

2019-20 Proposed Budget Questions & Answers



Presented March 6, 2019

1. **Middle schools: Can we get more details on where the 1 FTE reduction is coming from? (Position, not the person)**
 - a. Currently we cannot provide that level of detail. The projected reduction is based on the number of students and projected classroom needs. The actual reduction will be determined once the scheduling process is complete.
2. **How does this and other schedule changes made at the middle schools effect teaming model?**
 - a. The changes made to the middle school schedule preserve the benefits of the teaming model of a middle school, balance class size and adjust for declining enrollment.
3. **Can we receive additional information on the changes to MS schedules and proposed changes to ELT time?**
 - a. The administration will begin to roll out the changes to the middle school schedule over the next few weeks. There is a joint staff meeting scheduled with both schools for Friday March, 8th as the next step in the process. We hope that beginning the scheduling process this early will allow for us to address any conflicts.
4. **Can you provide average class size projections at the middle schools for core academic classes?**
 - a. Currently we are planning for classes no larger than 25 with anticipated range of 18-24 for core academic classes. Traditionally courses like Chorus and Physical Education have run higher.
5. **I understand that class size at the high school is hard to report on since schedules are not complete for next year. Is there is any information you are able to share on this?**
 - a. Currently it is too soon to project class size at the high school. Course registration is in the final stages now. The changes being made to the registration and course selection process should help create more balanced classes, but nothing in this budget process will impact class size directly.
6. **How is it that the high school is adding courses that do not require additional staffing?**
 - a. The amount of students enrolled in the high school is remaining relatively flat. The course selection and enrollment process will dictate which courses will actually run and the administration will be able to decide the minimum and maximum class sizes.

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7. Will we be getting more details regarding Alt Ed, and how this will be accomplished?

a. We should we be able to move forward, there will be a dedicated presentation in the next two months. Currently we are assessing the plausibility of repurposing the house on the high school property to function as an alternative high school.

8. Transportation is up even though we reduced a bus, can we assume that this is special ed related?

a. Bussing costs for special education rose \$230,000 in unbudgeted expenses for this school year. Those costs are incorporated as part of the increase to the 2019-2020 proposed budget. In addition there was an increase in the number of students in our transition program and transportation for expelled students that contribute to the cost increase. The reduction of the one bus is from general transportation. The district will receive 18 new buses next month and another 12 next year as part of our contract and will not add additional cost. As a region we continue to seek efficiencies and mitigate the rising costs of transportation services.

9. I am not familiar with recommendations that were made by NEASC. Would it be possible to get a summary of those we have taken on board and those we may be postponing?

a. NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Accreditation organization. The accreditation process happens every ten years and our last one was in 2014. The full report is on the high school website:
<http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/160/162/172/NEASCPomperaugHighSchoolFinalReport.pdf>

b. The NEASC staffing recommendation that we did not include in this year's budget was specific to the Library Media Center and the addition of another certified staff member. While we agree and support the recommendation, this year we were not able to make that a priority.

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10. What is the special education contingency and how have we fared over the past few years? Have the unexpected costs been consistent, or even increasing (or decreasing) linearly, or if they are proportional to the size of the incoming class?

- a. For the 2019-2020 school year the contingency for special education costs is budgeted at \$230,000, this is higher than the \$200,000 budgeted for the current school year, but less than the \$300,000 in 2017-2018.
- b. Unexpected costs have ranged from \$200,000-\$500,000
- c. We have not seen a clear relationship between the number of students and the amount of unexpected costs.
- d. While we have seen a trend where cost increases are in the 10-14% range each year, it has not been consistent or predictable in its application and there is no direct correlation to enrollment.

11. You said the budget does not include an elementary administrator, but I am curious to know where we would like to add an administrator and what their role might be.

- a. Long Meadow is the largest of our elementary schools and is where our preschool program is located. While this is an area we monitor, we believe that we can continue to provide appropriate supports under our current structure.

