



TONAWANDA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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TIMOTHY A. OLDENBURG, Ed.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

November 1, 2023

Dear Tonawanda School Community:

As we approach Election Day on Tuesday, November 7, as well as early voting that is taking place now, it is important to recognize and understand that there will be an issue affecting small city school districts on the ballot for November's elections. The Tonawanda City School District is a small city school district. **The result of this proposition will directly impact our school district.**

Proposition 1 asks voters across New York to consider a proposed amendment to the State Constitution to allow 57 small city school districts to operate with the same limits on indebtedness as all their rural and suburban counterparts.

Under the current State Constitution, indebtedness of small city school districts may not exceed 5% of their total property wealth, except when special conditions are met. In contrast, the Constitution imposes no limit on indebtedness for suburban and rural districts; they do have a 10% limit, set by a law passed by the State Senate and Assembly and approved by the Governor.

This disparity is compounded by a difference in how state aid is applied toward debt limits. Suburban and rural districts are allowed to reduce the debt counted toward their limit by any applicable state aid. Small city school districts, like Tonawanda, are not allowed that offset. This disparity dramatically further widens the difference in actual debt limits between small city districts and their peers.

The amendment that voters are asked to consider would allow small city school districts to operate with the same limits on indebtedness as their rural and suburban counterparts.

A bill to apply those rules to the small city school districts has been signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul and will take effect if voters approve the constitutional amendment.

At one time there were major differences in state laws governing the finances of small city school districts and those of most other school systems. For example, it was not until 1997 that small city school districts were required to submit operating budgets for voter approval every year. But now small city school systems operate with the same budget voting procedures and tax limitations as all other school districts subject to the state's property tax cap.

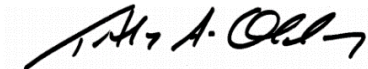
The proposed constitutional amendment would eliminate one remaining major difference in financial practices between small city and other school districts. **Voter approval of the proposed constitutional amendment would not give small city schools special treatment—it would allow these school systems to have the same rules as neighboring districts.**

Here is a collection of background documents and video explaining the details on the proposed amendment:

- A [video](#) prepared by the Vernon Verona Sherrill School District.
- A [one-page background piece](#) that has been developed in conjunction with the Association of Small City School Districts.
- A [letter to news editors](#) across the state in support of the proposed amendment that many associations and other public school groups supported.
- A [column](#) in the *Albany Times Union* in support of the amendment by Assemblymember John McDonald, sponsor of both the amendment and implementing legislation.

Thank you for your continued support and pride in our school district. We continue to make gains, provide needed resources, and create innovative programs and opportunities for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy A. Oldenburg".

Timothy A. Oldenburg, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools