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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 WSESD voters to consider a \$69 million budget

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2 School board's Jan. 27 budget vote saw one 'no' vote

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3 TEXT BODY:

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4 The Windham Southeast School District board has  
5 approved a \$69,874,600 — a 2.6% increase this year — for  
6 FY27.

7 Board member Tim Maciel was the sole 'no' vote.

8 Maciel said he couldn't vote for the budget due to  
9 insufficient transparency, board oversight in determining senior  
10 administrative pay, and prioritizing capital expenses for athletic

11 facilities and bathroom refurbishment over direct academy and  
12 student support services.

13 He also noted understaffed student support roles and the  
14 board's rejection of his proposal earlier in the budgeting process  
15 to make a \$400,000 capital reduction to evaluate trade-offs.

16 "So right now, I'm afraid I cannot vote in favor of this  
17 proposed budget. [...] I have concerns about how senior  
18 administrative compensation has been determined over the  
19 years," said Maciel. "I am talking about the process here and not  
20 the amount of salaries."

21 Some examples: "Until last year, our school boards had  
22 little to no direct oversight of these decisions and compensation  
23 for administrators was not even publicly disclosed," he said.  
24 "Increases have seemed to take to have little relationship to  
25 performance. Transparency matters quite a bit here when we're  
26 asking voters to trust that we have examined every major  
27 expense."

28 Raising more concerns, Maciel said it all begs "a  
29 fundamental question of priorities."

30 "I struggle to understand why capital expenses such as  
31 \$100,000 for bathroom refurbishment or hundreds of thousands  
32 of dollars for athletic facilities are treated as absolutely essential  
33 for the coming budget year while direct academic student  
34 support services are reduced or deemed unaffordable," Maciel  
35 said.

36 "I believe we can still do better," he continued. "My vote  
37 reflects a commitment to fiscal responsibility, transparency, and  
38 respect for the taxpayers we serve, while remaining fully  
39 committed to providing a high quality education for every  
40 student in Windham Southeast."

41 Board Finance Committee Chair Ruby McAdoo spoke via  
42 Zoom, calling the budget review process "really robust."

43 "It's the same process we've had for many years, but I  
44 think we did a better job this year at trying to kind of let people  
45 know how they could become engaged and show up," she said.

46 “So I can say as the chair, and as someone who has been at every  
47 meeting related to budgets in this budget development process,  
48 that I feel really confident in this budget. And I feel that way  
49 because we had multiple meetings where our administrators  
50 were in the room and we could ask them questions. . .are there  
51 ways that we can improve it and tweak it and make it better for  
52 future years? Always.”

53         McAdoo continued to say, “these are budgets that will  
54 help us reach our goals.”

55         “And that’s what our administrators have told us,” she  
56 said, adding Speno and Business Manager Frank Rucker, who has  
57 announced his December 2026 retirement, have said adjusting  
58 the budget “over the years” has brought it “further and further  
59 fiscally responsive.”

60         Key cost drivers in the budget include negotiated  
61 agreements (\$794,000), health insurance increases (\$378,000),  
62 and special education costs (\$196,000).

63         Offsets include eliminating the 10 positions  
64 (approximately \$700,000) and reducing the equipment budget  
65 (\$150,000).

66         The proposed budget would reduce the tax rate from  
67 \$1.84 to \$1.80, a 3.9-cent decrease, based on current state  
68 funding law.

69         Spending per student is essentially flat at \$15,972, well  
70 below the state’s tax penalty threshold of \$16,470.

71         The weighted student count is projected to rise by 1.5%  
72 to 3,863, primarily due to increases in students in poverty, not  
73 solely multi-language learners.

74         Among roughly 65 districts reporting, the district’s 2.2%  
75 education spending increase is about half the state average of  
76 4%.

77         The district’s annual meeting and budget vote will be  
78 Tuesday, March 17 at Brattleboro Union High School.

79         School tax rates are currently projected to rise by about  
80 2.9% in Brattleboro, 4.6% in Dummerston, 5.8% in Guilford,

81 and 0.4% in Putney, but the district doesn't yet know the effect of  
82 this year's legislative "yield bill," which will affect property taxes  
83 as well.

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