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Third year of declining state aid leads to \$2.7 million in cuts

Residents to vote on \$42.9 million budget

On Tuesday, May 17, Mohonasen voters will decide on a \$42,904,561 spending plan for next year.

The budget proposal is \$184,391 higher than the current year's budget – an increase of less than one half of one percent.

The budget carries a tax levy increase of 2.5 percent in a year when the district will lose more than \$3 million in state operating aid.

In order to bring spending in line with reduced revenues, the Board of Education enacted \$2.7 million in budget reductions for next year.

"These are hard economic times for our schools and our taxpayers," Board of Education President Dominic Cafarelli said. "This budget represents some of the most drastic cuts we've ever made as a district—but we believe it balances the needs of our students with the needs of our taxpayers."

Also on May 17, voters will decide on a bus proposition, and elect two candidates to the Board of Education (see page 8).



Next year will be the third consecutive year that New York's public schools will see a decline in state aid. As a result, \$2.7 million in budget reductions were made in the proposed Mohonasen budget for 2011-12.

NAVIGATING TOUGH TIMES WHILE MAINTAINING A FOUNDATION

Budget cuts for next year include teaching, administrative and other positions – as well as across-the-board reductions in areas such as athletics, transportation, and operations and maintenance.

The proposed budget maintains all current academic and extracurricular programs.

"When the legislature adopted a state budget, Mohonasen was left with a \$3.4 million cut in operating aid – this is the money we use to keep our buildings open, our programs running and to pay our staff," Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Spring said. "With that kind of reduction

in our revenue, and with our bare-bones budget, we had no choice but to make significant spending cuts."

Spring said that combining this level of aid reduction with the prolonged economic recession and property tax fatigue in the community meant that officials had to reorganize programs. This is the third consecutive year that New York's public schools have seen a decline in state aid.

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

"One thing we heard loud and clear was that the cuts should be across the board and they should affect students as little as possible. That's what we tried to do."
- Dr. Kathleen Spring, Superintendent

At a glance

- **PROPOSED BUDGET**
\$42,904,561
- **BUDGET INCREASE**
0.043%
- **TAX LEVY INCREASE**
2.5%
- **ALSO ON THE BALLOT**
Bus purchase proposition & BOE election (see page 8).
- **MEET THE CANDIDATES/ BUDGET HEARING**
Monday, May 9, 6 p.m.
HS Farnsworth Tech. Ctr.
- **BUDGET VOTE**
Tuesday, May 17
7 a.m. - 9 p.m., HS Gym
- **BUDGET CUTS**
\$2.7 million in budget CUTS were made for next year. This included eliminating 34.5 teaching, support staff and administrative positions.
[Learn more on page 3](#)
- **PAY FREEZES & MORE**
All four Mohonasen bargaining units — the Mohonasen Teachers' Association, Mohonasen Support Staff Association, the Mohonasen Administrators' Association and the Mohonasen Supervisors' Association — agreed to concessions, saving the district more than \$525,000 and eight positions that would have been eliminated.

➤ Budget cuts follow loss in state aid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Approximately 34 teaching, administrative and support staff positions were eliminated in the proposed budget. These include six elementary teaching positions and a number of core curriculum and special area positions at the middle and high schools.

As a result of these reductions, Spring said that class sizes will increase slightly in some areas (*See class size chart on page 3*). At the secondary level, course offerings will generally be the same. However, fewer sections of some courses may be offered, making scheduling more difficult.

The district's four bargaining units — the Mohonasen Teachers' Association, Mohonasen Support Staff Association, the Mohonasen Administrators' Association and the Mohonasen Supervisors' Association — agreed to a partial pay freeze and other concessions. This move saved the district more than \$525,000 and allowed officials to restore approximately eight positions that would have been eliminated.

"There's no doubt that things will look a little different here next year. There will be a little less of almost everything we have right now and everyone

➤ Proactive measures help limit cuts

Over the years, Mohonasen officials have prided themselves on being proactive in terms of cost-saving measures. Without these efforts, the proposed budget cuts would have been much deeper.

