

# **A New Beginning:**

## ***A Report on the East Ramapo Central School District***

***January 24, 2017***

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<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Commissioner's Charge to the Monitors	2
Meetings and Visits	2
What the Monitors Heard from the Community	3
Implementation of Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016	6
Strategic Academic Plan	7
Fiscal Improvement Plan	8
English Language Learners	15
Students with Disabilities	17
Recommendations	18
Next Steps	18
Attachments: Tables and Charts	20

## **Commissioner's Charge to the Monitors**

On August 16, 2016 State Education Department Commissioner MaryEllen Elia appointed Charles Szuberla and reappointed Dr. John Sipple as monitors (Monitors) for the East Ramapo Central School District (District). This year's monitoring initiative builds on the many accomplishments seen in the 2015-2016 school year, during which the previous year's Monitors worked with the District to name Dr. Deborah Wortham superintendent, improve teaching and learning for its students, increase transparency and communication with the community, and begin the process for much-needed capital repairs and projects.

The Monitors are focusing on:

- Community engagement and communication;
- Monitoring District operations, including fiscal and operational management and educational programming and to provide guidance, recommendations and propose actions for improvement to the District;
- Proposing potential actions to the State Education Department to ensure that students have access to appropriate programs and services and that the District is on a path to fiscal and programmatic stability; and
- Supporting implementation of Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016, which contains a specific focus on fiscal and budgetary planning and oversight.

## **Meetings and Visits**

Since their appointment in August 2016, the Monitors have made numerous visits to the District and have met with the superintendent, school board, students, teachers, principals, parents, Parent Teacher Association, the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch, local advocacy group Padres Unidos, nonpublic school administrators, members of the clergy, Rockland Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) administrators, and former school board members. In addition, the Monitors have attended school board meetings, including executive sessions. In addition to meetings, the Monitors have received numerous phone calls and emails from parents, community residents, and District staff.

The Monitors and the Commissioner have met with the Superintendent and her cabinet, representatives of the nonpublic school community, and teachers to explain the District oversight statute and the Department's and Monitors' roles. The Monitors attended the opening of school at Kakiat Elementary School and the first day of full-day kindergarten at Summit Park Elementary School.

The Monitors collaborated with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Business to review the requirements for the Academic Strategic Plan and Fiscal Improvement Plan.

In preparation for the much-needed capital projects, the Monitors conducted building walk-throughs of four buildings to review facility conditions.

In addition, the Monitors met with leadership of the Chestnut Ridge Middle School to review their planning to launch an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. The school is currently a Priority School in the state's accountability system and has chosen the IB program as their school improvement strategy.

Further, the Monitors reviewed and approved the use of a \$500,000 legislative grant secured by Assemblymember Ellen C. Jaffe. The funds will be used for upgrades to deteriorating structures as follows:

- Spring Valley High School outdoor bleachers: \$310,000;
- Spring Valley High School gym bleacher upgrades: \$50,000;
- Chestnut Ridge Middle School bridge windows: \$90,000; and
- Related Design/Engineering/Legal/Other Costs: \$50,000.

The Commissioner also visited East Ramapo Students at the Hudson Valley P-TECH High School. It should be noted that all of the East Ramapo students had passed the required five Regents exams before their junior year.

The Monitors also met with Jack Eisenbach, the owner of the architecture/engineering firm for East Ramapo's capital projects. The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Mr. Szuberla met with the editorial board of the Journal News to explain the purpose of the bond vote and answer questions about how it would be implemented if it passed, and attended a public meeting where information related to the proposed capital improvements was presented to the community.

The Monitors also oversaw voting at all polling places during the December 6, 2016 capital project bond vote, which was ultimately overwhelmingly passed by voters in the district.

### **What the Monitors Heard from the Community**

The Monitors received significant feedback from the various and diverse stakeholders in the district. The following is a summary of the questions and concerns voiced by certain stakeholder groups.

## Parents of Public School Students

- Strong support for full-day kindergarten and restoration of the arts;
- Strong desire for the District to provide all students with an opportunity to receive an excellent education;
- Strong desire for the State Education Department to continue its enhanced monitoring role;
- Importance of supplementary educational services to ensure students are prepared to take advantage of challenging and rigorous course work;
- Desire to retain full-day kindergarten and the partial restoration of the elementary school arts programs funded with reauthorization of the \$3 million in legislative grants;
- Desire for details on how the School Improvement Grant for the Chestnut Ridge Middle School will be used;
- Concern regarding the school guidance system and scheduling errors;
- Availability of advanced coursework;
- Concern about lead in the drinking water;
- Concern about staffing vacancies;
- Concern about strangers on school property while school is in session;
- Concern regarding the adequacy and availability of programs for immigrant students and English Language Learners;
- Strong desire for the superintendent to appoint a community advisory board;
- Questions regarding special education referral rates;
- Concern regarding the resources allocated toward Yiddish-speaking students;
- Concerns regarding large class sizes;
- Desire for the superintendent to publicly publish aggregate student performance data publicly;
- Desire for a liaison for new students who do not speak English as a native language;
- Concern about students not feeling welcome;
- Concern regarding students whose families have difficulty proving residency in the District;
- Teachers need diversity training;
- Concern about segregation of classes;
- Questions regarding the ability to use public funds for certain programs;
- Concerns regarding the use of textbook aid;
- Revitalization of the Education Foundation; and
- Support for restoration of afterschool programs including programs for immigrant students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE).

## Community Residents

- Concerns regarding whether the District has a balanced budget;

- Concern that prior board members and administrators have not been held accountable for depleting the District's funds balance, using funds improperly, and selling buildings below fair market value;
- Frustration that the District got into fiscal trouble resulting in the cutting of programs for students
- Concerns regarding whether District contracts are appropriate and properly monitored;
- Questions regarding the District's state aid allocation compared to other districts of similar wealth ratios;
- Accuracy and timeliness of the District's billing processes;
- Frustration over the significant rise in insurance costs when the District was dropped by the New York State Insurance Reciprocal (NYSIR);
- Strong desire and need for a continuing and significant State Monitor presence;
- Support for Monitor with veto power of school board decisions;
- Support for capital projects to be monitored by the state to ensure public interest is secured;
- Concern that newly renovated school buildings will be sold;
- Concerns regarding the efficiency, structure, and cost of public and nonpublic school transportation;
- Concern about the number of no-bid contracts;
- Concern about high legal costs;
- Tax impact of capital projects;
- Explanation of how the board of education will avoid problems seating future board members;
- Information on diversity training the board of education attended;
- Lack of communication about plans to sell District-owned school buses;
- Concern over nonpublic school transportation providers storing their buses at public schools and the resultant bus fumes from those buses;
- Requests that contracts for proposed capital projects include efforts to hire minority contractors;
- Questions regarding whether there will be a construction manager for the proposed capital projects; and
- Concerns over the use of PKF O'Connor Davies accounting firm and its citation by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

#### Board of Education

- Concern about district's state aid sharing ratios;
- Strong support and cooperation with our monitoring work;
- Concerns regarding the District's accounting firm;
- Concern about districts high legal costs; and
- Concern about school safety.