12. What assumptions have we made regarding Excess Cost and Education Cost Sharing?

- a. We budget Excess Cost at the rate of 66%. Historically the state's reimbursement amount has ranged from 65% to 70%.
- b. The Educational Cost Sharing Grant goes directly to municipalities and is not reflected in the school budget.

13. I would infer that the 2 middle school teacher enrollment-based reductions are in special education? Is there a reduced need for special education instruction at the middle schools?

- a. While the student needs for next year have not been finalized, at this time we do not expect any reduction in special education teachers and there are no proposed reductions in special education services.

14. Under classified personnel, the budget for BCBA is \$0 for 2018-2019 and "Adj Budget", but I thought that was approved in referendum last year. I'm just not sure it should show up as part of a net increase this year if it was part of last year's budget?

- a. The BCBA funds were moved from certified to non-certified. While the position does require a professional certification, it is not certified by the State Department of Education.

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15. There were several increases for substitute pay, and I wonder whether that was because of an increased need for substitutes or whether that is just to account for a rate increase?

a. The increase in the substitute pay line is a correction for the three year historical trend which has been short each year. We are now tracking substitutes monthly to try to dig deeper into any specific cause. Currently there are a variety of reasons and not a single driver.

The increase in the certified sub pay is based on a three year average of actual use.

The substitutes for professional development have also increased as the district works to build capacity around several major instructional and curriculum shifts.

16. There were several reductions in Extra Pay/Tutors for SIP tutoring, pretty much across the board, and I wonder what the rationale for that is?

a. Some of the reduction does come from the SIP tutor line based on actuals. In a climate of almost full employment, these positions are often hard to fill.

b. The other reductions to that line are in Homebound Tutoring, Lifeguards, based on three year actuals, and the sunset of the Early Retirement Payout of \$397,000.

17. I see we have made some reduction in custodial overtime, and I think we did this last year as well. I guess I would like to understand when overtime typically happens. If it takes overtime hours to disinfect lunchroom tables during a flu outbreak for example, that is a trade-off I'd want to be aware of.

a. Overtime happens for several reasons:

1. Emergencies between 11pm and 5am or on some weekends
2. Staff illness

b. Actual overtime costs are down over the past three years. The main reason for the reduced cost in overtime is an increasingly deep substitute pool. The increase in available substitutes means that there is less of a need for our custodial staff to work additional shifts.

Questions asked at the 3.6.2019 BOE Budget Workshop Meeting

18. Mr. Suriani referred to the School Community Highlights slide and asked the elementary principals how does this directly correlate to the budget?

a. Mr. Romeo replied that this slide represents what the elementary schools were able to fund with the current budget, but if the new proposed budget was not approved these would be items that they would have to consider cutting.

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19. Mr. Suriani asked if the Superintendent’s budget has an addition of a social worker at the elementary level.

- a. Mr. Smith responded that the current proposed budget has the possibility of shifting the contracted services away from Spectrum and have 2 FTE social workers employed by the Region. This would be a 0 net increase because the money used to pay for Spectrum would offset the cost of 2 FTE Social Workers hired in the Region. If this were to happen 1 social worker would be k-8 and the other would be at the high school.

20. Mr. Brennan asked where does the social emotional learning and restorative practices fit into the traditional learning of reading, writing, math, social studies and science?

- a. Mrs. Pellicone responded that elementary students are in a singular classroom all day and their elementary teachers are charged with teaching all of these subjects everyday and the social emotional feeling of community are woven into their lessons.

21. Mr. Watson asked about the replacement of equipment in elementary schools.

- a. Mr. Romeo responded that they feel supported when they come forward with equipment that needs to be replaced, especially when it is a safety concern. The “risers” at MES do need to be replaced and that cost was built into the MES budget, but the rest of the elementary schools are ok.

22. Mr. Watson asked about the class size in 5th grade at MES if the 1 FTE teacher is not approved for 2019-20 budget?

- a. Ms. Pellicone responded that currently the 4th grade class has 2 sections with 24 and 24 students. She continued to state that historically over the summer 5th grade enrollment goes up. Mr. Smith clarified that the budget proposal is moving a teacher to grade 5 for next year making classroom size at 16.