Some of the ways Mohonasen officials have brought down costs include:

- ◆ Rebidding the district's telephone service contract.
- ◆ Reducing supplies and outside maintenance contracts.
- ◆ Locking in prices for gas, electricity and general liability insurance.
- ◆ Careful administration/monitoring of budgetary expenditures. This includes limiting overtime and freezing all non-essential spending.
- ◆ Incorporating job responsibilities from vacant administrative positions into existing positions.
- ◆ Participating in a consortium for electricity.
- ◆ Energy curtailment program.
- ◆ Cost containment measures in health insurance (co-pay changes, Cana-Rx, Medicare Gold for retirees).
- ◆ Aggressively seeking lowest prices for purchases, services.
- ◆ Consolidating/sharing resources with BOCES, area districts and the town.

➤ Per pupil spending lowest in the area

According to the latest numbers released by the NYS Education Department, Mohonasen had the eighth-lowest per pupil spending in the state and the lowest in the area for 2008-09.

will have to work a little bit harder," Spring said. "While the school experience will not be the same, we've tried to ensure that the opportunities are still there."

WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

District officials gathered feedback from students, staff, parents and taxpayers at three community budget forums this past winter.

"We knew we had big decisions to make and at the forums we talked to people about their values and their vision for Mohonasen," Spring said. "One thing we heard loud and clear was that the

Officials held three community budget forums this past winter, at which residents said that budget cuts should be made across the board.



cuts should be across the board and they should affect students as little as possible. That's what we tried to do."

Each forum consisted of a presentation followed by break-out group discussions where participants offered feedback and answered questions relating to the budget. The feedback was then

compiled and placed on the district website — and given to the Board and administration.

"While the school experience will not be the same, we've tried to ensure that the opportunities are still there."

- Dr. Kathleen Spring, Superintendent



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▣ Projected Average Class Size for 2011-12

Grade	Current Enrollment	Projected Enrollment	Current Sections	Projected Sections*
K	180	175	9/19.4	8/21.8
1	190	180	10/18	8/22.5
2	207	190	9/21	8/23.8
3	198	207	9/23	9/23
4	201	198	9/22	8/24.8
5	236	201	10/22	8/25.1
6	229	236	10/22.9	10/23.6

Secondary class sizes will vary depending on the grade and course. While no subject areas have been completely eliminated, there may be fewer sections of some courses offered. This could make scheduling more difficult for some students.

* As a result of the salary concessions, one FTE teacher will be added to grades K-2 and another to grades 3-5. While the specific grade levels that will have a teacher added have not been determined, it will result in slightly decreased class size ratios.

▣ Summary of budget changes for 2011-12

INSTRUCTION

Eliminate 19 FTE teaching positions:

- * 6 Elementary
- * 0.5 Art
- * 1.0 Physical Education
- * 1 Technology
- * 0.6 FACS
- * 1.1 Business
- * 1 Library
- * 1.2 Math
- * 0.8 English
- * 0.7 Science
- * 0.8 Social Studies
- * 0.8 French
- * 1.6 Spanish
- * 1.9 Special Education/ESL

Eliminate 2.5 FTE administrative positions:

- * 1.0 Academic Administrator (math)
- * 1.0 Director of Technology
- * 0.5 CSE Chairperson

Eliminate 4 FTE teaching assistant positions

Eliminate 9 FTE support staff positions:

- * 2 Health Office Assistants
- * 1 Teacher Aide
- * 5 Bus Aides
- * 1 Monitor

GENERAL SUPPORT/ OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE/ TRANSPORTATION

- * Replace assistant treasurer position with part-time clerk
- * Reduce part-time custodial hours and eliminate a cleaner position
- * Modify bus mechanic shifts
- * Reduction of supplies, travel and conference
- * Reduction in outside contracts
- * Reduction in late bus

runs from 5 days a week to 2 days a week

- * Reduction in field trips
- * Reduction in BOCES services

CO-CURRICULAR & INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

- * Reduction to bus/cafeteria/afterschool and chaperoning duties
- * Reduction of out-of-area and long-distance competitions
- * Eliminate strength and conditioning coaching position
- * Elimination of fall freshman cheerleading
- * Elimination of assistant coaching positions