## Educators

- Inappropriate spaces used for instruction;
- Concerns on how educators will be held accountable for student performance;
- Support for increased professional development; and
- Growing professional learning communities.

## Students

- Students have embraced “Smart is not what you are, smart is what you get” motto;
- Lack of bleachers for spectators at sporting events and school activities;
- Poor condition of school facilities;
- Low expectations from some teachers; and
- Support for the superintendent.

## Clergy Groups

- Concerns about board governance and transparency;
- Concerns about equitable and adequate education for all students; and
- Desire that children in the District receive a high-quality education that is equitable and adequate.

## Nonpublic School Administrators

- Adequacy of State Aid for Transportation;
- Lack of transportation when the public schools are not in session, including Sundays; and
- Distribution of Mandated Services Aid.

## **Implementation of Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016**

Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016 required the District to create three major plans in collaboration with the community stakeholders and the state monitors. The plans are:

1. Long-term (2016-2020) strategic academic plan;
2. Long-term fiscal improvement plan; and
3. Expenditure plan outlining the use of the \$3 million in legislative grants, which the District chose to use toward implementation of full-day kindergarten and restoration of Arts programs.

The educational investments funded with the State appropriations are aligned with the State Monitors’ Recommendations 8 and 10 included in the December 14, 2015

“Opportunity Deferred” report. Both the fiscal improvement plan and the comprehensive expenditure plan for the additional \$3 million in State funds were developed in compliance with Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016 and in consultation with the State monitors.

Together, the three plans address the core areas that have been identified as needing improvement, either by state-appointed monitors or by the District and community itself through the root-cause analysis exercise that was conducted during the development of the strategic academic plan. The strategic academic plan provides measurable objectives and explicit strategies to address areas where improvements are needed in the District, including but not limited to:

- Financial stability;
- Academic opportunities and outcomes for all students;
- Education of and accelerated rates of success for students with disabilities;
- Education of and accelerated rates of success for English language learners; and
- Compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

The District conducted a public hearing and received community input on the strategic academic and expenditure plan on September 7, 2016. All plans were also posted on the District’s website. After considering the public comments received, the board of education approved all three plans on September 13, 2016 and the plans were submitted to the Commissioner for review on September 20, 2016. The Commissioner approved the District’s plans on September 26, 2016. Full-day kindergarten for all students and arts programming started October 6, 2016.

## **Strategic Academic Plan**

The Monitors assisted the district in development of a Strategic Academic Plan that meets the needs of all students and the community. The Strategic Academic Plan includes:

- \$3 Million in Legislative Grants for new programs:
  - Full-day kindergarten classes for all students commencing on October 6, 2016
  - Adds both monolingual and bilingual Kindergarten teachers
  - Partial restoration elementary arts programs commencing on October 6, 2016:
    1. Dance Preps for grades K and 1
    2. General Music Preps for grades 2 and 3
    3. Theatre Prep for grade 4
    4. Art Preps for grades 4, 5 and 6



5. Enrichment periods for grades 4, 5 and 6 in the orchestra, instrumental music, band, and chorus
- STAR-Renaissance formative assessments aligned with the New York tests administered once every six weeks;
  - Formative assessment parent reports;
  - Increases in professional development opportunities for teachers and principals;
  - New collaborative planning time for elementary teachers;
  - New high expectations for all students and educators; and
  - Continued support for enhanced course offerings.

Although the District has made improvements since enhanced monitoring was initiated by the Department, there are many students who need additional support to accelerate their learning. The District needs to build into the budget additional supports such as after school and summer learning opportunities.

## **Fiscal Improvement Plan**

The East Ramapo Central School District mission states that:

*“As a unified community, the East Ramapo Central School District is committed to educating the whole child by providing a healthy, safe, supportive, engaging and challenging environment. We will do so as a community unified by mutual respect for its members and a shared concern for the well-being of all of our children. We will manage the School District’s resources effectively. To accomplish our mission, the School District developed a fiscal plan focused on three core elements:*

1. *Educating the whole child.*
2. *Improving and maintaining the physical environment of our schools and grounds.*
3. *Implementing a solid resource management system.”*

As noted above the District invested the supplemental \$3 million State grant to enhance the educational program and worked to improve the management of the financial and capital assets of the school district. The fiscal improvement plan has aligned the financial resources of the district with the academic strategic plan.

## **Building on the Work of the 2015-16 School Year**

The Audited Financial Statement for the 2015-16 School Year shows a significant improvement in the financial condition of the district. Key financial highlights from the financial statement are:

- The District's General Fund reported unassigned fund balance on June 30, 2016 of \$4,150,436, an increase of \$2,747,868 from the unassigned balance of \$1,402,568 reported on June 30, 2015. This was because of expenditures coming in less than budgeted by \$1.3 million and revenues exceeding budgetary estimates by \$1.4 million;

- It should be noted that New York State law allows school districts to maintain up to 4% of the ensuing year's budget, exclusive of the amount assigned for the subsequent year's budget, as unassigned fund balance. For this District, that amount would be approximately \$8.97 million. On June 30, 2016, the District had \$4,150,436, or 1.84%, of its subsequent year's budget reflected in unassigned fund balance;
- For cash flow purposes, the District borrowed \$15 million in anticipation of the receipt of taxes to be levied for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016. This obligation, with interest, was satisfied on time during the fiscal year;
- The District retired \$2,165,000 of serial bonds issued in previous years for various capital projects and tax certiorari obligations. The District also retired \$878,012 of energy performance contract debt; and
- On the District-wide financial statements, the assets and deferred outflows of resources of the District exceeded liabilities and deferred inflows of resources at the close of its most recent fiscal year.