23. Ms. Dwyer inquired about the phonics program for 2019-20 school year.

- a. Ms. Pellicone responded that the phonics program that elementary is currently using is from Teacher College and it directly correlates with the reading and writing units of studies. It might not look like a “traditional” phonics program but the purpose of the program is to teach the phonics but also emphasizes transfer. The first grade piloted this program this year.

24. Ms. Manzo asked if there is still a “Readers and Writers” workshop.

- a. Ms. Pellicone responded yes. Teachers College is the provider of the “Readers and Writers workshop” program.

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- a. Mr. Romeo replied that this slide represents what the elementary schools were able to fund with the current budget, but if the new proposed budget was not approved these would be items that they would have to consider cutting.

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32. Mr. Surini asked about the impact of last year’s elimination of a music teacher had on the elementary schools?

- a. Mr. Romeo responded that the elementary schools do miss having an “in house” music teacher but they have adjusted their schedules. Going forward they are planning on making it a k-8 schedule adjustment instead of just an elementary. This will allow a music teacher per building for next year.

33. Ms. Connelly inquired what an ideal Middle School Advisory Program would be like.

- a. Mr. Bernardi responded that ideally 1 advisor for every 8 – 10 students over a course of 3 years. They would meet regularly and their lessons would have focus and purpose.

34. Mr. Cookson asked if the Middle School principals felt that both communities will support these new ideas that we are approaching in teaching.

- a. Ms. Murphy feels very positive about the changes and feels that the Region is being very innovative.

35. Ms. Manzo asked for clarification between the Bridges Math Program vs. Big Ideas.

- a. Mr. Bernardi responded that Bridges is the actual math curriculum and Big Ideas is the resource which is supplemental materials.

36. Ms. Dwyer asked if the Region’s technology investment need to include more than just Chromebook Carts.

- a. Mr. Bernardi responded that the Chromebook carts that were in added to the RMS budget were added to have more consistency with availability to the students.

37. Ms. Manzo asked who provided the 3D printers, robotic arm, and other technology at RMS.

- a. Mr. Bernardi said the PTO has provided all of the funding for extra technology.

38. Mr. Suriani asked how the MS schedule was working with the reduction of 1FTE music teacher.

- a. Ms. Murphy replied that the MS schedule is working out well.

39. Ms. Dwyer asked the middle school principals their thoughts about on-line resources?

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- a. Both principals agree that on-line resources are necessary for innovative learning.

40. Mr. Cookson asked if the middle schools have enough money to fund technology.

- a. Mr. Smith responded that no, there is never enough money; it is all about prioritizing where we want to place our funds.

Questions from 3.20.19 BOE Budget Workshop

41. Mr. Suriani asked if Dr. Jones has enough data to know if PHS has enough teachers.

- a. The enrollment is consistent to where PHS was last year or a little lower. Yes, we will have enough teachers.

42. Mr. Suriani asked to clarify the goals for the cafeteria at large and the senior cafeteria.

- a. For the cafeteria at large PHS would like to replace the tables that are broken. For the Seniors PHS would like to repurpose the AP Room for seniors to go when they are not in class and make it an added senior privilege.

43. Mr. Suriani asked for clarification on the replacement of Chromebook carts.

- a. Dr. Jones replied that PHS matches their Chromebook Carts to certain courses that use them largely. Currently, there are not enough Chromebooks to fulfill all the course and the goal is to improve what we have to better meet the demands.

44. Ms. Manzo asked what upgrades PHS needs to the video equipment. What the weaknesses are and what improvements are needed?

- a. Dr. Jones replied that by adding more cameras we will be able to add more students to this technology class. Two of the main cameras that PHS is looking to replace will allow for more mainstreaming of live meetings. Mr. Smith explained that our system needs to move from analogue system to a digital system and these upgrades will allow for that.

