

# Lewiston-Porter, Niagara Wheatfield districts plan for May 21 budget votes

**BY TERRY DUFFY**  
Editor-in-Chief

The Lewiston-Porter and Niagara Wheatfield school districts outlined their respective 2024-25 budget proposals in board presentations last month. The plans were prepared as New York state finalized its official 2025 budget that was adopted April 22.

According to the governor's press office, the plan calls for "nearly \$36 billion in total school aid for the 2024-25 school year – the highest level of school funding in state history." The budget also includes \$24.9 billion in Foundation Aid assistance, as well as new state aid to address low reading proficiency rates.

Both the Lewiston-Porter and Niagara Wheatfield central school districts continue to adjust their respective budgets that will be decided by voters on Tuesday, May 21.

The Lewiston-Porter CSD proposed plan for '24-25 totals \$54,651,119 according to the district's latest numbers released April 15. It reflects a 0.11% spending increase over the 2023-24 district budget, or \$57,807 additional. Among its changes, the budget forecasts \$18,483,649 in state aid for Lewiston-Porter in '24-25 – a 6% decrease, or \$1,180,198, from last year.

To compensate, various operational adjustments/cuts have been outlined by Lewiston-Porter administrators, as well as an increase in real property taxes for district property owners. Announced by Lew-Port for '24-25 is \$30,236,874 in real property taxes – a 2.12% increase, or \$628,558 over last year.

The Lewiston-Porter Board of Education will hold a detailed presentation on its '24-25 plan and discuss any changes in a special budget session/meet the candidates night at 6 p.m. Monday, May 13, in the Lew-Port Community Resource Center. BOE candidates for office in the May 21 election are Steven J. Tarnowski, Sara Ohanessian



and Connelly.

For more information, visit [www.lew-port.com](http://www.lew-port.com); link to "2024-2025 Annual Budget Vote."

In the Niagara Wheatfield CSD, the proposed '24-25 plan presented in April totals \$87,072,229. The budget calls for utilizing various reserve accounts to compensate for state aid reductions as well as possible tax increase.

Like Lewiston-Porter, the district is contending with a reduction in state aid. For NWF, that total is projected at \$39,337,403 for '24-25 – a decline of \$319,577, or 0.81% from last year.

Among the budget adjustments, the NFF district is considering using \$810,000 from its capital transportation reserve account and \$200,000 in capital technology reserve funds. It forecasts \$3,910,465 in "balance to fund" appropriations, which reflect various "interfund transfers" and the district's planned use of reserve accounts. These include its tax certiorari reserve, \$121,433; worker's compensation reserve, \$500,000; employee benefits reserve, \$300,00; ERS reserve, \$400,000; TRS reserve, \$400,000; and appropriated fund balance, \$2,189,033.

The district budget forecasts a 3.08% calculated tax levy increase for 24-25. Its approved tax levy for voters in '23-24 was 2.18%.

District residents will vote on the '24-25 plan May 21 along with selecting candidates to fill three seats on the Board of Education. For more information on the NWF budget and candidates for election, visit [www.nwscsd.org](http://www.nwscsd.org).

# Heart, Love & Soul calls upon community support amidst increased demand for services

**HEART, LOVE & SOUL GUEST EDITORIAL**

Heart, Love & Soul, a cornerstone organization in downtown Niagara Falls, is facing increased challenges as it works to meet escalating community needs.

Heart, Love & Soul provides invaluable services including a food pantry, dining room, and an abundance of social care programs. Recent statistics, however, reveal a troubling reality: Demand for assistance has surged dramatically, but so has the cost to meet those demands.

Over the past year alone, Heart, Love & Soul has distributed a staggering 71,856 meals from its pantry and served 44,926 hot meals to the community in downtown Niagara Falls. Moreover, between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2023, the organization witnessed a 62% increase in total meal distribution compared to the same period in 2021, with food pantry meals spiking by 87%.

"The numbers speak volumes about the growing food insecurity in this community," Executive Director Mark Baetzhold said. "In addition to huge increases between 2021 and 2023, we've seen a 17% uptick in the first quarter of 2024 compared to quarter one of 2023, indicating that more families are struggling to put food on the table. It also shows they are relying on our organization to feed their families."

Compounding these challenges are financial constraints brought on by soaring food prices. USDA data indicates a 20.4% increase in food prices between 2018 and 2022, and further increases of another 2% are anticipated this year. With grants and funding stagnant, Heart, Love & Soul's food spending in 2024 is expected to exceed its state and federal food funding by \$140,000.

In light of these circumstances, the success of Heart, Love & Soul's 2024 spring appeal is critical. Through the appeal, the organization aims to raise vital funds to sustain its operations and continue serving those in need.

Financial donations can be



Heart, Love & Soul has recently shared 71,856 meals from its pantry and served 44,926 hot meals to community members in Niagara Falls. (Submitted photo)

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Executive Director Mark Baetzhold

made securely on the Heart, Love & Soul website at [heartloveandsoul.org/donate](http://heartloveandsoul.org/donate), or by check to Heart, Love & Soul, 939 Ontario Ave., Niagara Falls, NY 14305. Additionally, an essential items drive is being held, with donations accepted at the organization's food pantry located at 939 Ontario Ave., Niagara Falls; or at the Upward Niagara Chamber of Commerce at 895 Center St., Lewiston. A list of needed goods can be found at [heartloveandsoul.org/donate-food-supplies](http://heartloveandsoul.org/donate-food-supplies).

"We cannot do this alone," Baetzhold emphasized. We are

fortunate to have the support of so many people who care about the food, housing, and basic needs of community members living at the margins. It's only through the collective generosity and support of our community that we can continue to provide vital assistance to those who need it most."

Heart, Love & Soul encourages individuals and businesses to get involved by donating, volunteering, or spreading the word about their mission on social media. Please follow our journey at [facebook.com/heartloveandsoul](https://facebook.com/heartloveandsoul).

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