### **Improved Controls and a Balanced 2016-17 School Budget**

The District's current budget for the 2016-17 year is in structural balance. To ensure the current budget and future budgets remain in the balance the District has adopted an accounting policy and is vigorously monitoring the budget and strengthening the following financial management practices:

- All decisions for hiring new staff are made after a thorough assessment of the District's budgeted resources and on realistic costs projections;
- List of monthly budgetary reports underspent and overspent amounts for each budgetary account;
- Implement every internal auditor's recommendation within a fiscal-year period;
- Seek and obtain written or verbal quotations for items not subject to competitive bids;
- Monitor, analyze and assess on an annual basis the District's long-term liabilities including but not limited to compensated absences;
- Implement during the 2016-17 school year the State Monitors' Recommendation number 14 included in the December 14, 2015 "Opportunity Deferred" report, which seeks to explore longer-term transportation contracts with public approval while a third large-scale busing contractor is also being sought to enhance competition for services; and
- Adopt a new accounting policy by the Board of Education.

The 2016-17 voter-approved budget (excluding the \$3 million in State legislative grant noted above) built upon the progress made in 2015-16 but fell short of the communities desires. The 2016-17 voter approved budget:

- Added only four full-day kindergarten classes;
- Included Instrumental Music or Band or Chorus for Grade 6 Students;
- Included Visual Arts for Grade 5 Students;

- Increased the After-School Music/Arts Enrichment Offerings;
- Enhanced professional development for staff;
- Included Ninth Grade Academy;
- Included mentors for Senior High School Students;
- Included a “STEAM” Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Math program at Kakiat School starting with the seventh grade;
- Included a Literacy through Engineering program at Kakiat School; and
- Added a full-time position to facilitate a strong attendance initiative.

The following programs were requested by the Superintendent but were not included:

- Literacy through Engineering program at all schools grades 1-6; and
- Gifted and talented programs for all grades.

A \$2,497,895 School Improvement Grant received after adoption of the budget will fund creation of an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Chestnut Ridge Middle School which is a Priority School. The full project period for this grant is five years. Continuation of funding each year of the project is contingent upon progress toward meeting achievement goals, leading indicators, fidelity of implementation of required model actions, and maintenance of all grant requirements.

## **Risks and Liabilities**

In preparing their fiscal improvement plan, the District has worked rigorously to improve transparency by identifying and assessing potential risks and future liabilities. Below is a comprehensive list:

- In 2011, the District entered an energy performance contract with Johnson Controls, Inc. to install numerous energy efficient controls and devices throughout the District's buildings. It seems that no actual contract was signed and approved by both parties. The District was unable to secure financing for the project and was unaware that work had commenced. Johnson Controls claims to have done close to \$1.9 million of work. The District believed it should not be required to pay Johnson Controls the required amount as funding was not secured prior to Johnson commencing work done. This matter proceeded to mediation. There is now a Board-approved agreement between the District and Johnson Controls to pay \$1 million over a five-year period starting in fiscal year 2017-18. The District's 2017-18 proposed budget will include the first payment of \$200,000;
- In 2011-2012 the District used \$662,523 in lunch funds for capital expenditures that did not receive prior approval by the Department. In addition, there is another potential \$80,000 of disallowances for other years. To view the State Education Department's audit on these findings, visit: [http://www.oms.nysed.gov/oas/Audit\\_Report/SchoolDistricts/SchoolDistricts.html](http://www.oms.nysed.gov/oas/Audit_Report/SchoolDistricts/SchoolDistricts.html);

- The District has an ongoing unresolved issue with the Ramapo Central District about the processing of claims for parentally placed non-public students with residence in East Ramapo. On June 21, 2016, the District filed an application for “administrative review of a claim for payment” with the State Education Department. The amount involved is \$183,645 for the fiscal year 2013-14 and 2014-15;
- In April 2016 New York State Insurance Reciprocal (NYSIR) decided to drop coverage for District. This decision negatively impacted the District as it had to seek new insurance coverage in a very short time frame. There was no single insurer that offered to commit to insuring the District. The insurance costs increased by over \$900,000 on an annual basis starting July 1, 2016. The settlement with the plaintiffs in the civil rights lawsuit may assist the district in securing more affordable coverage. The District will continue working to identify efficiencies and areas of risk to accommodate and reduce this additional cost for the fiscal year 2017-18 and beyond; and
- School Facilities are in desperate need of renovation. The District’s voters approved bonding \$58 million in capital projects and \$1.1 million in EXCEL projects on December 6, 2016. The projects will address the district’s most critical infrastructure needs. The tax impact of the projects will be minimal due to the retirement of existing debt and reimbursement by the state at a rate of 56.2 percent.

Major elements of the school facilities renovation program include:

- \$9,898,000: Window replacements at Spring Valley High School, Summit Park Elementary, Ramapo High School, Fleetwood Elementary, Chestnut Ridge Middle School, Kakiat Elementary and the administration building. Window hardware replacements at Eldorado Elementary, Hempstead Elementary, Elmwood Elementary and Lime Kiln;
- \$14,862,080: Roof replacements or renovations at the District’s 14 schools and administration building. Skylight replacement at Chestnut Ridge Middle School and Kakiat Elementary;
- \$9,845,000: Boiler replacements in Fleetwood Elementary, Pomona Middle School, Summit Park Elementary, Chestnut Ridge Middle School, Grandview Elementary, Hempstead Elementary, Elmwood Elementary, Kakiat Elementary, Lime Kiln Elementary, Ramapo High School, Eldorado Elementary and Administration Building;
- \$3,900,000: Replacement of heating/ventilation units at Lime Kiln Elementary, Eldorado Elementary and Chestnut Ridge Middle School;
- \$5,370,000: Bleacher replacement at high school athletic fields, broken sidewalk replacements, installation of artificial turf fields at Spring Valley High School and Ramapo High School;
- Upgraded security system, renovations in K-8 classrooms to add science labs and special education classrooms and installation of a Wi-Fi network for every classroom and office; and

- A second proposition on the ballot sought approval to borrow \$1,127,920 through the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York program to replace windows and doors at Kakiat and Fleetwood elementary schools.

