HOW TO READ A FIVE-YEAR FORECAST

Tips and Explanations on Understanding a School District's Forecast

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the importance of discussing school district finances, the Ohio Department of Education & Workforce (DEW) has developed this guide to assist teachers, administrators, Boards of Education, community members or other individuals in developing a general understanding of a school district's five-year forecast. Additionally, this document includes DEW's perspective of the forecast's purpose, O.R.C. and O.A.C. requirements for school district forecasts, definitions of key terms, an expectation of key lines, some general beliefs on what a "good" forecast should contain, and a line-by-line explanation of the forecast (see Appendix for a complete line-by-line description)

A forecast is somewhat like a painting of the future based upon a snapshot of today. That snapshot, however, will be adjusted and the further into the future the forecast extends, the more likely it is that the projections will deviate from actual experience. A variety of events will ultimately impact the latter years of the forecast, such as state budgets (adopted every two years), tax levies (new/renewal/ replacement), salary increases, or businesses moving in or out of the district. The five-year forecast is viewed as a **key management tool** and must be updated periodically. In Ohio, most school districts understand how they will manage their finances in the current year. The five-year forecast encourages district management teams to examine future years' projections and identify when challenges will arise. This then helps district management to be proactive in meeting those challenges. School districts are encouraged to update their forecasts with DEW when events take place that will significantly change their forecast or, at a minimum, when required under statute.

In a financial forecast, the numbers only tell a small part of the story. For the numbers to be meaningful, the reader must review and consider the *Assumptions to the Financial Forecast* before drawing conclusions or using the data as a basis for other calculations. The assumptions are very important to understanding the rationale of the numbers, particularly when a significant increase or decrease is reflected. Individual district forecasts are posted on the DEW website at: https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/finance-forecast-submissions. The accompanying "Notes & Assumptions" are posted on the DEW website at: https://public.education.ohio.gov/geoDoc/5-yrForecast/

Since the preparation of a meaningful five-year forecast is as much an art as it is a science and entails many intricacies, it is recommended that you contact the Treasurer/Chief Fiscal Officer or Board of Education (BOE) of the individual school district with any questions you may have. The Treasurer or CFO submits the forecast, but the BOE is recognized as ultimately responsible for the development of the forecast and the official owner.

PURPOSES/OBJECTIVES OF THE FIVE-YEAR FORECAST

Here are at least three purposes or objectives of the five-year forecast:

(1) To engage the local board of education and the community in long range planning and discussions of financial issues facing the school district

(2) To serve as a basis for determining the school district's ability to sign the certificate required by O.R.C. §5705.412, commonly known as the "412 certificate"

(3) To provide a method for the Department of Education and Workforce and Auditor of State to identify schools districts with potential financial problems

O.R.C. and O.A.C. REQUIREMENTS

O.R.C. §5705.391 and O.A.C. 3301-92-04 require a Board of Education (BOE) to submit a five-year projection of operational revenues and expenditures along with assumptions to the Department of Education and Workforce prior to November 30 of each fiscal year and to update this forecast between April 1 and May 31 of each fiscal year. DEW encourages school districts to update their forecast whenever events take place that will significantly change the forecast.

Required funds to be included in the forecast are:

- General funds (001)
- Any special cost center associated with general fund money
- Emergency levy funds (016)
- Any debt service (002) activity that would otherwise have gone to the general fund
- Education Jobs Fund (504)

DEFINITIONS

Following are some definitions of terms commonly used to discuss the five-year forecast:

412 Certificates – ORC 5705.412 requires the treasurer, superintendent, and president of the board of education to certify that adequate revenues will be available to maintain all personnel and programs for the current fiscal year and for a number of days in the succeeding fiscal years. 412 Certificates must be attached to:

- Appropriations for the current fiscal year
- Qualifying contracts covering the term of contract
- Wage and salary schedule for the term of contract
- Negotiated agreement(s) and contracts for benefits

Encumbrances – Money obligated to pay for any purchase. An end of year encumbrance is money obligated in the current fiscal year to be paid in the next fiscal year.

Expenditures – The spending of any public money for a specified purpose as approved by the BOE policy and procedures.

Fiscal Year – In education and state government, the fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30, and each fiscal year is dated by the ending date. Example: FY12 would start July 1, 2011 and end June 30, 2012.

Revenues – Receipts generated from property taxes, school district income taxes, state foundation formula, and local monies (such as donations, fees, tuition, etc.).

KEY LINES

The five-year forecast is divided into two sections: revenue and expenditures. A district's revenue is made up of two main sources, local and state funding. The expenditures are mainly salary and wages, benefits, and purchased services. The following is a brief explanation of some of the key lines with a line-by-line explanation in the Appendix.

