

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Page 10

Does the BOE have its own debt - do they issue bonds?

The Board of Education debt is for school projects' which is included in the Town's budget as an obligation of the Town. The Board of Education does not issue bonds, they are issued by the Town.

Page 22/23

Difference between Education Cost Sharing Grant on 22 and Equalized Cost Sharing Grant on 23?

One and the same. Cost sharing on the part of the State, which was designed to equalize the amount of support each Town is due based on its need.

Page 26

Why such drastic increase in Special Education Programs? (49 headcount on 27)

From 2009-10 to 2018-19 the headcount increase is 31.24 (not clear on where 49 is derived from). Increases in Special Education reflect changes in identification, changes in student population, changes in State mandates around services

Page 31 and 227

Why does the Town pay for transportation for St. Rose, Housatonic Valley, Fraser Woods?

Section 10-281 of the CT General Statutes requires: "Any municipality or school district shall provide, for its children enrolled in any grade, from kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, attending nonpublic nonprofit schools therein, the same kind of transportation services provided for its children in such grades attending public schools when a majority of the children attending such a nonpublic school are residents of the State of Connecticut"

Page 42

How much did the leadership retreat cost, how many attended, where was it held?

\$8,432 was used for all 4 elementary schools and included 10 teachers, building administrators and 2 facilitators (9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.). The leadership retreat was meant to engage in planning prior to the start of the school year, including planning for resources, new programming, scheduling, and professional development. This is the only planning of this nature that allows administrators to work with their teacher leadership team prior to the start of the school year, and this includes working on school improvement plans in alignment with the district strategic plan.

Page 105

Reed School has 2 principals. Middlegate, Head O'Meadow, have 1. Sandy Hook has 2. Hawley has 1, Middle School has 2, High School has 4. Why so many principals?

Middle Gate, Head O'Meadow, Hawley all have a Building Principal. Sandy Hook School, Reed, and Middle School each have a Principal and Assistant Principal. The Sandy Hook Assistant Principal position is being eliminated next year. The High School has a Principal and 3 Assistant Principals. The student population and number of staff requiring supervision and evaluation are primary reasons for the levels required. Elementary schools range from enrollment of 277 to 392 students, (1 Principal each), Reed and the Middle School, from 618 to 675 students, (each have 1 Principal & 1 Assistant Principal, and the High School of 1,565 students (1 Principal & 3 Assistant Principals). Proportionally levels of administration are similar to enrollment size.

Page 163

**".....the District is required to maintain its current level of special funding in order to be eligible for Federal dollars under IDEA/Individuals with Disabilities Education Act."
How much money, Federal dollars, does Newtown receive? Please also see below under Special Education in General.**

\$764,429 from the 2017 award and \$27,583 Balance carried forward from 2016.

Page 238

**Why are English (\$2,071,667) and Reading (\$1,329,898) (Total \$3,401,565) separate categories?
What is "Classroom" \$9,135,135?**

English is a program offered only in the Middle School and High School while reading is offered at all levels, but to a lesser degree at the Middle School and High School. Classroom is a category of expense which is used for all locations, also to a lesser degree at the Middle School and High School where other programs categories capture expenses. At the lower levels, teachers are grouped here because they teach all subjects except specials.

Special Education in general

How does the School District certify that all 572 Special Education Students qualify under the guidelines - see excerpt below?

“Thus, children must meet two criteria in order to receive special education: (1) the child must have one or more of the disabilities listed below, and (2) he or she must require special education and related services.”

- **Autism:**
- **Deafness:**
- **Deaf-Blindness:**
- **Hearing impairment:**
- **Mental retardation: Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning**
- **Orthopedic impairment: ... amputation, absence of a limb, cerebral palsy, poliomyelitis, and bone tuberculosis.**
- **Other health impairment: ... heart condition, rheumatic fever, asthma, hemophilia, and leukemia, which adversely affect educational performance.**
- **Serious Emotional Disturbance: A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics, displayed over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:**
 - **An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors**
 - **An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers**
 - **Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances**
 - **A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression**
 - **A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.**
 - **Specific Learning Disability**
 - **Speech or language impairment**
 - **Traumatic brain injury**
 - **Visual impairment, including blindness**

The October 1 count of 572 special education students are certified by:

- *Each student has to have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) with one of the identified classifications (as stated in the question) to receive Specialized Special Education Instruction, as required by the State and Federal Government.*
 - *Specialized supports are unique to each individual, based on individual's disability, and developed in a PPT (team of educators, medical personnel, counselors, SPED personnel, and parents)*
 - *Students identified as needing an IEP and specialized instruction are identified through comprehensive evaluations*
 - *Each student based on evaluation would require specialized instruction and supports as outlined in his or her individualized education plan*
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The budget includes teacher position reductions and counselor/social worker increases in headcount, which I believe was characterized as a request from the principals. I understand that the logic for teacher reductions is headcount loss among the student population.