The District has also retained an accounting firm as the internal auditor to look at specific areas of risk each year. The June 2016 Internal Audit report identified the following recent improvements to the procedures and internal controls:

- New directors have been appointed to oversee funded programs and transportation;
- Checks received by senior account clerk are logged by payer; and
- The District is now performing formal employee exit interviews in human resources.

In addition, the following improvements have been made in recent months:

- Fuel reports are reviewed by employee/vehicle for excess usage;
- New bus contracts charge the District per pupil (as opposed to per bus). Student headcounts are monitored by the Transportation Department to ensure accuracy;
- Benefits Department is using *WinCap* to track billing for health insurance reimbursements;
- The payroll clerk is comparing totals from time cards to the number of hours input to the payroll edit hours; and
- The Purchasing Department is consolidating and cleaning up vendors in the *WinCap* system. The process is expected to be completed by mid-January 2017.

The report also identified recommended additional improvements that have not yet been implemented:

- Work orders and field use scheduling are not consistently being entered into the software application for proper tracking. The newly hired (October 2016) Director of Facilities has reviewed the District's shortcomings in using the software application and has developed a correction plan. It should be noted that Building and Grounds reports to the Assistant Superintendent of Finance as of August 2016. It used to report to Human Resources;
- The District should research the cost-benefit of the *WinCap* online time card software (*WinCap Web*). District staff has researched using the software and it is a cost saver. The District will have a proposal by February 28, 2017;
- The District should examine reports to compare all time spent on different areas of maintenance to determine if the District is over or under staffed in any area. The District expects to have plan for implementing the software by July 2017;
- Live payroll distributions are not being conducted annually. The District has scheduled this exercise in two schools in February 2017;
- Preventive maintenance is not planned due to financial constraints. Maintenance has been planned but is not up to the level of need. The Monitors are working

with the District to ensure preventive maintenance is included in the 2017-18 budget;

- A second approval should sign off on wire transfers under \$50,000. Currently, Board Policy only requires second signatures above \$50,000;
- The Health insurance invoice from NYSHIP should be reconciled to benefit department reports monthly (not quarterly). The District will start a monthly reconciliation schedule in January 2017 to coincide with the new health insurance rates; and
- Purchasing staff have been cut which could cause a separation of duties problem. There are two staff members working at the purchasing department which the District feels are adequate.

## **District Trends**

Demographic trends will continue to affect the fiscal outlook of the District. The current District's student population comprises approximately 8,650 public students and 24,700 non-public students. See attachment B for school by school enrollment. Of the public student population, 84% are economically disadvantaged and 30% are English Language Learners (ELL). See attachment C.

The free and reduced price lunch enrollment for public students has increased from 59% of the total student body in 2007 to 84.3% today. The Hispanic population has grown from about 20% in 2007 to 50% of the current student population.

A significant element with an enormous impact on the District's finances is the growth of the special education student population, which has grown 58% since 2003. More importantly, this outsized growth has happened at the same time as the total student population has declined. Therefore, while the special education student population represented 11% of all students in 2003, it reached over 19% in 2016. In 2016, the number of special education students decreased slightly after several years of increases.

This growth in special education identification is likely due to two issues: changing demographics and programmatic cuts. The increased proportions of low-income and ELL students is commonly found with increased special education rates, but the budget and programmatic cuts were severe and resulted in reduced options for teachers and parents. The District has a new Director of Special Education and new systems are now in place to ensure that identification and Committee on Special Education (CSE) procedures are properly followed. This has immediately resulted in a decrease in inappropriate special education placements. It should also be noted that nonpublic students receiving legally required services provided by the District, while low in number, are counted in the state aid formulas.

While the free and reduced price lunch enrollment data place the District in the top decile of the poorest New York State school districts, paradoxically the District ranks among the top 20% of the richest Districts based on a Combined Wealth Ratio. The

anomaly rests with how the State Aid formulas work. These formulas capture the entire wealth (income and property) of the District but they divide it by public students only. This is an area of investigation by the Monitors who are trying to calculate the costs of nonpublic students to the District and how State Aid formulas account (or not) for such costs.

Nearly 25,000 students attend nonpublic schools – mainly Orthodox Jewish Yeshivas. Since 2004-2005, the private school population in East Ramapo has increased by nearly 50% and continued growth is projected at about 4-5% per year. It should be noted that the District receives Transportation Aid from the state for nonpublic students through the existing state aid formula, which does include a weight for nonpublic students in calculating school district wealth.

Transporting 33,350 students (24,700 non-public and 8,650 public) has necessitated the creation of the state's second largest school transportation system after New York City (See attachment C). The District spent \$29 million on transportation in 2015-16. The per pupil cost of just under \$900 compares favorably with other Rockland and Westchester county school district averages. The District average per pupil transportation expense in Rockland is \$1,041, Northern Westchester is \$1,394, and Southern Westchester is \$972. Offsetting the cost of transporting nonpublic students is the option to select a state sharing formula that includes nonpublic students which increases the state share. For the 2016-17 school year the state share is 81.6% for eligible transportation costs related to both public and nonpublic students rather than 41.9% if nonpublic students were not included in the formula.

The District has worked and continues to focus on improving its fiscal condition. The District's unassigned fund balance stood at 0.4% of the revenues as of 2014-15 fiscal year, but has shown improvement during the last two years. The 2015-16 fiscal audit indicates that the unassigned fund balance will be close to 2% of the approved 2016-17 budget. While there may be some that wish to spend these funds on programs, it is important and fiscally sound practice for a school district to retain a fund balance for unforeseen costs.

## **Sustainability**

The Monitors have worked with the District to model District revenues and expenditures over the next several years. Based on the current data, the District will be able to maintain a positive fund balance for the current school year. In addition the District can expect to maintain a positive fund balance for the next several years assuming the following:

- Public enrollment increases at a rate of 1.3% annually and nonpublic enrollment increases at a rate of 5.0% annually (See Attachment C);
- The board of education proposes and the District's voters adopt budgets that include tax increases up to tax cap;
- State revenue growth follows the current state financial plan; and
- Current \$3 million State funding continues annually.

The district must increase local revenues faster than the tax cap allows if the district is going to restore programs that were cut over the last nine years.