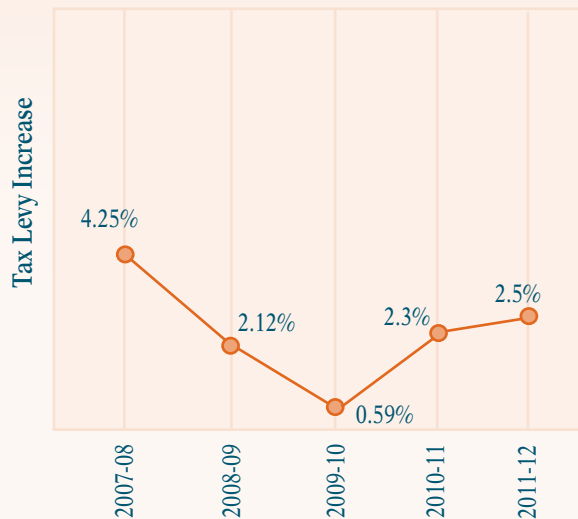
Note: All positions are shown as full-time equivalent, or FTE. This means that they are totals and often include full-time positions being reduced to part time; and the partial or full reduction of some part-time positions.

▣ The Approach

Below are some of the strategies officials used when deciding what to cut—and what to keep.

- Look at big picture and make reductions across the board.
- Maintain structures to build on in the future.
- Reallocate resources where possible.
- Rethink and reorganize programs while maintaining effectiveness.
- Consider administrative expertise, professional judgment and experience.
- Feedback/insight from the Board of Education.
- Consider any potential new revenues.

Comparison of Tax Levy Increases Over the Past Five Years



➤ The three-part budget

All public schools in New York State are required to report appropriations in three categories: administrative, program and capital. The following data shows how Mohonasen's budget breaks down under this formula:

THE PROGRAM BUDGET INCLUDES: The salaries and benefits of all teachers, guidance counselors, aides, monitors, psychologists, nurses, social workers and speech therapists.

Also included is in-service training; library costs; transportation; co-curricular programs; and interscholastic athletics.

- ◆ Program Budget 2011-12: \$30,958,228
- ◆ Program Budget 2010-11: \$31,911,936

THE CAPITAL BUDGET INCLUDES: Debt service on buildings; bus purchases; tax certiorari and court-ordered costs; and operations and maintenance costs including custodial staff.

- ◆ Capital Budget 2011-12: \$6,944,326
- ◆ Capital Budget 2010-11: \$5,956,013

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGET INCLUDES: The salaries and benefits of all professional members who spend 50 percent or more of their time in administration and supervision. Also included is: clerical staff; public information; curriculum development and supervision; research, planning and evaluation; legal services; and school board-related costs.

- ◆ Admin. Budget 2011-12: \$5,002,007
- ◆ Admin. Budget 2010-11: \$4,852,221

➤ Appropriation Summary

	2010-11 Budget	2011-12 Proposed	Dollar Increase/ Decrease
Instruction	\$24,053,530	\$22,277,982	\$(1,775,548)
Employee Benefits	9,059,114	10,242,991	1,183,877
Operations & Maintenance	2,372,667	2,363,879	(8,788)
Transportation	2,192,062	2,121,178	(70,884)
District Support	1,814,357	1,810,569	(3,788)
Debt Service	3,228,440	4,087,962	859,522
Total	\$42,720,170	\$42,904,561	\$184,391

➤ Revenue Summary

	2010-11 Budget	2011-12 Proposed	Dollar Increase/ Decrease
State Aid	\$18,652,219	\$17,344,259	\$(1,307,960)
*Property Tax Levy	21,880,276	22,427,627	547,351
Fund Balance Appropriation	850,000	1,000,000	150,000
Reserve Appropriation	0	800,000	800,000
BOCES Rental/Svcs.	345,500	365,500	20,000
Interfund Transfer	553,000	653,000	100,000
Other Revenue	339,175	314,175	(125,000)
Total	\$42,720,170	\$42,904,561	\$184,391

* A portion of the tax levy will be paid by the state under the School Tax Relief (STAR) program.