- **Is the increase in counselor/social worker headcount similarly tied to student headcount?**
- **Is there an analysis available that evaluates existing counselor/social worker caseload?**
- **Is there a sense that caseload is too high? How do you evaluate that?**
- **Is there an evaluation of how effective the existing counselor/social worker resources are and how effective they are?**
- **For teacher reduction decisions, are class sizes the sole determinant? Will the reductions affect class offerings and choice? Any other impact?**

This is often tied to social and emotional needs of a district or school. For example, if after reviewing information and data around student needs, decisions are made that determine what supports are essential. In addition, as additional responsibilities for identifying, tracking, and supporting students become mandated (SRBI), then the role of our support staff continues to increase (regardless of decline in population). In addition, we have increased both our populations at the elementary school and our SPED population district-wide. Counselors and social workers serve the needs of all students and families across the district, especially in districts like Newtown that continue to work with a PTSD population.

As of October 2017 from Area Roundtable Counseling Director Data - average counselor caseload at NHS = 199 (Trumbull: 190, Simsbury: 200, Wilton: 195 Greenwich: 180 Westin: 190 The average across both DRG A/B = 202).

Average counselor caseload at the elementary level includes all students, but some students also work with the school psychologist for testing or therapeutic needs.

Hawley – 304

Middle Gate – 363

Sandy Hook – 388

HOM – 265

(some students also work with their SPED case managers – so caseloads typically look like other levels)

- *Panorama Survey (district-wide) – one of the key elements by parents was that they felt their students needed to see counselors more often throughout the year.*
- *With respect to caseloads, we review area data to determine average caseload in similar schools across our DRG.*
- *Internal study and evaluation of programs and support services (through the District Safe School Climate Committee). Example, for the last two years we have been working with*

consultants from UCONN to revise our Social Emotional Learning practices and support services.

- *Teacher reductions are based on class/section enrollment but also considers whether adequate services will provide level of quality instruction moving forward. In addition, as in the case of music at RIS, this was based on lower enrollment, which showed a discrepancy over the last two years regarding equitable caseloads (electives teachers). In addition, now the .8 at Hawley will be combined with .2 NHS for 1.0 FTE (this had been difficult in the past to retain Hawley music as only .8 FTE).*

The total proposed budget of \$76 million seems to be mostly focused on maintaining level services and employing cost containment.

What are the strategic academic investments being made – meaning the things that will improve the academic investments being made that will differentiate Newtown? How will you evaluate the impact and success of those investments?

- *Concept-based curriculum and instruction, which focuses on a stronger inquiry based learning model around concepts and “big ideas” rather than discrete facts. This aligns with best practice in teaching and learning (and is basis for new NGSS – Next Generation of Science Standards – which students will be tested on moving forward.*
- *Social Emotional learning practices district wide – including of Alpine platform that will allow us to track and access student data across schools to help support students as they move through the system. NOT TYPICAL ACROSS ALL DISTRICTS*
- *STEM programming – new biomedical program at HS, at MS, and STEM program at RIS ;*
- *What have been the strategic investments in the past few years? How have you evaluated the impact and success of those investments?*
- *Current engineering program at HS increased in interest in just one year. Students may receive college credit from Project Lead the Way (engineering and biomedical) – both highly competitive careers. NOT TYPICAL IN ALL DISTRICTS*
- *Evaluation of any and all programs include review of in-house assessment and standardized test data, as well as information from Panarama surveys, anecdotal information, parent feedback, observations of classroom instruction, and teacher evaluation. Interest level is also important – which impacts enrollment, at times, as was the case with Mandarin. This is an extremely difficult language, and the ongoing rotation of teachers from China caused the enrollment to continue to decrease.*

If you has an additional \$200,000 (25%) to spend on strategic, academic investments, what would/could that be used for?