In the coming 2017-18 school year, the District faces several challenges:

- Repayment of \$724,616 in non-salary expenditures that should not have been charged to the school lunch fund for the period July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2015;
- Payment of more than \$500,000 to the Ramapo Central School District for services provided to students who are residents of East Ramapo; and
- A just announced \$435,000 tax certiorari settlement.

The Monitors are working with the District to model expected changes in student demographics, tax base and restoration of critical academic programs. The restoration of programs, coupled with more systematic classification systems and criteria for special education, will help to reduce special education identification rates and costs. Incorporation of these changes may require adoption of a future budget that exceeds the tax cap or changes in state reimbursement to reflect the costs of mandated services for an increasing number of nonpublic students. It is critical the board of education take both sustainability and program restoration into account during upcoming contract negotiations.

Recently, the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit withdrew their claims against the District's board of education. This may result in up to \$1.5 million in legal cost saving annually.

### **2017-18 Budget Planning**

While the District has shown improvement in student test scores and the graduation rate, the levels of achievement are far below the levels expected by the community, the board of education, superintendent, and students. It is the goal of the District to provide access for every student to participate in integrated arts programs, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and Honors courses. Next year's budget will need to include additional supports to allow all students to benefit from enhanced courses. A list of currently available enhanced course offerings is included in Attachment A.

### **English Language Learners**

The Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) is working with the District to implement its corrective action plan (CAP). OBEWL received the District's first quarterly report of 2016-17 in a timely fashion on October 15, 2016. The report indicates the District is making diligent efforts toward and good progress at compliance with CAP mandates. The District's next quarterly report is due in January 2017.



The District's obligations under the CAP include:

- Accurately identifying parent interest concerning bilingual education and English as a New Language (ENL) program options and creating/maintaining bilingual education programs as required by student population triggers;
- Providing Beginner and Intermediate ELLs/MLLs with access to the core curriculum and a pathway to graduation;
- Ensuring compliance with Commissioner's Regulation Section 100.2(y) regarding documentation of age and residency;
- Ensuring maintenance of data systems for accurate records about the home language and size of its ELL/MLL population;
- Correctly administering the Home Language Questionnaire and use data collected therein to accurately identify the home language of ELL/MLL students;
- Providing ELL/MLLs with adequate instruction, including:
  - Differentiated instruction appropriate to grade and level of English proficiency;
  - Sufficient native language instructional materials in bilingual education classes; and
  - Ensuring scheduling failures and disruptions do not occur (e.g., multiple mid-semester class changes, multiple study halls per day, or splitting ENL across two periods);
- Providing adequate information to ELLs/MLLs and their parents about their educational rights and programming; and
- Placing new ELLs/MLLs within ten (10) days of registration and initiation of the ELL/MLL identification process.
  - On August 22, 2016, ERCSD sent OBEWL a letter requesting termination of its CAP based on the district's efforts and past performance.

OBEWL informed the District that it is unable to terminate the CAP as it continues to receive complaints from community members, notwithstanding the district's cooperation and responsiveness at addressing these complaints, as described below. Therefore, the District's CAP will continue through the standard three-year term, which began in the spring 2015 semester and continue through the fall 2017 semester.

OBEWL receives occasional complaints from community members documenting various concerns, and the district has been cooperative at resolving these issues. In particular, concerns have arisen regarding parent orientation and placement in bilingual programs:

- OBEWL quickly resolved two issues (one at Fleetwood Elementary School and one at Spring Valley High School) regarding failure to offer bilingual programming to two newly enrolled students.
- The District has voluntarily disclosed to OBEWL that it is having difficulty offering bilingual program seats to all interested ELLs/MLLs at the high school level due

to contractual class size constraints, and sought technical assistance from OBEWL. To this end, OBEWL is working with the district to:

- Promote postings for certified bilingual educators in order to expand the number of bilingual classrooms and
- Ensure the district is providing native language supports to all students who request bilingual programming.

## **Students with Disabilities**

The Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) Hudson Valley Regional Office is conducting a Special Education Programs and Services Focused Review in the District. The Focused Review is designed to determine if the District is in compliance with specific federal and State laws and regulations regarding the provision of special education programs and services for school-age students with disabilities. The provision of appropriate special education programs and services is critical to improved outcomes for school-age students with disabilities. The Focused Review covers the following areas:

- Area 1 – Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development;
- Area 2 – IEP Implementation;
- Area 3 – Instruction from Qualified Staff;
- Area 4 – Delivery of Special Education Programs and Services;
- Area 5 – Behavioral Interventions;
- Area 6 – Time Out Rooms, if applicable; and
- Area 7 – Parental Awareness of Special Education Delivery and Progress.

The District's Focused Review is centered on students with disabilities in 1st through 3rd grade in the following four elementary schools: Grandview Elementary; Margetts Elementary; Summit Park Elementary; and Fleetwood Elementary. Students in 1st through 3rd grades were identified as the focus of this review as the percentage of students with disabilities in the identified elementary schools scoring at Level 1 on the 3-8 State Assessments in ELA and math ranged from 69% to 96%.

An introductory meeting was held on November 9, 2016 with the Superintendent, two Assistant Superintendents, the four elementary school Principals, and SEQA staff in order to discuss the review process. On December 1 and 2, 2016 SEQA staff conducted record reviews for the students with disabilities in the review sample. In addition, SEQA staff conducted classroom visitations on December 5, 2016 at Fleetwood Elementary, December 7, 2016 at Grandview Elementary, December 12, 2016 at Margetts Elementary, and December 13, 2016 at Summit Park Elementary.

In January 2017, SEQA anticipates receiving District staff surveys and will conduct parent interviews and observations of Committee on Special Education meetings. The projected timeframe to issue the Focused Review Final Report is late February 2017.

SEQA will monitor the District's resolution of any identified noncompliance contained in the Compliance Assurance Plan.

## **Recommendations**

The Monitors recommend the continuation of the \$3 million legislative grant. Without continuation of the \$3 million grant, the district does not have the fiscal capacity to maintain both full-day kindergarten for all students and the recent partial restoration of elementary arts programs. The Monitors strongly recommend against using the District's current fund balance to fund these restorations because the fund balance is less than two percent of the general fund budget. Use of the fund balance would leave the district with very limited capacity to address unforeseen fiscal challenges. Elimination of the \$3 million grant would exhaust the District's fund balance.

