funds. Queensbury has good respect.
- Have issues at the elementary building with leaks on library books. A safety issue. The carpets are really bad.
- Agree with regards to stewardship. We've been pretty frugal.
- Time to take care of ourselves. Keep up to date.
- Last year, a man said, "I know we're touted as the lowest per pupil expenditure, but is that something to be proud of? Maybe we should invest more." I thought, I'm proud of our district, but maybe we do. Good to keep up.
- Pay through local tax or income tax. Grab your piece now.
- Repair costs go up. Take care of the issues while they're still small.
- Want to know more about the Smart Schools bond issue. What's the timeframe for repayment? 15 years is certainly not worth it, but five to seven may be worth supporting.
- At South Glens Falls the computers are rented. How do we purchase computers now? Lease? Rent? If state tests have to be on computers, we'll need more.
- Some stuff purchased through grants.
- How do they recycle computers?
- What is the recapture term (10-15 years) on the capital project energy efficiency savings? Where do those dollars fall into the budget? That's a good amount of money.
- I have some neighbors who would be happy to see new buses. All you have to do is get stuck behind one.

Table 7

- The district has been lucky it has not suffered a major catastrophe with infrastructure that has required a sizable amount of money to fix. Maintaining facilities/infrastructure is important.
- I think paying 15 years for something that will last is a priority.
- The district has worked at maximizing efficiency, such as breakage with energy efficiency.
- The district building and grounds department does a good job of keeping up infrastructure.
- I have seen the extent of the aging roofs and poor locker facilities – repair is needed. I have heard visitors from other school districts comment on the poor condition of our facilities.
- I was glad to see that replacing carpeting in the kindergarten rooms is included in the scope of the project. We are currently using duct tape to fix problems with the rugs.
- Constant upgrading and maintenance of infrastructure is necessary. We must maintain our capital assets.



*****Optional if time allowed*****

Question #3 *In May voters will consider a bus purchase proposition, as outlined tonight.*

- A. *What questions or concerns do you have about the bus purchase?*
 - B. *How would your concerns affect your willingness to support the proposition?.*
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Table 2

- Our group didn't understand how the buses were being purchased. If we purchased fewer buses, would it affect the tax rate? (John DeSanto did explain the process to us.)
- What is the percentage of students that ride the bus?
- There seem to be many large buses with few students in them. Can we re-route the buses to accommodate more students?

Table 6

- Fact of life. You should replace. I think it's necessary.
 - It's like buying a VW when you look at the total local cost broken out over five years.
 - Our taxes are half what they are in Glens Falls, and our kids get bused.
 - It's amazing how full that parking lot is now. Wasn't when I was here.
 - Are there laws that say how many buses you need to have?
 - My kids' bus is full, but the high school buses are not.
 - We have very few people who live within walking distance.
 - It's not a pedestrian school.
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Other Comments

Table 3

- Educating the taxpayers is most important. How do we reach them so they know our predicament?
- Showing the dollar value increase in taxes is important so taxpayers know what they are dealing with. It's sometimes hard to understand a percentage.
- How do we get more involved with the community forum? We need to hear from the taxpayers, and the district needs to show it is listening.
- Where will we house the pre-K students?
- Will the cut-off date for kindergarten students change if we have the new pre-K classes?

Table 6

- More demographic information.
- How do we as people support this? What can we do to help get the word out? Maybe some handouts.
- Where is the savings in consolidation?
- Use AAUW to recruit participants in future forums.