

**NE TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM SPEECH TO THE OPS SCHOOL BOARD ON ITS BUDGET:
Feb. 23, 2026.**

Good evening. Doug Kagan, 416 South 130 Str., representing NE Taxpayers for Freedom. We understand that because of fault by the state Dept. of Education, state aid to the district was over-appropriated in the current fiscal year, resulting in a \$30.5 million reduction in state aid and that OPS will see another state aid reduction in the upcoming fiscal year. However, your preliminary budget shows that your state aid will continue to increase in future years.

This board in 2025 overrode its budget by 4%, increasing our property tax burden, costing the owner of a \$300,000 home about \$3,100 property tax annually, a 7.26% tax hike. And by the FY 2027 estimation, the district will gain over 18% more in property tax receipts, with local funding rising by over 13%. Yet, your preliminary budget seeks a 9.46% increase in our property tax levy. The fiscal fault does not lie entirely with state aid. You have a spending problem. The OPS board appropriated \$1.2 million to buy 8 acres adjacent to Westview H.S. in June, 2025, for expansion. If the district had purchased this property at the time of the school construction in 2022, it could have paid fewer taxpayer dollars. The district generously purchased 27,216 student bus passes for all middle and high school students from 8-1-25 to 7-31-26, costing \$172,157, although many students already qualify for free bus rides and others utilize personal transportation. Your massively unfunded pension debt continues.

Your fiscal shortfall means that OPS can either hike its tax rate or cut its bloated budget. Our taxpayer group invites the board to view our 6-page, 145-item suggestions for public school budget cuts. Accepting a number of these ideas may eliminate the need for a property tax hike. We will await your response.

Presentation of OPS preliminary budget:

The state auditor discovered the state aid overpayment to OPS last year, so the state Dept. of Education recalculated the aid amount and implemented additional controls.

Two other school districts were overpaid and saw state aid reductions.

The error had no financial effect on the current OPS school year but has a huge effect in FY 2026-2027.

State aid will decrease by 15%. Local property taxes must substitute for this decrease.

Property taxes will increase by 9.46%.

The Learning Comm. is supposed to give OPS \$8.2 million in financial aid, but if it does not give it before March 1, the funding will delay until FY 2027-2028.

The budget bases on 2026 valuation increases of 4.5% (usually the official figure is higher).

The overall budget total is 0.01% lower than in FY 2025-2026.

The upcoming budget will hit the \$1.05 per \$100 valuation levy limit.

State and local revenues will increase by only 0.67%

OPS probably will not require a levy override, like the 4% override this current fiscal year.

No infusion of new funds for the building fund, because it has a surplus, but projects now deferred.

Increased costs for utilities and contracted services.

Unexpected federal funding allowed for less money spent on supplies and materials.

OPS still does not have sufficient teachers. District seeks to offer future teacher salaries and benefits above the Consumer Price Index. OPS offers the highest teacher salaries in NE.

No longer will give elementary kids Ipads to take home.

District must continue to fill its pension funding gap until 2049.

No mention of serious budget cuts.