45. Ms. Manzo asked for more clarification on the Drama Reduction.

- a. Dr. Jones said it was less of a reduction and more of a budgeting for what we have actually spent. Dr. Jones explained that when the school puts on a production the school buys the equipment for the sets and the costumes not the parents.

46. Mr. Cookson asked if inventory was taken in the PHS kitchen equipment.

- a. Mr. Smith answered that the PHS cafeteria is part of the Capital Improvement Plan.

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- 47. Ms. Carter asked Dr. Jones to address the overcrowding in the cafeteria.**
- Dr. Jones said some of the issues are caused by scheduling. Moving forward they are working on making sure that the lunch waves are more balanced. Replacing broken tables would address some of the overcrowding.
- 48. Ms. Dwyer asked about the kiln being moved from the high school budget to the District budget. Do we have 1 kiln in each school or just one in the district?**
- Dr. Jones said that there is one in each school.
- 49. Ms. Connelly asked Mr. Plasky to speak more about the branding initiative.**
- Mr. Plasky stated that the goal is to get all of the uniforms at PHS and the Middle Schools to have the same logo and be in the same color family. He is working on getting all of the uniforms on a uniform replacement cycle for both high school and middle schools and to move away from the booster clubs purchasing the uniforms.
- 50. Mr. Cookson asked if all of the uniforms were CIAC approved.**
- Mr. Plasky responded that all of the uniforms are approved by the National Federation of High School Rules.
- 51. Mr. Cookson asked Mr. Plasky to explain the \$130,000 in major repairs to athletic fields.**
- Mr. Plasky responded that the repairs and maintenance line item is for the annual care and maintenance of the athletic fields.
- 52. Ms. Manzo asked what the \$2000 in professional development will go towards for Health.**
- Mr. Plasky responded that each school has their own line budget for professional development. His line item request gives him the option to be able to send Health & PE teaches to professional development to cover training for state mandated instruction.
- 53. Ms. Manzo asked Mrs. Sciarretto to explain how the decision is made to send a student to private tutoring or private education.**
- Ms. Manzo also asked her to talk about the “burden of proof”. Ms. Sciarretto explained that the “burden of proof” is for the school system to prove that they have the ability to provide the required education and resources needed to educate a student. The judge makes the decision as to who pays for the tuition if the school district cannot provide the education needed.

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54. Ms. Manzo also asked Mrs. Sciarretto to explain what the process is and how the decision is made to send a student outside of Region 15 for their education.

- a. Mrs. Sciarretto explained that the decision is not made lightly and that their goal is keep all of the students in Region 15 as much as possible. An example that would allocate for a student to be sent out of district could be a behavioral issue, a heightened medical need that the region cannot cover, or a more directive education that the region cannot supply. If the district cannot provide the education that the student needs to make progress then we would send them out of district. Mr. Smith explained that some of the students come to Region 15 already placed in a facility by someone else. We have to follow the decision made by another district and in turn we would be responsible for that tuition.

55. Mr. Cookson asked Mrs. Sciarretto to explain what “new needs from 2018-19 budget” are.

- a. Mrs. Sciarretto explained that these are costs that are incurred after the budget is passed. For example, the need to add another paraprofessional for a student, a need for equipment out of district/ outplacement tuition, these are some examples that were paid for out of the 2018-19 budget not planned for as they were realized after the 18-19 budget adoption process.

56. Mr. Cookson asked if student services use transportation regionalization to help with the cost of transporting students to out of district facilities.

- a. Ms. Sciarretto replied that yes, we ride share.

57. Ms. Dwyer asked for an explanation of the addition of social workers to the district.

- a. Ms. Sciarretto replied that the addition of social workers is part of Mr. Smith’s presentation. This addition would be to replace the outsourced facility of Spectrum. The social workers would fall under Student Services. Ms. Dwyer asked what kind of services the social workers provide. Services would include the use of family outreach, working with attendance issues, working with students who have emotional issues that are beyond the service of what a school district can provide.

