

Phoenix Central School District

Board of Education

2019-2029 Financial Reserve Plan Document

Adopted December 2019

Updated November 2021

The Phoenix Central School District Board of Education believes that long-term financial health of the school district is essential to provide students with the educational programs and facilities to meet its mission.

MISSION STATEMENT: The Phoenix Central School District is committed to a challenging educational program that promotes academic and personal growth for all students. Each student will become a confident, productive, responsible individual with a strong academic foundation, and the ability to make positive ethical choices. Our goal is to cultivate a sense of pride, character, and accountability in our students and community.

The Board of Education, staff, parents, students, and community share responsibility for this mission.

PHOENIX CSD RESERVE FUND PHILOSOPHY

The District will continue to use conservative budgeting practices and constantly monitor the use of reserves. The District will continually update and analyze a 5-year financial outlook of the school each year. The goal is to provide long-term financial stability, avoid drastic cuts to the education program due to a lack of financial resources, and maintain a stable tax levy. As the District monitors the use of reserves it will attempt to avoid a major funding cliff due to the reliance on reserves in balancing the budget. In the short term, due to difficult economic times, the District will attempt to construct its budget as close to breakeven as possible to avoid large excesses at the end of the year.

Through the management of its reserves, the District hopes to achieve the following:

- Stability and improvements in the educational program
- Maintenance of educational programming during economic downturns
- The ability to maintain a stable tax levy
- Cash flows that will allow increased investment earnings
- The ability to fund non-recurring items in the budget
- A long term plan for preserving its infrastructure and school buildings
- The ability to maintain and/or improve its bond rating which will save taxpayers money at both the local and state level
- Cash flows that will eliminate the need to issue Revenue Anticipation Notes in the event state or federal aid is not paid timely

PHOENIX CSD RESERVE FUND PROCEDURES

This document contains a description and history of each reserve maintained by the Phoenix Central School District. It also identifies a target reserve level. The Board of Education, based on a review of the following information, recommended these targets:

- 5 year financial projections
- Possible exposure in each area
- Financial history of the District
- Regional events and factors that have impacted other Districts

Annually, the plan will be updated and implemented as follows:

- Board will review balances and patterns of revenues, expenses, and appropriations after books close each Summer/fall.
- Board will review updated 5-year financial projection.
- Board will review regional events and/or patterns and their impact on potential exposure.
- Board will review reserve targets and balances, adjust targets as appropriate, and present recommendations to the full Board.
- The Board will adopt the updated plan.
- Throughout the year, by Board resolution, adjust the budget to allow for charging appropriate expenditures to reserves.
- In June, by Board resolution, allocate funds to reserves as established in the plan.

SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCE ACCOUNTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019-20

Reserve	Balance 6/30/20	Balance 6/30/21	Increase(Decrease)
Employee Benefit Accrued Liability	1,803,273	2,303,273	500,000
Encumbrances	328,777	259,715	(69,062)
Workers Compensation	1,500,000	2,518,339	1,018,339
Capital	4,344,806	4,344,807	1
Capital 2	92,814	92,814	0
Unemployment	135,869	135,869	0
Property Loss	250,732	250,732	0
Retirement Contribution	8,161,338	8,161,338	0
Insurance Reserve	0	2,000,000	2,000,000
TRS Reserve	266,000	586,250	320,250
Debt Service Fund	1,494,665	1,616,176	121,511
Tax Certiorari	50,000	50,000	0
Subtotal	18,428,274	22,319,313	3,769,528
Assigned	714,089	0	(714,089)
Unassigned	1,893,420*	3,869,209	1,975,789
Total Fund Balance		26,188,522	5,031,228
• As of 6/30/2019			

Employee Benefit Accrued Liability Reserve

The Board of Education passed a resolution to formally establish this reserve. As of June 30, 2019, the balance in this reserve account was \$1,440,779. Funds in this account can only be used to offset costs for accrued and accumulated but unused sick leave, personal leave, holiday leave, vacation time, and other benefits that are payable upon termination of employment. As of June 30, 2019, the District estimates the liability for employee benefits covered under this reserve to be approximately \$3,103,108. This is in part due to the employee pay out for accrued sick, personal, and vacation time.

For a period spanning many years school districts in New York State believed this reserve could be used to save money for retiree health insurance costs. In recent years guidance provided by the NYS Education Department and the NYS Comptroller has clarified that the EBLAR reserve cannot be used to set aside funds for retiree health insurance.

Note: In current law there is no mechanism to set aside money for post-employment benefits, specifically for the cost of retiree health insurance. The District is required to have an independent actuarial valuation of its liability related to retiree health insurance. As of June 30, 2019 the District's unfunded actuarial accrued liability was \$20,182,332.

Employee Benefit Accrued Liability Reserve – GMU Article 2 § 6-p

- Established by Board of Education
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, transfers from other reserve funds as permitted by law, and other funds as the school board may legally appropriate
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- Utilized to pay for accrued and accumulated but unused sick leave, personal leave, holiday leave, vacation time, and other benefits earned by employees and payable upon termination
- Upon determination that this fund is no longer needed the fund may be discontinued and funds may be transferred to another reserve fund as permitted by law
- Funds cannot be used to pay lump sum “retirement awards” calculated as a percent of an employee’s final salary and paid upon retirement under a collective bargaining agreement

Reserve Target – Actual calculated liability for employee benefits – 50% of a liability. To be used periodically during fiscal downturns to pay one-time accrued obligations.

June 30, 2020 Balance - \$1,440,779

Encumbrance Reserve

At the end of the school's fiscal year there have been purchases of goods and services that have been ordered, but have not yet been received. The encumbrance reserve is utilized to set aside funds that are committed from the previous fiscal year toward paying for the purchases or services that will occur in the next fiscal year.

Workers' Compensation Reserve

The Workers' Compensation Reserve was established by the Board of Education on November 18, 2019. The District is a member of the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Schools Workers' Compensation Consortium. The consortium includes CiTi, OCM BOCES and 30 component districts. Annually each member district funds the plan based on its expected losses over time, as well as the overall needs and expenses of the plan. The amount to be paid in premiums for fiscal year 2019-2020 is \$294,947. Losses that exceed estimated amounts and changes in the NYS Workers' Compensation Law can result in premium spikes. The District will hold this reserve to assist in the event a large spike occurs. The District will utilize this reserve when for the difference in premium increases over \$315,000.

Workers' Compensation Reserve – GMU Article 2 § 6-j

- Established by Board of Education resolution
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, or other sums that may be legally appropriated
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- Utilized to pay expenses incurred by a self-funded worker's compensation plan such as compensation and benefits, medical, hospital, and expenses related to administering the plan
- Excess funds may be transferred to other reserves authorized by General Municipal Law and Education Law sixty days before the end of the fiscal year

Reserve Target

5% of payroll

The lower amount allows us to pay several years of premiums at the current level. A single catastrophic or serious event can cause a spike in costs that can as much as double premiums, as was experienced in 2014. The higher level of funding allows for such circumstances.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$0 (0% of payroll)

Unemployment Reserve

The Board of Education passed a resolution to formally establish this reserve. The District is obligated to pay 100% of all unemployment claims granted by the NYS Department of Labor. For many Districts across NYS, as well as Phoenix CSD, decreases in state aid, uncertainties regarding future state aid, property tax cap limits, enrollment decline, and a stagnant economy have created questions regarding the workforce. If, at a future date, the District finds it necessary to restructure its workforce, this reserve will help offset costs related to a staff reduction. The District will continue to monitor and possibly increase this reserve in future years as reductions in force may be necessary to balance future budgets.