A report of tax exemptions, showing how much of the total assessed value on the final assessment roll or rolls used in the budgetary process is exempt from taxation, is annexed to the budget document, which is available in the district's business office at 2072 Curry Road, Schenectady NY 12303.

**The total proposed
2011-2012 Mohonasen
budget is \$42,904,561**



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▣ A line-by-line look at proposed budget appropriations

Instruction (Program & Salaries)

52% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Teaching/Reg. School	\$14,177,557	\$13,033,649
Special Education	3,626,954	3,508,784
Curriculum Development	171,201	175,189
Supervision of Schools	1,634,328	1,566,635
Regional Planning/BOCES	130,500	121,350
In-Service Training/BOCES	40,000	41,000
BOCES Occupational Ed.	645,650	636,976
Summer School	151,950	112,942
Attendance	45,736	47,794
Adult Education	66,509	65,061
Library/Media	479,188	399,941
Computer Asst. Instruction	666,059	548,624
Guidance	673,023	610,684
Health Services	330,240	309,404
Diagnostic Testing	44,853	45,132
Psychological Services	169,410	172,526
Social Work Services	213,246	218,745
Pupil Personnel Services	0	0
Co-Curricular	234,218	200,195
Athletics	472,908	423,351
Transfers to funds	105,000	65,000
Total	\$24,078,530	\$22,302,982

Employee Benefits

23.9% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Health Insurance	\$4,830,000	\$5,085,000
Teachers' Retirement	1,650,000	1,900,000
Employees' Retirement	400,000	750,000
Social Security (FICA)	1,779,750	1,755,389
Workmen's Comp.	281,684	294,852
Unemployment	0	350,000
Life Insurance	99,500	90,000
Disability	9,000	8,500
Employee Asst. Program	9,180	9,250
Total	\$9,059,114	\$10,242,991

Operations & Maintenance

5.5% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Custodial Services	\$1,918,410	\$1,922,873
Maintenance	454,257	441,006
Total	\$2,372,667	2,363,879

Transportation

4.9% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Transportation	\$2,158,912	\$2,094,828
Garage	33,150	26,350
Total	\$2,192,062	\$2,121,178

District Support

4.2% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Board of Education	\$26,110	\$25,872
District Meeting	7,500	7,500
Central Administration	234,075	238,721
Business Admin./Finance	497,239	494,742
Auditing	33,382	32,921
Tax Collection	5,500	5,500
Fiscal Agent Fees	2,000	2,000
Legal Services	30,000	30,000
Labor Relations	0	0
Public Information	199,950	202,900
Central Printing	35,501	40,330
Data Processing	146,200	134,000
Liability/Prop. Insurance	169,650	167,925
School Association Dues	3,000	3,000
Property Assessment	26,000	25,000
BOCES Administration	295,000	297,500
Unclassified/Other	75,000	75,000
Community Census	3,250	2,658
Refund Real Property Tax	0	0
Total	\$1,789,357	\$1,785,569

Debt Service

9.5% of budget	Budget 2010-11	Proposed 2011-12
Serial Bonds	\$2,897,767	\$3,770,618
Bus Bonds	330,673	317,344
Total	\$3,228,440	\$4,087,962

Proposed 2011-2012 Budget

Questions & Answers

Q. HOW WILL THE BUDGET CUTS AFFECT STUDENTS?

A. When making budget reductions to close a more than \$3 million budget gap left by a sharp decline in state aid for next year, district officials tried to make across-the-board cuts and not eliminate any one program.

The largest impact of the cuts on students will be a slight increase in class sizes. At the elementary level, most grade levels will see a decrease of one to two sections, which will cause a class size increase of approximately one to four students. In both middle school and high school, where class sizes vary based on the specific course, class sizes may also change slightly. Fewer sections of some courses may be offered, making scheduling more difficult. No academic or extracurricular programs were eliminated.