- *We want flexible, high tech spaces to be used by students so they are able to fully explore sciences and technologies – these are rapidly growing fields and students’ success and career aspirations will be an investment for both the local and greater community.*

Examples include research labs and science makerspaces, where students are able to engage in real world application, explore, and engage in critical thinking.

Was this budget built on the assumption that the ECS grant would come in at \$4.75 million, reflecting a + \$500,000 increase from last year? If so, how would you have approached this budget differently if the assumption were adjusted to a more realistic number, such as the one included in Bob Tait's revenue line of \$3.95 million?

The budget was built based on spending needs as opposed to anticipated revenues. The school principals and administrators are always thoughtful in preparing budgets. They had to prioritize their budget requests more carefully this year knowing the fiscal climate.

Budget planning occurs with the best information available. This information changes over time, whether it is for energy or the state budget. Given the range of changes in ECS funding last year, what constitutes a realistic estimate is hard to determine. The amount that is currently in the statute is \$4,756,332. The Governor has proposed \$4,251,588. Interestingly, there is currently a bill, HB5171 which would prevent the Governor from making any rescissions to the ECS during the fiscal year. But as we saw last year, changes can be made long after our local budget has been set.

Page 27

Staffing of Curriculum & Technology – in this year's budget this staffing line item was a single 8.00 FTE; however, in next year's budget, these are two separate items where technology is steady at 8.00 FTEs, but there is an additional 1.9 FTEs currently and the staffing is requested to increase to 5.40. Why did staffing increase this year to 1.9 FTEs and what was the cost of this increase? Also, what is the justification for the additional 3.5 increase in staffing for next year's budget?

During the 2017-18 budget book production, the decision was made to break apart the Curriculum & Technology cost centers. To create even more clarity, we decided to develop a staffing section for Curriculum as these employees reported to the Assistant Superintendent. New to the 2018-19 budget book is the staffing section under Curriculum, see page 188.

The 1.9 FTE budgeted in 2017-18 contains an additional .5 FTE Spanish teacher for the elementary grade level along with .10 Math and .10 Social Studies Curriculum Coordinators. This is an increase of .7 FTE over the 2016-17 budget-year. The World Language and Curriculum Coordinators were all previously budgeted within the schools.

The two district administrators, Director of Guidance K-12 and the Director of Visual Arts and Music, were moved from the schools and the English Language Learner (ELL) teacher was moved

from the Special Education budget to now reside in the Assistant Superintendent's Curriculum Budget. There is no increase in these areas, only reallocation of positions.

The only addition to the 2018-19 request includes a .5 FTE Spanish teacher. This addition will now carry our Spanish classes into the third grade level.

With regard to the 4 FTE counselor positions (2 funded by Novo Grant), what was the reasoning for these new positions? How was the need assessed? How are these needs being dealt with currently without these counselor positions? Is there an opportunity to share these positions among the several elementary schools, i.e., .5 FTE per elementary school—or some variation of that?

- *The counselors are in place, but have been funded by EdAdvance grant for the last several years. They are critical resources, with caseloads averaging between 275-315 (as some share students with school psychologist), as we continue to develop our social/emotional learning and district-wide practices to provide appropriate interventions, help students develop Student Success Plans, provide counseling needs (group and individual), work with teachers to help support issues with families, and collect data that will be useful during PPTs, parent meetings, team meetings.*
- *Sharing counselors is difficult, especially when it comes to developing strong relationships with a school's population and family – but the more important reason is that our elementary counselors have higher caseloads given the populations.*
- *This was the single most critical budget request by all building principals as the emotional needs of their students are clearly evident and from Panarama data in the community.*

Regarding transportation, what financial impact did the change in school start time have overall? Has All-Star been called upon to identify opportunities to operate more efficiently given the new 2-tier system?

The change in school start times was accommodated for in the new contract with All Star Transportation by negotiating flexibility via differentiated pricing for two-tier of bussing, three tiers and four tiers, with the two tier system being less than the others. The rates are based on 5 ½, 6 ½, and 7 ½ hour of bussing. As start time and declining enrollment were issues that would likely be faced during the term of this new contract, it was prudent to negotiate consideration for change in this regard. The new contract term allowed us to appropriately plan for this change with the new contract taking the need for additional negotiations out of the discussion. The two-tier system is more efficient and cost effective and allowed for a no cost solution to make this happen. The savings in reduced bussing time was used to add three and a half busses to make up for the higher capacity and longer routes required in a two-tier system.