58. Mr. Spierto asked what percent of students require full time special education service.

- a. Ms. Sciarretto said that she would have to calculate that because her department covers a range of services. Mr. Spierto asked how many students are achieving the goal of getting out of Special Ed. Mrs. Sciarretto said she would get that information to Mr. Spierto. Mr. Spierto asked if Student Services tracks the 18-21 year old students after they leave Region 15. Mrs. Sciarretto replied yes.

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- 59. Mr. Cookson asked if the infrastructure program that we put into place 4 years ago, did it meet the needs and did it work?**
- Mr. Sage replied yes.
- 60. Mr. Cookson asked if the leasing program is seeing the net gains from what we did at that time.**
- Mr. Sage said somewhat. When the program was first implemented the district had a significant amount of devices that were past their time and we had to “catch up”. One of the options was to incur a lease payment to make a big dent in the replacement of the equipment that we needed.

Questions from 3.27.19 BOE Budget Workshop

- 61. Mr. Hill of Southbury asked when the next Educational Space Utilization Committee (ESU) meeting will be held and when the study will be complete.**
- Mr. Smith replied that the next meeting is Wednesday, April 3, 2019 beginning at 6:00 p.m. at Central Office. The study by Milone & McBroom should be complete by June of 2019.
- 62. Mr. Michaels of Southbury asked about the pension liability. Is the Region making the minimum contributions each year?**
- Mr. Smith replied yes and in 3 years the pension will be fully funded. Mr. Michaels asked for the Board to look into the following questions: What is the past service liability? How is that going to stay fully funded and how will that affect future school budgets?
- 63. What would the gross expenditures be without the net budgeting?** Mr. Smith will provide that information.
- 64. Mr. Stowell asked when there is a surplus does that surplus go back to the towns?**
- The revenue that goes back to the towns is driven by the interest earned on accounts. It does not come directly from school budget. Anything un-expendable in the school budget up to 1% gets put into a capital reserve account and that is used to fund major projects. This yearend balance is viewable each year in the schools audit and in recent history and has been far below the 1% mark.
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- 65. Mr. Connor asked what the impact of the state changing the Excess Cost formula.**

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- a. Mr. Smith replied that the excess cost formula has several proposals in Hartford. Currently the Excess Cost formula is not tied to any wealth calibration. If that changes then the impact to the towns will be significant.

66. Mr. Hill asked how many SPED students does Region 15 have and how much of the budget do they drive?

- a. Mr. Smith replied that the district does not want to “pit the needs of some students against the needs of other students” and our student service budget includes things other than just special education. Student Services has guidance counselors, nurses, school psychologists. The pupil to personnel piece of that budget is about 20% and the student identification of special education is about 14% and that is common across the state.

67. Mr. Hill asked what the increase for longevity was in the teacher’s contract.

- a. Per the teacher's collective bargaining agreement, teachers who have taught for 20 years, with 15 of those years being cumulative in Region 15, qualify for a longevity payment of \$2,468 for those with a Masters Degree and \$2,753 for those with 30 credits more than a Masters.

68. Mr. Connor asked for quality metrics of the district.

- a. Mr. Smith referred to the COHORT Graduation Rate, SAT /AP Scores, US News report on AP scores and passing rates, NICHE Index, National Clearing House of Student Data.

69. Ms. Carter asked for clarification on the increase of property insurance – up 24% and Life Insurance – up 62%.

- a. Property Insurance has been in the red for several years see attached historical spreadsheet. We increased to budget to reflect the increase in commercial property and the additional Law Enforcement Liability which was 11,973.00 this year.
- b. Life insurance was up for renewal in 2018-19. We built the current budget with a 2 % increase prior to the renewal. The current budget is projected to end in the negative by 35,707.91. The new renewal is for 3 years starting 18-19. But if we wanted to cancel the policy we can do so within the guidelines of their time cancellation period. The rates are as follows:

Type	1718	New Rate
Life	.146	.245
AD&D	.024	.024

70. Mr. Connor asked what is driving the transportation increase.

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- a. Typically transportation goes up 4%. This year 4.75% is in the contract and an additional 4% is due to under budgeting last year and correct for the deficit. 12.25% out of district and other transportation.