Unemployment Insurance Reserve - GMU Article 2 § 6-m

- Established by Board of Education resolution
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, amounts from any other fund authorized by this chapter by resolution subject to referendum, or other sum that may be legally appropriated
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- Utilized to pay unemployment claims
- Excess funds may be transferred to other reserves authorized by General Municipal Law and Education Law sixty days before the end of the fiscal year

Reserve Target

1%-2% of payroll

Over the past few years, our enrollment has dropped significantly. Based on this and other factors, we have a steady pattern of adjusting staffing levels accordingly. There have been some layoffs, but we have been able to utilize attrition. An examination of our staffing profile indicates that opportunities for attrition will be lower going forward, and a possibility of a higher reliance on layoffs, with the accompanying unemployment responsibilities.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$135,869 (.6% of payroll)

Liability Claims and Property Loss

The Board of Education passed a resolution to formally establish this reserve. This reserve was established to pay for potential property damage costs to repair buildings that were not deemed necessary to insure due to age and condition as well as un-indemnified liability claims.

Furthermore, this reserve may be utilized to cover any liability, casualty, or other types of losses for which coverage may not be purchased.

Insurance Reserve – GMU Article 2 § 6-n

- Established by Board of Education
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, transfers from other reserve funds as permitted by law, and such other funds as the school board may legally appropriate
- Contributions to the fund may not exceed 3 percent of the total budget for that year
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds. A judicial approval is needed to pay settled or compromised claims exceeding \$25,000
- Upon determination that this fund is no longer needed the fund may be discontinued and transferred to another reserve fund as permitted by law

Reserve Target

\$1,000,000

This reserve allows us to pay any unsettled claims or unexpected losses due to gaps in insurance coverages.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$250,732 (25% of target)

Tax Certiorari Reserve

The tax certiorari reserve was re-established by the Board of Education in June of 2019 in the amount of \$50,000. This was established based on a potential claim. Every four years monies not used to pay judgments or claims must be returned to the General Fund. The District has been utilizing this reserve over the past few years to pay for tax certiorari cases and resulting payments needed to be made. This allows the district to not have to budget for these items. The District will review and update this tax certiorari case schedule at the end of each school year and adjust the balance of this reserve to match those potential claims.

Tax Certiorari Reserve Fund – EDN Article 74 §3651

- Established by Board of Education resolution
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- Utilized to pay judgments and claims arising out of tax certiorari proceedings
- Established in the amount which might be deemed reasonably necessary to pay judgments and claims
- Monies not used and/or are not reasonably required to pay judgments or claims are to be returned to the general fund on or before the first day of the fourth fiscal year following deposit into such fund
- Such monies shall be deemed reasonably required to pay any such judgment or claim if the proceeding or claim has not been finally determined, or otherwise terminated or disposed of after the exhaustion of all appeals

Reserve Target

By law, the allowable amount for this reserve is calculated based on pending tax certiorari cases.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$50,000 (Pending cases--\$48,000)

ERS Reserve

The ERS Reserve was established by the Board of Education in June of 2010. As a result of the severe stock market declines in 2008 the NYSERS (New York State Employees' Retirement System) has steadily increased the employer contribution rate to ERS. Recently due to better stock returns there has been a decrease in rates. The main issue is the volatility of the stock market and associated risks with significant increases in retirement rates.

In recent years the average ERS rates have been as follows:

2010-2011	11.9%	2013-2014	20.9%
2011-2012	16.3%	2014-2015	20.1%
2012-2013	18.9%	2015-2016	18.2%

The District has paid out \$655,000 in Employee Retirement costs for the 2019-20 school year. Due to the uncertainty of the stock markets and overall economy, the District will continue to monitor this fund in future years. Since retirement costs are a significant line item in the budget this reserve is very useful if money is needed to assist in balancing budgets in the short term to provide educational program and tax stability.