Q. WHAT HAPPENS IF A MAJORITY OF RESIDENTS VOTE NO ON THE SCHOOL BUDGET?

A. Under New York State law, if a school budget is defeated, the Board of Education can either put the same or revised budget up for another vote or move directly to a contingency budget. The Mohonasen Board of Education's philosophy has always been to put forth a bottom-line budget that best meets student and community needs for the first vote. Therefore, if a majority of residents vote no, the district would adopt a contingency budget. There can be no more votes after that to restore funds eliminated under contingency.

By law, spending in a contingency budget is capped at the lesser of 120 percent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the prior calendar year or 4 percent. The CPI

for 2010 was 1.6 percent, which means the contingency cap for 2011-12 would be 1.92 percent.

Because of the loss in state aid this year, calculating a contingency budget could actually result in an estimated 11.06 percent tax levy increase. However, a contingent budget can **never** be greater than the budget that goes before voters on May 17. Given this, if the budget is rejected by voters on May 17, the district would have to cut only those expenses that are not allowed in a contingency budget. These include some student supplies, community use of buildings and grounds, certain equipment purchases and certain salary increases.

Q. HOW WILL THE BUDGET PROPOSAL AFFECT MY TAXES?

A. If the proposed budget is approved by voters on May 17, the tax levy – or total amount of money collected through taxes – will increase by 2.5 percent.

The district will set final tax rates in August, right after the towns finalize assessment figures, which the state Office of Real Property Services uses to set equalization rates.

Q. WHAT TAX EXEMPTIONS CAN MOHONASEN RESIDENTS RECEIVE?

A. The New York State School Tax Relief (STAR) program allows property owners to exempt a certain amount of the assessed value of their property, and thus lowers their school tax bill. There are two levels of STAR: Basic STAR applies to all owner-occupied, primary residences and Enhanced STAR is for senior citizens whose income does not exceed a set limit.

The district has no control over the

STAR program and does not estimate tax impacts based on STAR savings.

Starting with the 2011-12 school district budget, the state legislature established a cap on increases in STAR savings. For next year, increases in STAR savings are capped at 2 percent of the prior year savings.

For information on the STAR program, visit www.orps.state.ny.us or call your local assessor's office.

Mohonasen also offers a Real Property Tax Exemption. Residents over the age of 65 and qualifying residents of any age with disabilities who have an annual income of \$35,400 or less can be exempted from paying taxes on 5 to 50 percent of their home's value – thus reducing their school tax bills. Applications for these exemptions must be filed with your town assessor's office and must be renewed annually.

Q. HOW DOES MOHONASEN INVOLVE RESIDENTS AS THE BUDGET IS BEING DEVELOPED?

A. This year, Mohonasen officials invited all community members to take part in three community budget forums held in January, February and March. At these forums, residents, faculty, staff, parents and students were asked to give feedback on potential budget cuts. Information relating to these forums and other budget materials are available online at www.mohonasen.org/budget.

See more Questions
& Answers online at
www.mohonasen.org



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Questions & Answers

➤ Setting the record straight

Q. GOVERNOR CUOMO HAS STATED THAT NEW YORK IS FIRST IN PER PUPIL SPENDING, BUT 34TH IN PERFORMANCE? IS THAT TRUE? WHAT IS THE RETURN ON THE INVESTMENT FOR MOHONASEN TAXPAYERS?

A. The claim that New York ranks first in spending but 34th in performance has been reported far and wide since the Governor included it in his State of the State address. It turns out the reference comes from a somewhat obscure 2007 U.S. Census report measuring the percentage of all adults who possess a high school degree. So, this refers to educational attainment of everyone older than 25, some who attended school as far back as the 1930s and earlier. (It would also include residents who attended school in other states and countries, as well as those who might not have attended school at all.) This can hardly be called a fair, accurate or comprehensive reflection of today's schools.

However, such a measure does exist in Education Week's annual "Quality Counts" report, which came out within days of the Governor's remarks. The report showed that New York's schools rank 2nd in the nation on a comprehensive analysis of policy and performance. The state's schools earned an overall grade of B, second only to Maryland, which earned a grade of B+.

The study looked at family income, parent education, preschool enrollment, proficiency in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math, high school graduation, young adult education, adult educational attainment, annual income and steady employment. It took into consideration

state efforts to tie K-12 schooling to college readiness and the world of work.