The Monitors also recommend that the Commissioner continue to use existing authority to ensure that the District has on-going, on-the-ground support to ensure that the District's recent gains are not lost and that progress continues to be made.

## **Next Steps**

The Monitors will continue to collaborate with Department staff which has been extremely helpful and timely in their assistance.

Areas of focus include:

1. Student Performance and Attendance
  - The Offices of Accountability and School Improvement and Monitors are reviewing and analyzing the data to identify areas requiring additional resources.
2. English Language Learners
  - The Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) will continue to monitor the District's implementation of their corrective action plan (CAP).
3. Students with Special Needs
  - In January 2017, The Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) Hudson Valley Regional Office anticipates receiving District staff surveys and will conduct parent interviews and observations of Committee on Special Education meetings. The projected timeframe to issue the Focused Review Final Report is late February 2017. SEQA will monitor the District's resolution of any identified noncompliance contained in the Compliance Assurance Plan.

4. Supplementary Education
  - The Monitors are working with the Department's Office of Student Support Services to identify resources for providing supplementary educational services. The Monitors are also looking at the possibility of restoring programs that were eliminated.
5. Benchmarking
  - Dr. Sipple is comparing East Ramapo to other comparable Districts to identify opportunities for identifying best practices and savings.
6. Transportation
  - Office of Student Transportation and Dr. Sipple are looking at the efficiency of the current system and ways to reduce costs.
7. Nonpublic Textbooks
  - Monitors have requested a list of purchase orders and textbook inventory from the District. Mr. Szuberla will review the material with appropriate Department staff to ensure only allowable textbooks are purchased and the District keeps an inventory of textbooks loaned to nonpublic schools.
8. State Aid
  - Monitors are working with of the Office of Education Finance to study options for weighting for nonpublic students in state aid formulas.
9. 2017-18 District Budget
  - The Monitors and Department staff are working with the District on next year's budget and a sustainable five-year plan that restores additional critical programs.
10. Renovation of School Facilities
  - The Monitors and Office of Facilities Planning will continue to monitor the school renovation work, ensure the District maximizes state building aid and address concerns from the public.
11. Contracts
  - The Office of Education Management Services and Monitors have received copies of all major contracts and have begun reviewing the contracts and the request for proposals to procure the contracts.

## **Attachments: Tables and Charts**

**Enhanced Course Offerings: 2016-17 School Year**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Total Number of Sections</b>	<b>Ramapo High School</b>	<b>Spring Valley High School</b>
<b>English</b>			
Honors	15	10	5
Advanced Placement (AP)	4	2	2
Project Advance	2	2	0
College in High School	17	8	9
<b>Math</b>			
Honors	9	5	4
Advanced Placement (AP)	2	1	1
Project Advance	0	0	0
College in High School	1	0	1
<b>Science</b>			
Honors	20	11	9
Advanced Placement (AP)	2	1	1
Project Advance	0	0	0
College in High School	1	0	1
<b>Social Studies</b>			
Honors	14	8	6
Advanced Placement (AP)	8	3	5
Project Advance	4	2	2
College in High School	4	0	4

<b>Course</b>	<b>Total Number of Sections</b>	<b>Ramapo High School</b>	<b>Spring Valley High School</b>
<b>World Languages</b>			
Honors	8	4	4
Advanced	9	4	5
Advanced Placement (AP)	2	2	0
Project Advance	0	0	0
College in High School	5	3	2
<b>Total Number of Sections</b>	127	66	61

- For comparison in 2006 the District offered 16 different AP courses and was considered a national leader.