Regarding the reduction in the orchestra teacher at Reed, what has the orchestra census been over the last 5 years?

- See chart

In furtherance to the January 14, 2018 CT post article, has there been any progress in identifying opportunities where we can regionalize resources such purchases such as school supplies, etc. with neighboring districts as a way of reducing costs?

On the topic of regionalizing purchases, currently, Superintendents and Directors of Business have been meeting on this topic. In fact, hosted by ER9 and Bethel, we have collaborated to look at areas that may be shared in order to reduce costs.

A meeting will be held with five local districts (including Bethel, Monroe, Danbury, etc.) to look at regionalizing programming for students with behavioral issues (often resulting in outplacement). This is occurring in the next two weeks.

We did not touch on page 171 Transition Services. Are these youths included in the 572 figure of students in special ed? Page 171 requests 7 job coaches but page 172 requests 5 coaches. Where is the program? This looks better than break even; can we expand?

The youngsters that participate in the Transition Program are 18-21years old and are included in the special education number of 572. The Transition Program recently became (a separate program with its own facility designation provided by the State, and is also referred to as "Community Partnership Program." This program is now open to students from neighboring towns in exchange for a nominal tuition fee. Pages 18 and 20 now show the current and projected student enrollment.

Due to the growth of this program, we have had to add job coaches (this is a billable cost for out-of- district students), as you will notice on page 172. Three of our job coaches work 32.5 hours per week and four coaches work 20 hours per week. The hours total 177.5 and when divided by a 35 hour work week (this is considered full-time), the total becomes 5.07 FTE; or full-time equivalency employees.

The Director of Pupil Personnel is open to expansion and we are hoping to see more youngsters enrolled in this program.

Payroll systems have become very automated. Do the town and BOE use the latest version of systems from ADP (or another service company) to minimize salaries of

those administering payroll? If not, what would be the cost to upgrade and are there IT issues that rule out an upgrade?

The payroll system utilized by both the Town and BOE is automated in that all payroll processing is done completely in-house. The Town discontinued using ADP a number of years ago in order to reduce the costs and purchased the HR/Payroll module system that the BOE has been using for years. This was done when the Town switched over to the BOE general ledger accounting software system.

Running the BOE payroll is very complex due to the many exceptions regarding payroll accounts, substitutes, activity accounts, stipends, civic billable, overtime, just to name a few. After all entries have been made and encumbrance reports, state tax reports, deductions, etc. have been balanced, it is then interfaced with the general ledger. The Town has been setting aside, on an annual basis, the funds to replace the entire general ledger and HR/payroll sometime in the near future.

I would like to revisit the insurance expense for the BOE. Page 201 shows a 4.43% increase for liability insurance. The BOS shows a decrease. I ask Ron to verify that the figure is correct.

Does the figure combine property premiums with liability premiums?

The CIRMA letter referencing 2018-19 Budget Indicator was received after the BOE approved its budget. Factoring in the -3% predicted LAP rate will allow the BOE budget to be reduced in its insurance line by \$22,807. (An insurance schedule is attached.)

What would you do with incremental \$200k

To answer this, we can look to some of the Principal requests that were not fulfilled (in bold), and consider BOE conversations about some of these topics.

Increase hours by 0.1 for curriculum coordinator positions. *The BOE has not had this discussion recently. However, for many, many years, the idea of adding (full time or part time) curriculum coordinators has been raised. Curriculum coordinators would ensure that the K-12 curriculum and instruction are aligned between schools (vertically and horizontally) and that data inform instruction. A quick search shows other districts with curriculum coordinator positions include Cheshire, Wilton, Brookfield, Westport, Monroe, Tolland, Danbury, Milford and Stratford.*

Lead teacher to become AP. *The BOE moved to have lead teachers at all elementary schools (as opposed to creating AP positions).*

Restoration of previous year's elementary school extra-curricular activities. *The Board has had and will continue to have conversations about how to support extra-curricular activities. While elementary school extra-curricular activities were not discussed specifically this year at the Board level, the Board in general supports extra-curricular activities as a part of the educational experience, and this is a continuing topic of interest.*

Additional security guard. *The Board has not taken up a discussion about adding security.*

Full-time dean at NMS. *The Board has not taken up a discussion about adding a dean.*

Additional ESL support. *The Board discussed this, but there was not enough impetus to make a change this year*

