

# Cheektowaga-Sloan Union Free School District

Mrs. Andrea L. Galenski  
Superintendent of Schools  
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May 22, 2020

Dear Cheektowaga-Sloan Families & Community Members:

It is with sincere hope that this letter finds you and your families healthy and well during this uncertain and scary time in our Country and our own Cheektowaga-Sloan Community.

These past couple of months have been some of the most challenging times in my career and it is with the deepest appreciation and admiration that I extend my gratitude to our teachers, staff, and to all of our parents and family members who have worked together to provide the best remote learning opportunity possible to our students.

Prior to school closure back in March, we have never before had to attempt to educate students without being in a classroom. We truly became a united front by not only providing remote learning for our students, but we also ensured that our students and families were provided an opportunity to receive daily meals and childcare at Theodore Roosevelt School at no cost to our families. In fact, to date, we have served a total of 32,802 meals. We are so proud to have been able to serve our community during this challenging time. This crisis put into perspective the importance of a community approach to educating our children and working together to be confident that the needs of our students and families were met. Thank you to everyone in our School District and our Community for unifying during this unprecedented time. The phrase, *'we are in this together'* certainly became a reality in the Cheektowaga-Sloan Community.

I felt it important to expand on what the concept of remote learning and instructional continuity meant for us in Cheektowaga-Sloan so that our community understands the various steps we took during this time.

Our teachers PreK-8 prepared several rounds of educational packets of materials for our students to complete at home. Our teachers in grades 9-12 began remote learning by developing educational packets similar to what was provided to our PreK-8 students, but then transitioned to on-line learning. We surveyed our families district-wide to determine technology needs, such as devices in our homes and internet access. Based on the survey results, we were able to reorganize the number of chromebooks that we had. We prioritized and determined that our high school students would each receive a District owned chromebook if they needed one. Along with our educational packets PreK-12, we deployed the chromebooks and materials to our students multiple times at each of our schools by using a curbside pick-up process. Along with

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*Our mission is to provide a positive academic and social learning environment that fosters independence, responsibility, life-long learning and student success.*

these educational packets and on-line learning opportunities, we provided ongoing and daily communication check-ins from not only our teachers, but also from our support staff who checked in with our families to be sure that social and emotional needs were also being met. Our teachers and staff engaged students and families throughout this process by exchanging emails, conducting phone conferences, through virtual meetings via Google Meet, by using videos to reinforce or reteach concepts, by providing on-line resources, and more to ensure that we were as accessible as possible to meet all of our students' needs during this time.

I also wanted to share that we have already purchased almost 1,000 additional chromebooks for students to use in the 2020-2021 school year. This number will now enable us to be considered a one-to-one District where each student will have a chromebook to use. These will be used in our schools; however, we will also be prepared for remote learning should we need to engage in that process again.

Having worked in the Cheektowaga-Sloan School District for almost 25 years, but more recently in the capacity as Superintendent, I have taken the Budget process each year very seriously and have made it my top priority to ensure that we are cognizant and respectful of our taxpayers. We are so proud of our record of maintaining the lowest possible increases year to year. I have continued to advocate on behalf of our taxpayers and have fought very hard for our District's needs, which has resulted in additional aid being granted to us through Assemblywoman Monica Wallace's Office. This advocacy is continuing now and won't stop as our District deserves our fair share of funding each year. The District has always and will continue to keep our taxpayers at the forefront when preparing our annual budget. Despite all of the fiscal hardships we face in the coming fiscal year and for future years the budget once again is below the tax cap.

With this pandemic that our World and Country unexpectedly had to endure, we are in a position of complete uncertainty with the amount of aid and funding that we will end up receiving from New York State and the Federal Government. We want our community to know that New York State has not only frozen our aid at last year's level, but they are discussing reducing State aid by 20-30%. Additionally, sales tax revenue and interest earnings may be reduced by up to 80%. We realize that our community may be facing financial hardships as a result of this health crisis which is why we were determined to prepare a Budget below the tax cap.

This year more than ever before, we must ask for your continued support and help. We are committed to educating all of our children PreK-12 with the highest standards in place. Our students deserve an educational experience that is focused on Educating the Whole Child which continues to be the foundation of our District's Vision for Education. We have put tremendous programming in place such as the Leader in Me, 7 Habits, Restorative Practices, Academic Advisement, Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Workshop, Academic Learning Centers, AP and College Credit Courses, Honors Courses, etc. to ensure that our students not only receive the highest quality academic experience, but also the very best social and emotional opportunities as well. I thank you for your help and support now more than ever before so that we can maintain and continue implementing these tremendous programs for our students.