Retirement Contribution Reserve – GMU Article 2 § 6-r

- Established by Board of Education
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, revenues not required by law to be paid into other funds or accounts, transfers from other reserve funds as permitted by law, and such other funds as the board may legally appropriate
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- A portion of the funds may be transferred to another reserve fund established pursuant to Education Law § 3651 following a public hearing conducted in the manner set forth by in law

Reserve Target

25% -35% of ERS payroll multiplied by 5 years

Pension costs are a significant factor in district budgets. It is desirable to have enough reserve to pay these costs for 5 years, as contributions are based on 5 year averages. The lower and upper targets are based on the history demonstrated in the above chart.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$5,661,338 (34% of ERS payroll multiplied by 5 years)

TRS Reserve

The TRS Reserve was established by the Board of Education in June of 2019. Because of the severe stock market declines in 2008 the NYSTRS (New York State Teachers' Retirement System) has steadily increased the employer contribution rate to TRS. Recently due to better stock returns there has been a decrease in rates. The main issue is the volatility of the stock market and associated risks with significant increases in retirement rates.

In recent years the average TRS rates have been as follows:

2010-2011	8.62%	2015-2016	13.26%
2011-2012	11.11%	2016-2017	11.72%
2012-2013	11.84%	2017-2018	9.80%
2013-2014	16.25%	2018-2019	10.62%
2014-2015	17.53%	2019-2020	8.86%
		2020-2021	9.53%

The District has paid out \$1,577,000 in Teachers' Retirement costs for the 2018-19 school year. Due to the uncertainty of the stock markets and overall economy, the District will continue to monitor this fund in future years. Since retirement costs are a significant line item in the budget this reserve is very useful if money is needed to assist in balancing budgets in the short term to provide educational program and tax stability.

Retirement Contribution Reserve – GMU Article 2 § 6-r, Chapter 59 of 2019

- Established by Board of Education
- Funded by budgetary appropriations, revenues not required by law to be paid into other funds or accounts, transfers from other reserve funds as permitted by law, and such other funds as the board may legally appropriate. 2% of TRS payroll annual limit of funding
- Voter approval is not needed to expend funds
- A portion of the funds may be transferred to another reserve fund established pursuant to Sections 6-c,6-d,6-e,6-f of 3651.

Reserve Target

10% of TRS payroll

Pension costs are a significant factor in district budgets. It is desirable to have enough reserve to pay for unexpected fluctuations in the ECR. This will limit layoffs like those that occurred in 2010 through 2012.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$266,000 (1.5% of TRS payroll)

Capital Reserve Fund

The Board of Education established a Capital Reserve Fund through voter approval on May 19, 2015, for ten years in the amount of 7,000,000. The Board of Education established another Capital Reserve Fund 2 through voter approval on May 19, 2015 for \$500,000. The District will utilize the Building Condition Survey and meet to discuss some capital work that is needed to maintain and upgrade the facilities in the near future.

Capital Reserve – EDN Article 74 § 3651 (1)

- Established by voter approval
- States the purpose of the fund, the amount, the term of fund, and sources where funds are obtained e.g. budgetary appropriations, unappropriated fund balance, and New York State aid
- Utilized to pay for any object or purpose for which a school district may issue bonds pursuant to Finance Law
- Expended only with voter approval and for the purpose for which the fund was established
- Transferred to other funds only by voter approval
- May be liquidated by approval of voters if determined fund is no longer needed for the original purpose. Proceeds must be applied first to outstanding bond indebtedness than to tax levy

Reserve Target

The District recently completed the required Building Condition Survey. This survey identifies three categories of projected capital work: (1) Building Condition (code related work), (2) 5-year plan (beneficial upgrades), and (3) long-term planning (program and environment enhancement). Phoenix's building aid ratio is approximately 88%. The target amounts are based on projected local share of cost.

Target minimum (1) + (2) multiplied by 12% (\$4,800,000)

Target maximum (1) + (2) + (3) multiplied by 12% (\$7,500,000)

June 30, 2020 Balance

Fund 1--\$4,344,806 Fund 2--\$92,814

Assigned Fund Balance – Reserve for Subsequent Year

For the 2020-2021 school year the District appropriated \$714,089 of unassigned fund balance towards its budget. This represents approximately 1.5% of the current budget. The District philosophy is that appropriated fund balance is money owed from one budget to another. Based on the unpredictability and unfortunate political nature of Foundation Aid distributions, the district would rather stay away from appropriated fund balances as much as possible. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, State aid was reduced requiring the use of reserves and appropriated fund balance in the 2020-2021 budget.