Here at Mohonasen, the results are also encouraging. Many students continue to meet proficiency marks on standardized exams. Regents scores have continued to show significant gains in the past several years and graduation rates are on the rise. In addition, more Mohonasen students than ever are attending college.

The unique middle school Success is Required initiative requires that all students are held accountable for every major test and assignment in every course they take throughout the year. As a result, more than 98 percent of middle school students are passing every quarter of every class they take each year.

Students continue to excel on the field, court and stage in activities from athletics, to our award-winning Field Band and other music groups, to the Mohon Masque theater group.

Mohonasen's schools' daily attendance rate continues to average around 96 percent a year.

In addition, Mohonasen continues to have the lowest per pupil expenditure in the area. In fact, according to the 2008-09 figures (the latest available), Mohonasen's per pupil expenditure was the lowest in the area and the eighth lowest in the state.

Q. THE GOVERNOR HAS CALLED FOR A 2 PERCENT TAX LEVY CAP. WHAT WOULD THIS MEAN FOR MOHONASEN?

A. If a 2 percent tax levy cap had been in place for 2011-12, officials would have had to trim another \$100,000 from the budget.

Looking ahead, significant increases in mandated and contractual items, such as health insurance and state pension contributions, are projected for next year. Without meaningful mandate relief from state leaders, a property tax cap could mean that district programs would be decimated.

- ◆ *The Governor said his budget plan cut school spending by 2.7 percent. Under the Governor's proposed budget, Mohonasen would have lost 13.23 percent of its state aid.*
- ◆ *The Governor says that districts need to look at their administrative structure and make cuts there to address the gap. In the last three years, Mohonasen officials have cut administrative positions by 23 percent.*
- ◆ *The Governor says that districts are "playing games" with students and do not need to lay off staff. Mohonasen had no other option to address a more than \$3 million budget gap.*
- ◆ *The Governor says that there is fraud and abuse in schools. Out of 733 audits of schools and BOCES in recent years, the Comptroller found "fraud" in 19 of them.*
- ◆ *The Governor says that the gap can be filled by freezing salaries, increasing health insurance contributions and using reserves. **This is not the case.** An across the board salary freeze, combined with a five percent increase in health insurance contributions, would have saved \$1.4 million and not the \$3.4 million needed to fill the gap.*

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Mohonasen

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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➤ Board candidates featured in future brochure *and* online

Two of seven seats on Mohonasen's Board of Education are up for election on May 17. The board candidates will be listed in a budget brochure, which will be mailed out after the budget hearing on May 9. You can find the full board candidate biographies online at www.mohonasen.org.

Learn more about the board candidates and the budget on Monday, May 9 at 6:00 p.m. in the Mohonasen High School Farnsworth Technology Center (LGI).

➤ Replacement of school buses

On May 17, Mohonasen residents will be asked to vote on a proposition to purchase three full-size 66-passenger buses and one Suburban at a total cost of \$370,000. Of this amount, 79 percent (\$292,300) would be paid for in the form of state aid, meaning the district would be responsible for \$77,700—or approximately \$15,540 a year for five years.

The purchase of these vehicles would have no impact on next year's budget and since the district is always retiring debt, the new purchase would result in a minimal increase on that debt.

Mohonasen is on a regular bus replacement schedule based on mileage, age of vehicles, repair history and condition.

Don't forget to vote on Tuesday, May 17

Polls will be open from 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. in the Mohonasen High School gym (use the pool entrance).

Voter eligibility

You are eligible to vote if you are a U.S. citizen, 18 years old or older and a resident of the school district for at least 30 days prior to the vote.

Absentee Ballots

Absentee Ballots are available to residents who will be out of town or unable to vote in person because of illness or disability. Ballots are available in the district office at 2072 Curry Road. Call 356-8210 for more information or if you would like a ballot mailed to you. To download an absentee ballot application, visit www.mohonasen.org.

For more information

For more information about the 2011-12 proposed budget, go to www.mohonasen.org/budget or call 356-8210. A copy of the complete budget proposal is available in the district office at 2070 Curry Road, Schenectady NY 12303.