

Bedford school plan: Cut 57 jobs, raise tax rate 8.5%

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BEDFORD — It will take 57 layoffs to balance next year's public school budget as well as an 8.5 percent tax rate increase for town residents, according to a proposed spending plan for 2012-2013.

The Bedford school district's proposed \$122 million budget for next year calls for selling its bus fleet and firing 37 full-time transportation workers — most of them bus drivers — as well as laying off another 20 classroom employees, most of them teachers and aides.

The plan to disband the district's in-house busing operation and outsource all the routes to a new company would save more than \$600,000 next year, said Mark Betz, the school district's assistant superintendent for business. Over five years, the total savings would be about \$4.7 million.

Although transportation outsourcing is not new, it is something other districts are considering. Mamaroneck has proposed to save \$700,000 next year by fully outsourcing bus routes and scaling back service to private-school students, for example.

Currently, Bedford covers 33 percent of school bus routes itself with a fleet of mini buses. Under the outsourcing plan, all employees except a supervisor and two dispatchers would lose their jobs.

"Any layoff is catastrophic," said Mary Lou Cavaliere, president of the CSEA union that represents the transportation workers. "We are hoping that the new bus company will offer employment to our drivers."

School district officials say they are caught between cuts they don't want to make and costs they don't want to pass along. They have proposed a budget that represents a 2.7 percent increase over the current spending plan to cover increases in salaries and in the state-run pension systems.

The \$2.5 million in total cuts would mean reductions in the tax rate for property owners in Mount Kisco, Pound Ridge, New Castle and North Castle, but the tax rate for people who pay school taxes in Bedford would jump 8.5 percent because of higher property values.

"As a homeowner in Bedford I am outraged," says Wolfgang Armbruster, a retired Wall Street exec. "Bedford is by and large an affluent place, but there is a big subset of people who cannot absorb that kind of an increase."

Two public work sessions are planned between now and April 18, when the Board of Education plans to adopt the budget.

Under the proposed plan, Bedford's tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed property value would be \$132.03, or 8.5 percent more. A home in Bedford assessed at the town average of \$65,000 would pay \$8,582 next year, or \$671 more.

In Mount Kisco, the tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed property value would decrease by less than one percent to 68.82. In Pound Ridge, the tax rate would also decrease slightly to \$77.81 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

In New Castle, the tax rate would fall by more than 3 percent to \$65.39, and in North Castle, the rate would also decrease 3 percent to \$570.02 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.