Reserve Target

0% of budget

Unexpected costs, such as high cost special education students, can disrupt school district finances. Phoenix recently had seven such students move into the District over 1 summer. This method of revenue can be cautiously used to minimize the impact of such unexpected costs on planned programming.

2020-2021 Budget

\$714,089 (1.5% of the current budget)

Unassigned Fund Balance

For the year ended June 30, 2019 the amount in unassigned fund balance was \$6,576,163, or 13.89%, which is over the maximum allowed under State law. In future years, the District will work to keep the amount in unassigned fund balance at 4%. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the State of NY, has withheld some aid payments by as much as 20%, and threatens to continue in future 2020-21 aid payments. The District therefore, held all of its excess fund balance in unassigned fund balance. Excess funds will be moved to reserves in the spring of 2021.

Reserve Target

By law, this reserve is limited to 4% of the current budget.

June 30, 2020 Balance

\$6,576,163 (13.89%)

INTENDED USE OF RESERVES

Reserve funds, like other savings plans, are mechanisms for accumulating cash for future capital outlays and other allowable purposes. The practice of planning ahead and systematically saving for capital acquisitions and other contingencies is considered prudent management. Saving for future capital needs can reduce or eliminate interest and other costs associated with debt issuances. Similarly, certain reserve funds can be utilized to help protect the budget against known risks (a potential lawsuit) or unknown risks (a major ice storm).

Most reserve funds are established to provide resources for an intended future use. An important concept to remember is that a reserve fund should be established with a clear intent or plan in mind regarding the future purpose, use and, when appropriate, replenishment of funds from the reserve. Reserve funds should not be merely a “parking lot” for excess cash or fund balance. Local governments and school districts should balance the desirability of accumulating reserves for future needs with the obligation to make sure taxpayers are not overburdened by these practices. There should be a clear purpose or intent for reserve funds that aligns with statutory authorizations.

Each statute that authorizes a reserve fund sets forth a particular underlying purpose for the fund. For example, provisions of the General Municipal Law (the GML) and the Education Law allow municipalities and school districts, respectively, to establish capital reserves for future equipment purchases and capital improvements. The GML also authorizes the establishment of an employee benefit accrued liability reserve for the payment of the monetary value of accumulated, unused leave time to employees upon separation from service. Planning today and saving incrementally for expected future events can help mitigate the financial impact of major, nonrecurring or unforeseen expenditures on your annual operating budget. Establishing and funding allowable reserve funds for a clear purpose can help smooth out spikes in the annual budget and in the real property tax levy.

Source: Office of the New York State Comptroller – Local Management Guide for Reserves <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/lmg/reservefunds.pdf>

ANALYSIS OF RESERVE/FUND BALANCE ACCOUNTS AND PROJECTED NEEDS

The District has created a multi-year financial plan document that is updated and discussed each year. A financial graph is incorporated into the document to monitor reserve usage and plan for the challenges that are facing all school districts due to the property tax cap and limited State aid. Appendix A displays three different fund balance scenarios, worst, expected, and best case. These scenarios are adjusted by changing some of the major factors of the budget such as health insurance, retirement, tax revenue, and state aid revenues. The financial model developed is utilized for discussions centered on different assumptions in the financial plan which in turn changes the remaining reserves in the graph. An annual budget contains estimates of revenues and expenditures and the actual results may differ from the budget. In addition there are contingencies built into the budgeted expenditures to plan for different scenarios. In the event that any surplus funds are available at the end of the fiscal year, the Board of Education will determine the best use of these funds.

APPENDIX A

Reserve & Budget History

