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Webster schools to dip into reserve funds again

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Staff writer

WEBSTER — Officials with the Webster Central School District again will dip heavily into reserve funds as part of a \$140.3 million budget proposal for the 2011-12 school year.

The district also is seeking wage and benefit concessions from employees and, in a worst-case scenario, could cut 55 positions if employees do not agree to concessions, said Superintendent Adele Bovard.

Last year, with a budget of \$140.6 million, the district used nearly \$3.2 million in reserves, the first time the district tapped into its piggy banks, and had 20 layoffs. Bovard said. This time, the district plans to use \$4.8 million in reserves.

"These are rainy-day funds," Bovard said. "Last year, it was raining. This year, it's pouring."

Next year could be even worse, Bovard said. One big factor is the reduction in state aid, which will be nearly \$3.5 million less in 2011-12 as the state tries to close an estimated \$10 billion deficit.

As the budget process now stands, the 2011-12 spending plan calls for a 1.9 percent increase in the tax levy, the amount raised by property taxes. The "true tax rate" — reflective of district residents who live in both Webster and Penfield — would increase from \$20.05 per \$1,000 to \$20.23 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, a hike of 0.9 percent, said Jim Fichera, the district's chief financial officer.

The district has seven units of employees from which it is seeking concessions.

The Webster Teachers Association, which represents 750 full-time teachers and counselors, is the largest group.

Steven Turiano, president of the Webster Teachers Association, said it was "quite possible" that the district could impose 55 layoffs. He said his union already has made a great deal of concessions and said the district should be discussing how best to deliver quality educational services to students.

"We're looking at problems that affect districts all over New York state, and there aren't enough concessions that could be made to solve these problems," Turiano said. He said district bureaucracy has increased in recent years, including the addition of assistant principals to each of the elementary schools.

The district hopes to save \$700,000 in teacher-retirement costs. Other cost-saving measures for 2011-12 include reducing or restructuring some athletic teams from three areas (Modified A, Modified B and Freshman) to two, reducing the number of field trips and cutting back on hiring consultants and purchasing new musical equipment. The budget proposal calls for no cuts in academic programs, Bovard said.

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Additional Facts

What's next

A budget workshop will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at Spry Middle School, 119 South Ave., Webster. The Board of Education is expected to adopt a budget proposal during a meeting at 7 p.m. April 7, and a public hearing will be held at 6:30 p.m. May 10. Both of those meetings also are at Spry. Budget votes for area school districts will be held May 17.
