

Hello Berlin Community!

Tuesday, March 5 is Town Meeting Day. Please come out and VOTE on your local Berlin Elementary School Budget, between 10AM and 7PM at the school. There will be a public hearing on the school budget at BES the night before, on Monday, March 4, at 6PM.

With this BES budget and the estimated budget for U32, here's the bottom line for taxes:

A 2.67% increase in spending over last year's budget and, when combined with a decreased tax impact from the U32 budget, we will see a **projected education tax increase of .005 cents, or \$5 for each \$100,000 of assessed property value.**

This is an unusual year for our Berlin school district. We are operating under the assumption that we will be merged and a consolidated budget will be proposed to all voters of the five towns in a few months and this budget and vote would be moot. Until then, we as a board believe we have a duty to present the Berlin voters with a local budget. This budget will most likely be the very same budget that is rolled up into one of five (six, counting U32) budgets for a vote of the entire district. It is possible that a lawsuit or legislative action will halt the merger, but that is a total unknown right now so we are proceeding on both tracks.

Your School Board asked for a "level service" budget this year (maintaining the same level of educational services as the previous year) and is asking you to approve a budget that includes a net **2.67% increase** in spending over last year.

Your ballot will show a 4.41% increase in spending "per equalized pupil," but that is different than the actual impact on taxes noted above and is somewhat a reflection of Berlin having a few less students this year.

Last year, Governor Scott asked schools to reduce education spending by making sure the student to staff ratios are at least **4.45 students per staff member**. As of 2017, Berlin was well above that (and the statewide average) with **6.86 students per staff member**.

When it comes to student to teacher ratios, BES was at **12.71 students per teacher** in 2017, which ranked as the 250th largest ratio out of 297 schools in Vermont. The Agency of Education has not provided updated numbers for 2018.

We think it's important to point out that as a school board, we are doing relatively well with cost-control measures, but we have no control over the statewide education tax and other complicated education funding factors which are calculated through a complicated formula, including these four factors, and the Board only has control over one item, our local elementary school budget:

- **The common level of appraisal (CLA)** – accounts for the gap between appraised value and actual value of property, so that some towns don't undervalue their property in order to pay less into the statewide pool. This year, the CLA in Berlin went down slightly, from 102.45% to 102.14% of appraised value. This accounts for a small part of the increase in taxes.

- **The statewide education tax rate** – set by the State, it reflects statewide education spending, including merger incentives.
- **The yield** – also called the “property dollar equivalent yield,” it is the product of the total revenues in the education fund, minus spending on programs not directly related to kindergarten-through-12 public education, divided by the total number of students in Vermont schools. Easy to understand, right? This likely accounts for another small increase in this year’s taxes under this budget.
- **Local budgets** – This is the only thing the BES Board has control over and, as stated above, we think we’ve been responsible stewards of Berlin tax dollars with an increase of 2.67%. The U32 budget is an estimate at this point, but it is projected to have a negative impact on Berlin, lowering the overall tax rate.

Despite the distractions of Act 46 and forced merger, we are moving in the right direction at BES. Enrollment remains steady and as the statewide rate rises from spending in other districts, your local elementary school board is being responsible and conservative with your tax dollars while maintaining a high quality education for our children.

Summary:

Warning Amounts: \$3,630,287 / \$17,637 Per Equalized Pupil (PEP) / 4.41% PEP above last year

School Property Tax Impact: The projected education tax increase is **.005 cents, or \$5 for each \$100,000 of assessed property value**, excluding income sensitivity factors for some lower-income residents.

- ✓ The Berlin Elementary budget adds .02 cents.
- ✓ The U-32 budget subtracts .15 cents (estimated).

You can see the underlying details behind the totals in this summary by visiting the Berlin budget page: <https://www.wcsu32.org/Page/594>. Contact Chris Winters at cwinters@U32.org with questions or attend pre-town meeting on Monday, March 4 at 6PM.

OTHER GOOD NEWS!

- Berlin Elementary continues to be the hub of the community. On any given weekend or evening there are sporting events and tournaments, PTNA meetings, Farm to School programs, Family Math nights, Chess Tournaments, Trainings and board meetings.
- Our newly renovated, more secure, and efficient building is a pleasure to work and learn in and is attractive to families considering to move to Berlin.
- Berlin’s new Principal and dedicated staff are doing a great job with our Berlin children.
- Students recently put on a wonderful, student-centered winter concert.
- New Outdoor Learning provides cross-curricular activities through study of nature.
- The Berlin Board continues to plan and add to our capital fund to avoid future bonds.
- Genius Hour is helping students with gains in Transferable Skills.

Thank you for your continued support of Berlin Elementary School. Please vote!