We have prepared a Budget for the 2020-2021 school year that maintains a very small increase for our taxpayers which is outlined below.

**The 2020-21 proposed budget increases spending by less than 1%:**

Total Proposed Budget for 2020-2021	\$ 37,136,645
Total Adopted Budget for 2019-2020	\$ 36,900,454
Dollar Change	\$ 236,191
Percentage Change	0.64%

**The 2020-21 tax levy is proposed to change as follows:**

Proposed Tax Levy for 2020-2021	\$ 15,544,546
Proposed Tax Levy for 2019-2020	\$ 15,301,305
Dollar Change	\$ 243,241
Percentage Change	1.59%

**What does this mean to the “average” single family home in the District?**

The increase for the entire year	\$ 16.80
Monthly cost (if paid with mortgage)	\$ 1.40

Please note that each home is assessed differently and calculation includes STAR rebate.

As mentioned above, the District has always kept both our students and our taxpayers at the forefront of our planning process for all educational needs and financial responsibilities. Our history shows that the District has been below the New York State Tax Cap every year that the Tax Cap has been in existence and the average increase over that period has been only one-half of one percent. We have included that information here for your review:

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Total Tax Levy</b>	<b>Percentage Change</b>	<b>Tax Cap</b>
2013 - 14	\$ 14,882,613	-0.40%	4.10%
2014 - 15	15,089,534	1.39%	3.00%
2015 - 16	15,132,624	0.29%	3.74%
2016 - 17	15,236,351	0.69%	1.71%
2017 - 18	15,164,004	-0.47%	2.24%
2018 - 19	15,163,318	0.00%	2.57%
2019 - 20	15,301,305	0.91%	2.29%
2020 - 21	15,544,546	<u>1.59%</u>	<u>1.60%</u>
Total last 8 years		<u>3.98%</u>	<u>21.25%</u>
Average for 8 years		<u>0.50%</u>	<u>2.66%</u>

While the District takes great pride in our strong and thoughtful actions to control costs, we are even more proud of the support that our community has shown us. Over the past several years

we have been able to accomplish so much with your support especially with our Capital Project that enabled us to improve and create a safer environment for our students, teachers, staff and community.

Here are just a few of the many improvements that we have been able to make with your support:

- Made vast improvements in our facilities in order to provide for the safest learning environment possible as well as improve learning environments—new auditorium, new science classrooms with modern technology, new art classrooms, new lockers, modernized work spaces, kitchens, improved tennis courts, fields, track area, bleachers, safer entrance ways, etc.
- We have significantly enhanced security at all of our buildings—more cameras, safer entry with identification being required, and stop points at our middle and high schools
- Increased our technology (more wifi access points, chromebooks, classroom technology) to provide students with the knowledge and skills they will need for college or the workforce in today's society—this includes a recent purchase of almost 1,000 additional chromebooks
- Implemented the Lucy Calkins Reading Program for all of our elementary students so that they are all provided with appropriately leveled text, classrooms filled with leveled books, and the skills necessary to develop strong readers—this Program included the acquisition of approximately 10,000 books and provides opportunities for student to learn how to read and strengthen their reading like never before in our District
- We have begun the Lucy Calkins Writing Program which connects to our Lucy Calkins Reading Program providing continuity between reading and writing and allowing students to become better writers as they progress through the grade-levels
- We partnered with the Erie County Justice Coalition and implemented Restorative Practices in all of our schools which has been instrumental in improving relationships, engaging students, and decreasing behavioral incidents

It is difficult to summarize the number of student achievements, educational programs, school-wide events, extra-curricular activities, sports, clubs, etc. that we are so proud of and that students have excelled in and continue to look forward to participating in each year. We hope that these educational experiences will be able to continue despite the current uncertain financial situation that we are being faced with as a result of the pandemic. We will continue to advocate as strongly as we can so that we receive our fair share of State aid and Federal funding. However, your help now more than ever is so critically important to us so the high quality educational experience for our students can continue to grow and flourish. The reductions in aid from New York State and other revenue reductions due to the pandemic make your support more important than ever. It is with the deepest gratitude and appreciation that we have your support during the upcoming Budget Vote on June 9, 2020 for the Cheektowaga-Sloan Union Free School District.

Respectfully Yours,

Andrea L. Galenski  
Superintendent of Schools