## East Ramapo Central School District Comprehensive

116

### BEDS Enrollment Report 2016-2017

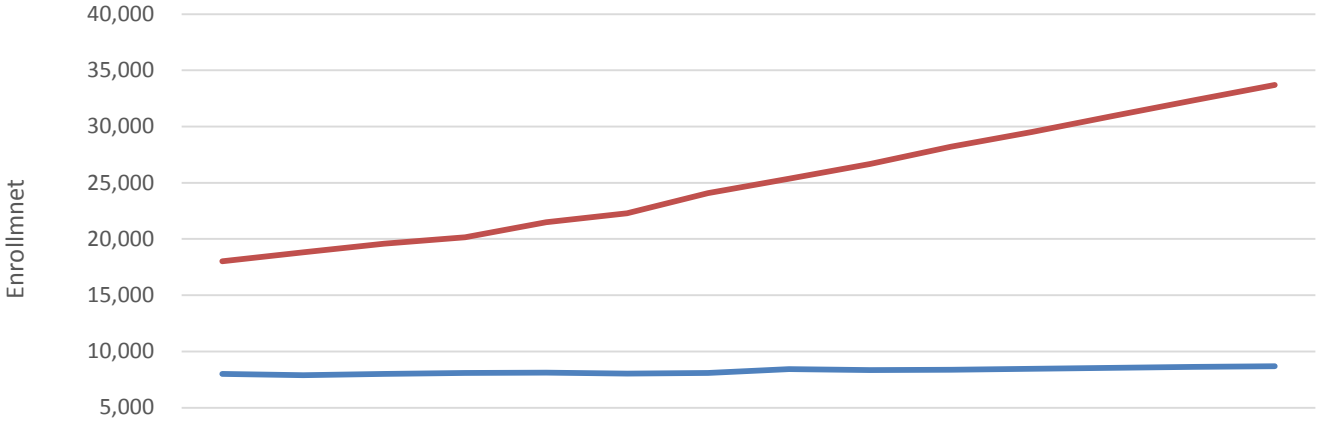
BEDS Day Oct 2014	Total	Male	Female	Am. Native	Black (non Hisp.)	Asian	Hispanic	White (non Hisp.)	Mult	POV			Sp. Ed.		ESL
										Free	Red.	Total	SC	ALL	ALL
EAST RAMAPO	8586	4493	4093	3	2966	349	4832	346	81	6351	426	6777	1239	1641	2762
		52.3%	47.7%	0.0%	34.5%	4.1%	56.3%	4.0%	0.9%	74.0%	5.0%	78.9%	14.4%	19.1%	32.2%
Spring Valley High School	1228	670	558	0	516	47	624	40	0	915	75	990	153	207	420
		54.6%	45.4%	0.0%	42.0%	3.8%	50.8%	3.3%	0.0%	74.5%	6.1%	80.6%	12.5%	16.9%	34.2%
Ramapo High School	1349	728	621	0	608	75	605	45	15	940	74	1014	127	197	305
		54.0%	46.0%	0.0%	45.1%	5.6%	44.8%	3.3%	1.1%	69.7%	5.5%	75.2%	9.4%	14.6%	22.6%
Chestnut Ridge Middle School	576	304	272	0	210	18	319	23	6	450	34	484	129	167	119
		52.8%	47.2%	0.0%	36.5%	3.1%	55.4%	4.0%	1.0%	78.1%	5.9%	84.0%	22.4%	29.0%	20.7%
Pomona Middle School	457	232	225	0	180	20	237	8	12	350	27	377	93	110	104
		50.8%	49.2%	0.0%	39.4%	4.4%	51.9%	1.8%	2.6%	76.6%	5.9%	82.5%	20.4%	24.1%	22.8%
Fleetwood Elementary	551	285	266	1	110	11	411	14	2	422	19	441	27	50	287
		51.7%	48.3%	0.2%	20.0%	2.0%	74.6%	2.5%	0.4%	76.6%	3.4%	80.0%	4.9%	9.1%	52.1%
Grandview Elementary	468	241	227	0	112	12	317	21	6	361	21	382	48	65	207
		51.5%	48.5%	0.0%	23.9%	2.6%	67.7%	4.5%	1.3%	77.1%	4.5%	81.6%	10.3%	13.9%	44.2%
Hempstead Elementary	463	248	215	0	181	18	223	33	6	319	16	335	104	123	141
		53.6%	46.4%	0.0%	39.1%	3.9%	48.2%	7.1%	1.3%	68.9%	3.5%	72.4%	22.5%	26.6%	30.5%
Kakiat Elementary	460	233	227	0	179	28	234	13	5	343	26	369	103	132	96
		50.7%	49.3%	0.0%	38.9%	6.1%	50.9%	2.8%	1.1%	74.6%	5.7%	80.2%	22.4%	28.7%	20.9%
Margetts Elementary	584	305	279	0	155	34	350	38	7	445	28	473	22	47	275
		52.2%	47.8%	0.0%	26.5%	5.8%	59.9%	6.5%	1.2%	76.2%	4.8%	81.0%	3.8%	8.0%	47.1%
Kakiat Middle School	146	73	73	0	74	14	50	3	4	99	19	118	33	42	15
		50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.7%	9.6%	34.2%	2.1%	2.7%	67.8%	13.0%	80.8%	22.6%	28.8%	10.3%
Summit Park Elementary	509	253	256	0	161	21	305	14	8	386	14	400	53	76	156
		49.7%	50.3%	0.0%	31.6%	4.1%	59.9%	2.8%	1.6%	75.8%	2.8%	78.6%	10.4%	14.9%	30.6%
Lime Kiln Elementary	452	223	229	1	126	12	297	15	1	389	18	407	120	151	185
		49.3%	50.7%	0.2%	27.9%	2.7%	65.7%	3.3%	0.2%	86.1%	4.0%	90.0%	26.5%	33.4%	40.9%
Elmwood Elementary	492	256	236	0	121	20	299	49	3	409	19	428	112	132	195
		52.0%	48.0%	0.0%	24.6%	4.1%	60.8%	10.0%	0.6%	83.1%	3.9%	87.0%	22.8%	26.8%	39.6%
Eldorado Elementary	485	240	245	0	146	9	308	18	3	386	27	413	94	112	166
		49.5%	50.5%	0.0%	30.1%	1.9%	63.5%	3.7%	0.6%	79.6%	5.6%	85.2%	19.4%	23.1%	34.2%
Early Childhood Center	366	202	164	1	87	10	253	12	3	137	9	146	21	30	91
		55.2%	44.8%	0.3%	23.8%	2.7%	69.1%	3.3%	0.8%	37.4%	2.5%	39.9%	5.7%	8.2%	24.9%



## **Trend Data**

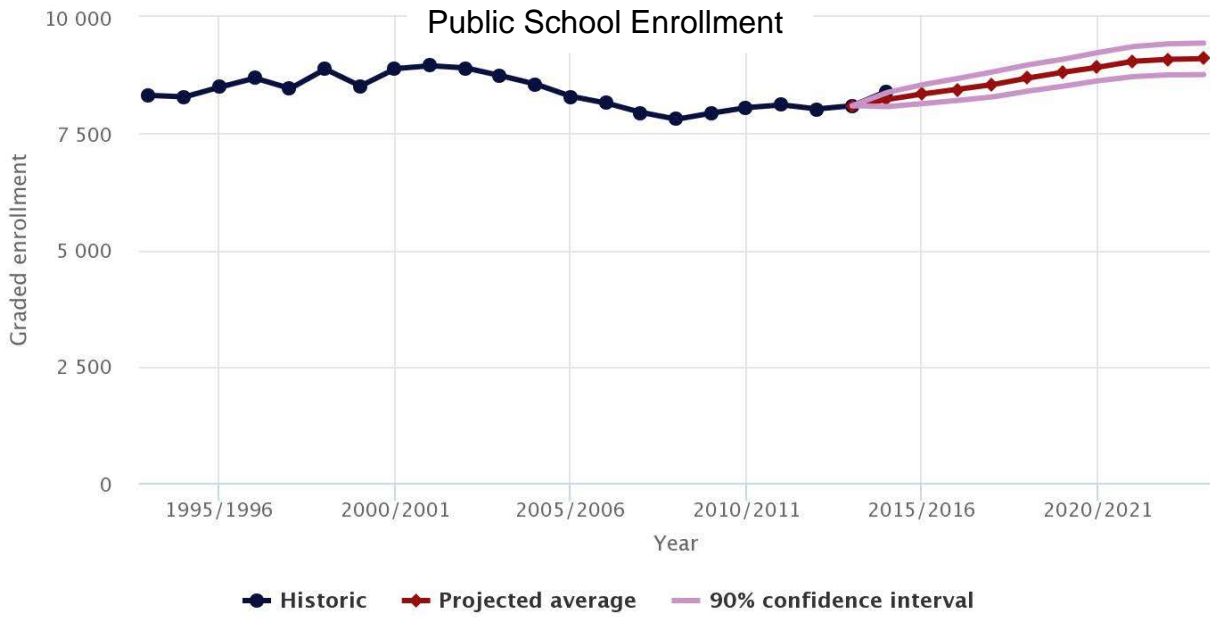
1. Public and Nonpublic Enrollment
2. Projected Public Enrollment
3. Free and Reduced Price Lunch and English Language Learners
4. Per Pupil Transportation Expenses