Revenue

1.010 General Property Taxes – Every three years, school districts rotate having reappraisals and triennial updates performed by the County Auditor's Office. Since taxes are collected and distributed on a calendar year, the first fiscal year following a reappraisal or a triennial update will only generate one-half of the increase resulting from the reappraisal or triennial update (January – June distribution).

Aside from a district's typical trend in valuation, the district may experience fluctuations for other reasons.

An upward spike in this line item could be caused by the passage of a new levy. Again, since taxes are collected and distributed on a calendar year, the first fiscal year following the election will only generate one-half of a typical year's proceeds.

A downward spike in this line item could indicate that an existing levy is up for renewal in which case the proceeds from this levy are relocated on the five-year forecast to line 11.02 until such time as the levy is either passed (and the proceeds are moved back up to line 1.010) or the renewal of the levy is no longer an option for the district.

A school district that takes a tax advance against its next fiscal year's collection could have fluctuations in either direction. The Assumptions to the forecast should explain these fluctuations in detail.

1.030 Income Taxes – When a school district passes an income tax levy, the tax becomes effective on the following January 1. The first payment will be received by the school district in April of that year (a relatively small payment). It will take 1 ½ years (six quarters) for the school district to receive the full amount of taxes liable from the first year it is levied because of the collection process. School districts will receive four income tax payments per calendar year, one each in January, April, July, and October.

1.035 Unrestricted Grants in Aid – This line represents the State Basic Aid to schools as defined in the current year's budget bill. The state budget is adopted in odd numbered years and implemented beginning in even numbered fiscal years. FY12 funding for school districts is based on a transitional approach referred to as the "Bridge" formula. Line O, P and Q on the Bridge funding report is the calculation to be used on the five-year forecast.

Expenditures

3.010 – Personnel Services – Since schools are service oriented entities**,** salaries and wages represent the bulk of school district expenditures. Fluctuations may occur due to reductions in force, negotiated salary schedule changes, retirement levels, or changes in enrollment which may cause the required staffing levels to fluctuate.

3.020 – Employee Retirement/Insurance Benefits – Some components of this line item, such as retirement contributions and Medicare, will have a direct correlation to the Personnel Services line item. Factors that could cause inconsistencies from year to year might include increased health insurance costs, future employee contributions toward medical costs, early retirement incentives (ERI), premium holidays, insurance claim pay outs, etc.

3.030 – Purchased Services – This line includes open enrollment (students leaving the school district), community schools, tuition, legal fees, utilities, and any contracted service. If a district contracts certain services (transportation, maintenance, janitorial services, etc) its 'personnel service' component (line 3.010) and 'employee retirement/insurance benefit' (line 3.020) will be lower percentages in relation to purchased services than if the district employs those service personnel directly.

Balances

6.010 Excess of Revenues and Other Financing Sources over (under) Expenditures and Other Financing Uses - Line 2.080 minus 5.050. This line can be used to get a good sense of a school district's fiscal health. A positive number indicates that a school district spent within its revenue for that fiscal year. A negative number indicates that a district's expenditures exceeded

the revenue generated for that fiscal year resulting in a reduction to any surplus the district holds, or in the worst-case scenario, a deficit. A district experiencing several years of "overspending" will almost always experience fiscal concerns or insolvency. **Pay great attention to this line!**

7.020 Ending Cash Balance – This line represents the total cash balance without including reservations or outstanding obligations. In DEW's experience, school districts should attempt to maintain a 30 – 60 day cash reserve.

"GOOD" FORECASTING PRACTICES AND HELPFUL HINTS

As financial forecasting is more of an art than a science, the forecaster's interpretation of events or numbers will influence the information contained in the forecast. Responsibility for the preparation of the forecast, the accuracy of the presented figures and the reasonableness of the assumptions on which they are based rests with district administration and the board of education. DEW believes there are certain practices that help make the forecast a more accurate management tool, allowing decision makers and stake holders to use it with greater confidence. Following are tips to assist the reader in better understanding a forecast:

- The five-year forecast starts with three years of historical revenues/expenditures. These historical numbers can be used to develop trends when forecasting.
- Know when the three-year and six-year reappraisals for the school district's valuation occur. Tax revenue may change the year after reappraisal because of the increased valuation.
- Be aware of the school district's Average Daily Membership (ADM) and whether the number of students is increasing or decreasing. The ADM contributes to the state's foundation formula as much of the formula funding is based on a per pupil amount.
- When reading a forecast, look for fluctuations in numbers on the same line. If numbers significantly vary up or down there should be a discussion in the Assumptions explaining why this has occurred or is expected to occur.
- Look specifically at Line 6.010. This line shows the school district's expenditures as "over or under revenue." A school district experiencing several years of expenditures exceeding revenues (overspending) will almost always experience fiscal concerns or insolvency. Positive numbers on this line are a good sign!
- A clear, concise narrative is critical to understanding the Assumptions used by the local BOE and treasurer in preparing the forecast. A careful reading of this text will often help understand why certain numbers are used in the forecast. Unexplained variances or ones that don't seem to make sense are cause for concern.
- Be aware of different types of levies and when they are collected. Permanent Improvement (PI) or bond levies cannot be used to fund general operations of the district. New school buildings may cause the misconception that the district is operationally solvent. Only operational levies may be used to finance the day to day operations (salaries, utilities, etc) of the district.
- Think long term and look at many data sources to make informed decisions. For example, new housing developments may bring additional students into the district (and additional revenue) but may require new buildings and/or staff (increased expenditures). Conversely, a factory closing may reduce funding and population causing the need for buildings and/or staff to decrease. Economic and population projections are essential factors in determining future requirements for educational services from the district.
- It is not uncommon to see deficits in years four and five of a forecast. Given the uncertainty of future state budgets, local economic factors, state or federal mandates, etc., years four and five are difficult to project. The key is recognizing how these conditions relate to current operations. Identifying future years' deficits allows districts to engage in planning for those conditions prior to their arrival and eliminating the projected deficit. Remember, the longer the period of time allotted to deal with a potential financial problem the better. Longer time horizons allow reductions in expenditures to be spread out over several years, reducing their impact on students and staff. Also, some reductions may take many years before realizing their full impact.

APPENDIX
LINE BY LINE REVIEW

1.0 General Fund Revenue

1.010 General Property Tax – Taxes levied by a school district by the assessed valuation of real property located within the school district.

1.020 Tangible Personal Property Tax – Businesses pay the 'tangible personal property tax' on equipment or supplies/materials of which they own. This tax is being phased out and is being replaced with the Commercial Activities Tax (CAT).

1.030 Income Tax – In the past, income tax for schools was paid by individuals residing in the school district, estates of school district residents, and unincorporated businesses located in the school district that file Ohio individual income tax returns. With the passage of HB66, however, school districts are now permitted to levy a school district income tax against an alternative tax base that includes only earned income and self-employment income.

1.035 Unrestricted Grants-in-Aid – Funds received through the State Foundation Program with no restriction. The foundation formula is the primary vehicle which the Ohio legislature uses to determine how much state aid each school district is to receive.

1.040 Restricted Grants-in-Aid – Funds received through the State Foundation Program or other allocations that are restricted for specific purposes. Examples include career-technical funds.

1.045 Restricted Federal Grants-in-Aid – Funds received through the State Foundation Program or other allocations that are restricted for specific purposes. Examples include the Education Jobs fund.

1.050 Property Tax Allocation – This line includes funds received for Tangible Personal Property Tax Reimbursement (as discussed above), Electric Deregulation, Homestead and Rollback, and the "ten thousand dollar exemption" where businesses are exempt from paying the first $10,000 of property tax and the district is reimbursed through state funding.

1.060 All Other Operating Revenue – Operating revenue sources not included above. Examples include but are not limited to tuition, fees, earnings on investments, rentals, and donations.

1.070 Total Revenue – The sum of lines 1.010 through 1.060

2.0 Other Financing Sources - The lines in this section are relatively self explanatory.

2.010 Proceeds from Sale of Notes

2.020 State Emergency Loans & Advancements (Solvency Assistance Funds)

2.040 Operating Transfers-in (permanent movement of monies between funds)

2.050 Advances-in (temporary movement of monies between funds)

2.060 All Other Financing Sources (Sale and Loss of Assets, Refund of Prior Year Expenditures)

2.070 Total Other Financing Sources – The sum of lines 2.010 through 2.060

2.080 Total Revenue and Other Financing Sources – The sum of lines 1.070 and 2.070

3.0 Expenditures

3.010 Personal Services – Employee salaries and wages, including extended time, severance pay, supplemental contracts, etc.

3.020 Employees' Retirement and Insurance Benefits – Retirement for all employees, Workers Comp., early retirement incentives, Medicare, unemployment, pickup on pickup, and all health-related insurances.

3.030 Purchased Services – Amounts paid for personal services rendered by personnel who are not on the payroll of the school district, and other services which the school district may purchase. Examples include but are not limited to legal fees, maintenance agreements, utilities, and tuition paid for students attending other school districts, including open enrollment and community schools.

3.040 Supplies and Materials – Examples include but are not limited to general supplies, instructional materials including textbooks and media materials, bus fuel and tires, and all other maintenance supplies.

