

Ogdensburg schools send unchanged \$58.2M budget back for a revote

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OGDENSBURG - Ogdensburg voters will go to the ballots a second time on the same 2026-27 proposed \$58.2 million budget that was voted down earlier this month by a 329 to 301 margin. According to a press release from the Ogdensburg City School District, the Board of Education met on Wednesday at a special meeting and decided to adopt the same budget proposal, which includes a 3.99% increase to the tax levy, for a revote on Tuesday, June 16 from noon to 9 p.m. in the William L. Dwyer Gymnasium at Ogdensburg Free Academy. "During the emergency meeting, Superintendent Kevin Kendall reviewed the reductions already made to close gaps in the original proposal and outlined the additional cuts that would be required if the budget fails a second time. Under state law, a second defeat would force the district into a contingency budget, which prohibits any increase to the current tax levy. For Ogdensburg, this would create a \$648,500 shortfall, resulting in additional reductions to both programming and staff," the release stated. Also rejected, by a vote of 317 to 307, was a proposition to purchase 13 student transportation vehicles at a cost not to exceed \$2,521,504. That proposition will also be sent back to voters a second time. The district added that although several community members attended the meeting, no one came forward to offer public comment when given the opportunity. An informational packet handed out at the meeting stated that a total of 37.5 positions would be cut in the budget proposal including an elementary principal, six elementary teachers, 16 per diem teaching assistants, five special education teachers, a secondary science teacher, an art teacher, music teacher, school counselor, a keyboard specialist, a maintenance worker and a laborer. Ten and a half of those positions were cut through attrition. Two sports programs, cross country and modified swimming, would be cut. The district states that if the proposal is defeated a second time, the district will be required to adopt a \$57,579,886 contingency budget, eliminating six additional staff positions and 12 programs, including summer marching band, driver education, and all junior varsity athletic teams, as well as the closure of the Edgar A. Newell II Dome. These reductions would be in addition to the cuts already made in the initial proposal. A contingency budget would also limit the district's ability to offer community use of school facilities. "A contingency budget isn't a one-year setback - it's a multi-year recovery," Kendall said. "Once programs and staff are cut, they cannot simply be restored the following year. It takes time, resources, and several budget cycles to rebuild what was lost." At the meeting, Kendall shared a 20-year lookback on local tax rates, noting that the proposed rate of \$21.64 per \$1,000 of assessed value is only slightly higher than the \$21.55 rate in 2006-07. "He emphasized that while the district held the levy at 0% for six

consecutive years, inadequate state funding paired with rising operational costs - including utilities, special education programming, and health insurance premiums - made an increase unavoidable for the upcoming year," the release stated. The district states that the tax levy is the total amount of money that a school district collects each year from all property owners in the district. Tax rates are calculated by dividing the total amount of the levy by the total assessed value in the community. "An increase in assessed value of a property will result in a higher tax bill - a factor that is outside of a school district's control," stated the release. In the budget proposal, the district is moving forward with a strategic elementary reorganization in the 2026-27 school year to "better align staffing and resources with student needs." "The new structure, which will see students in grades UPK-1 at Grant C. Madill Elementary and students in grades 2-6 at John F. Kennedy Elementary, allows the district to reduce costs through attrition, avoiding deeper cuts to programs and services," states the district. The Ogdensburg City School District serves over 1,200 students, including homeschooled students and preschool-aged children within the district that require special education services. A simple "cost per student" calculation does not reflect the district's actual needs, according to Kendall. "We have more than 375 students receiving special education interventions, which require additional staffing, specialized programming, and individualized support," Kendall said. "We aim to meet the needs of every student, and with that comes a different cost per student." The district continues to pursue long-term savings to offset rising expenses. An Energy Performance Contract (EPC) grant is funding the transition from standard lighting to more energy-efficient LED fixtures throughout the building. In addition, Phase 2 of the district's ongoing capital improvement project will replace three 75-year-old boilers, currently operating at roughly 82% efficiency, with modern, energy-efficient systems. More information about the proposed budget and voter qualification is available at ogdensburgk12.org <span class="sr-