71. Who is tasked with improving Region 15's effective use of technology to improve instruction and student achievement?

- a. While the Assistant Superintendent is the primary point person for instruction and student achievement, the Director for Fine, Applied, Technical Arts along with other administrators and district positions (such as principals, department chairs, media specialists, and Student Services directors) work to improve the effective use of technology in the classroom, school, department, and throughout the district.

72. Is there a long term plan to ensure our students have the necessary technology skills to be competitive in the 21st century global economy?

- a. Curriculum for CTE, technology, and Fine Arts are in the process of being revised to ensure the inclusion of the Computer Science Teacher Association (CSTA) K-12 Standards and the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) Standards for Students.

73. What is the long term plan for staff computer replacement?

- a. Staff computer replacement follows the same replacement cycle as desktop, laptop and Chromebook replacement cycle which is 6 years for desktops and 4 years for laptops and Chromebooks. In the third year of service for Chromebooks and laptops, an assessment is made to determine if they can be used for a 4th year. If we find in the third year of service that laptops or Chromebooks are showing significant signs of wear or are in disrepair, a budget request is made during the budget planning period to request replacement 1 year early.

74. What is the student to device ratio in grade 4 and 5? Chromebooks and laptops only (does not include fixed labs or Media Center).

- MES approx. 1:1.1 (includes 1 cart per grade level and 2 "floaters")
GES approx. 1:1.4 (includes 2 carts gr 5, 1 cart Grade 4)
PES approx. 1:1.7 (includes 2 carts gr 5, 1 cart Grade 4)
LMES approx. 1:1.1 (includes 3 carts per grade level)

75. What is the student to device ratio in middle school? Chromebooks and laptops only (does not include fixed labs or Media Center).

- a. MMS approx. 1:1
- b. RMS approx. 1:2

76. What is the student to device ratio in HS? Chromebooks and laptops only (does not include fixed labs or Media Center)

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- a. PHS 1:3
- b. Alternative Education 1:1

77. Are the elementary schools balanced in the students access to technology?

- a. No, the elementary schools are not currently balanced. LMES is further along in the number of devices available to students as they have received more PTO donations for technology compared to the other elementary schools. However, PES, GES and MES will receive 1 additional Chromebook cart each to help offset the difference.

78. What is the replacement cycle for student devices?

- a. The replacement cycle for student devices is similar to that for staff devices. Student device replacement is 6 years for desktops, and 4 years for laptops and Chromebooks. In the third year of service for Chromebooks and laptops, an assessment is made to determine if they can be used for a 4th year. If we find in the third year of service that laptops or chromebooks are showing significant signs of wear or are in disrepair, a budget request is made during the budget planning period to request replacement 1 year early.

79. When will the Enrollment and Space Utilization study be complete?

- a. The study by Milone & McBroom should be complete by June 2019.

80. In regards to pension liability, is the Region making the minimum contributions each year?

- a. Yes, and in three years the pension will be fully funded.

81. What is the past service liability? And how is that going to stay fully funded and how will that affect future school budgets?

- a. Please refer to the Hooker & Holcombe Actuarial Valuation Report that is listed on our Regional School District 15 website:
http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/20233/20235/24788/Hooker_and_Holcombe_Actuarial_Valuation_Report.pdf

82. What would the gross expenditures be without the net budgeting?

- a. An analysis was completed on April 1, 2016. Please see Appendix A at the end of this document.

83. If there is a surplus, does it go back to the towns?

- a. The revenue that goes back to the towns is driven by the interest earned on accounts. It does not come directly from the school budget. Anything un-expendable in the school budget up to 1% gets put into a capital reserve account and that is used to fund major projects. This earned balance is viewable each year in the school's audit and in recent history and has been far below the 1% mark.

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- 84.** What is the impact of the state changing the excess cost formula?
- The excess cost formula has several proposals in Hartford. Currently the excess cost formula is not tied to any wealth calibration. If that changes then the impact to the towns will be significant.
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