3.050 Capital Outlay – This line includes expenditures for items having at least a five-year life expectancy, such as land, buildings, improvements of grounds, equipment, computers/technology, furnishings, buses, and vehicles.

3.060 Intergovernmental – While very rarely used in forecasts, this line accounts for pass through payments, as well as monies received by a school district that will be spent by the school district on behalf of another government. This does not include purchased services from other government agencies such as ESCs.

4.0 Principal and Interest – This category represents general fund borrowing.

4.010 All Principal (Historical)
4.020 Principal – Notes
4.030 Principal – State Loans
4.040 Principal – State Advances
4.050 Principal – HB 264 Loans
4.055 Principal – Other
4.060 Interest and Fiscal Charges
4.300 Other Objects – The primary components listed here consists of membership dues and fees, ESC contract deductions, County Auditor/Treasurer fees, audit expenses, election expenses, etc.
4.500 Total Expenditures – Total Lines 3.010 through 3.060 and Lines 4.010 through 4.300

5.0 Other Financing Uses – Transfers are a permanent movement of monies between funds, and advances are a temporary movement of monies between funds. These are usually projected based on past history and knowledge of deficits in other funds. Advances and transfers both take BOE approval.

5.010 Operating Transfers-out
5.020 Advances-out
5.030 All Other Financing Uses
5.040 Total Other Financing Uses – Total of Lines 5.010 through 5.030
5.050 Total Expenditures and Other Financing Uses – Total Lines 4.500 and 5.040

6.0 Excess of Revenues and Other Financing Sources over (under) Expenditures and Other Financing Uses

6.010 Excess of Revenues and Other Financing Sources over (under) Expenditures and Other Financing Uses - Line 2.080 minus 5.050. This line can be used to get a good sense of a school district's fiscal health. A positive number indicates that a school district spent within its revenue for that fiscal year. A negative number indicates that a school district's expenditures exceeded the revenue generated for that fiscal year resulting in a reduction to any surplus the district may hold. A school district experiencing several years of "overspending" will almost always result in fiscal concerns or insolvency. **Pay great attention to this line!**

7.0 Cash Balance July 1

7.010 Cash Balance July 1
7.020 Cash Balance June 30 – Line 6.010 plus line 7.010

8.0 Estimated Encumbrances

8.010 Estimated Encumbrances June 30 – The amount of money already requested through a purchase order. The funds have been obligated, but a check has not yet been written. Funds may be encumbered (obligated) in one fiscal year and paid in another.

9.0 Reservation of Fund Balance

9.010 Textbook and Instructional Materials – O.R.C. 3315.17 requires 3% of general funds to be set aside for the purchase of textbooks and instructional materials. School districts may spend more or less and carry the surplus or deficit forward.

9.020 Capital Improvements – Similar to above, O.R.C. 3315.18 requires a 3% set aside each fiscal year for maintenance and capital improvements.

9.030 Budget Reserve – No longer required, but some school districts use this line as a "rainy day fund".

9.040 Poverty Based Assistance (PBA) – PBA has replaced the DPIA funding. The amount of funds a school district receives is based on the overall poverty levels within the school district. PBA funds are restricted funds.

9.050 Debt Service - This includes any loans or other debt for which repayment by the district is essential during the fiscal year.

9.060 Property Tax Advances – County Auditors may advance property tax payments (if money is available to the County Auditor through pre-payment of taxes) to school districts at the conclusion of a fiscal year to be spent at the beginning of the next fiscal year. This practice allows a school district to start the fiscal year with money for operations.

9.070 Bus Purchases

9.080 Subtotal – Total of lines 9.010 through 9.070

10.0 Fund Balance June 30 for Certification of Appropriations

10.010 Fund Balance June 30 for Certification of Appropriations – Line 7.020 minus line 8.010 minus line 9.080. All reserved funds are "backed out" and therefore not available for the school district to use in school operations.

11.0 Revenue from Replacement/Renewal Levies

11.010 Income Tax – Renewal

11.020 Property Tax – Renewal or Replacement

11.300 Cumulative Balance of Replacement/Renewal Levies – Previous year line 11.300 plus the current

12.0 Fund Balance June 30 for Certification of Contracts, Salary Schedules, and Other Obligations

12.010 Fund Balance June 30 for Certification of Contracts, Salary Schedules, and Other Obligations

13.0 Revenues from New Levies

13.010 Income Tax – New

13.020 Property Tax – New

13.030 Cumulative Balance of New Levies

14.0 Revenue from Future State Advances

14.010 Revenue from Future State Advances

15.0 Unreserved Fund Balance June 30

15.010 Unreserved Fund Balance June 30 – Line 12.010 plus line 13.030 plus line 14.010