### Stable Public- and Increasing NonPublic- Enrollment (Projected to 2020)

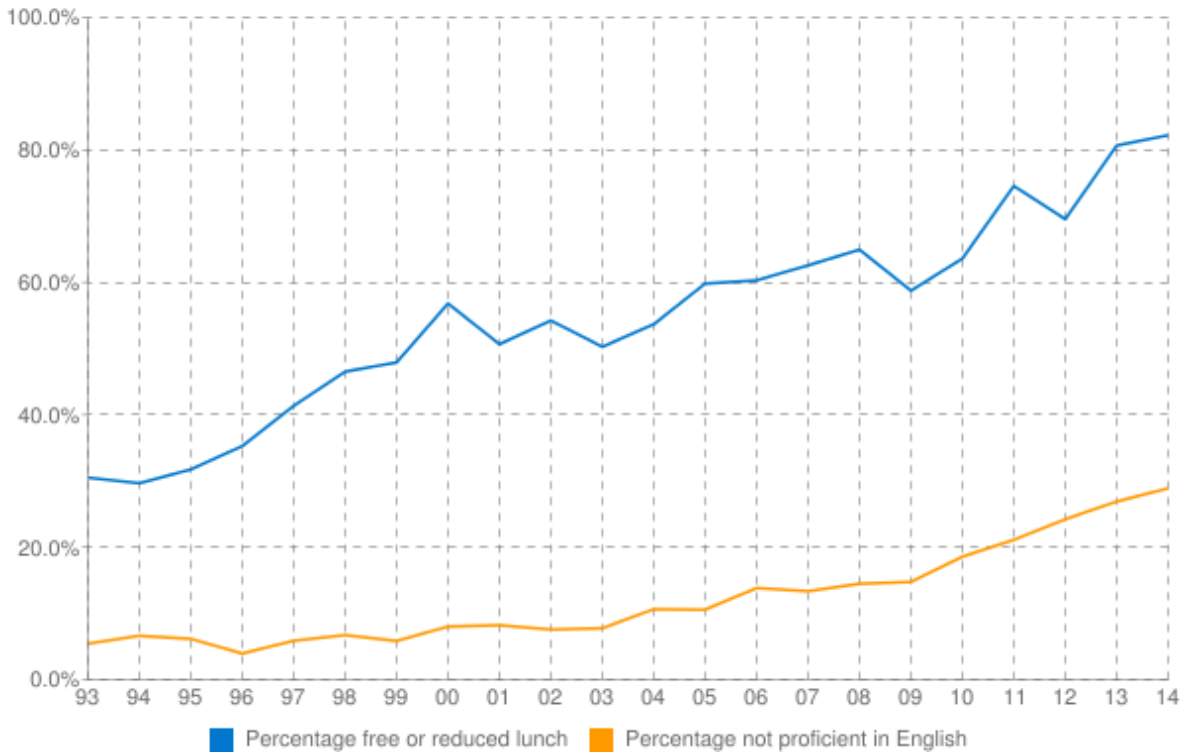


	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
— Pub Enroll	8,003	7,901	8,016	8,080	8,118	8,031	8,102	8,420	8,335	8,389	8,461	8,548	8,646	8,702
— NP Enroll	18,02	18,81	19,58	20,16	21,48	22,29	24,09	25,37	26,67	28,21	29,50	30,92	32,34	33,70

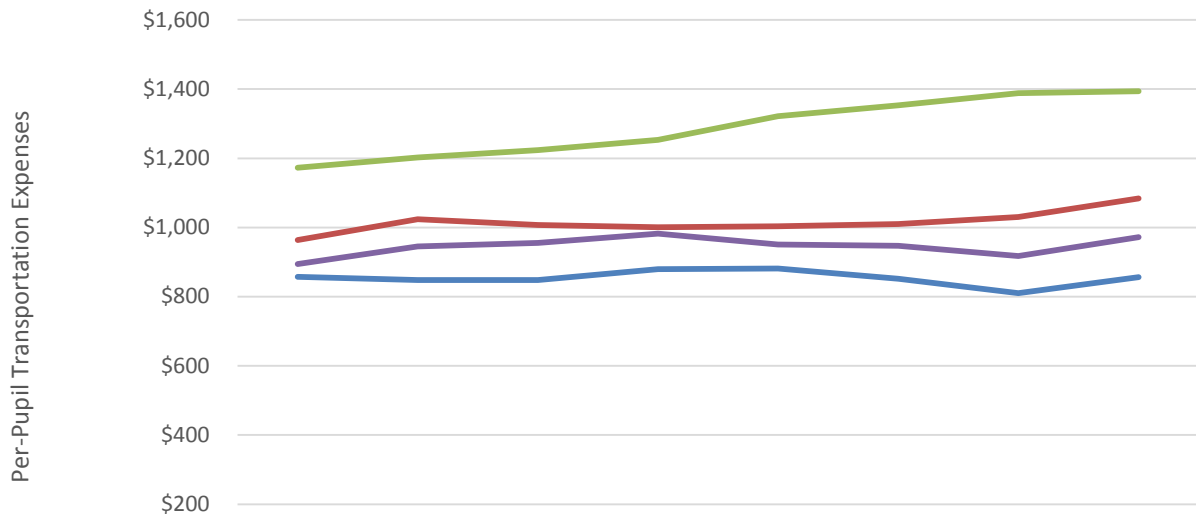
### EAST RAMAPO CSD (SPRING VALLEY)



### EAST RAMAPO CSD (SPRING VALLEY)



### Per Pupil Transportation Expenses by Year



	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ERCSD	\$857	\$848	\$848	\$879	\$882	\$852	\$811	\$857
Rockland	\$964	\$1,024	\$1,007	\$1,001	\$1,003	\$1,010	\$1,030	\$1,084
N. Westchester	\$1,172	\$1,202	\$1,224	\$1,254	\$1,321	\$1,353	\$1,388	\$1,394
S. Westchester	\$895	\$945	\$955	\$982	\$951	\$947	\$918	\$972