

RSD 17 BUDGET FAQ & Community Input Comments

1. Where is the BoE in the 2020-21 Budget Process?

March 4th - [Superintendent's Proposed Budget](#)

March 31st - Budget Workshop - Superintendent presented the [first round of adjustments](#)

April 14th - Budget Workshop - Superintendent presented the [second round of adjustments](#)

April 15th - [Joint Meeting](#) with the HK Boards of Selectmen and Board of Finance

April 21st - Budget [Community Input Session](#)

May 5th - Budget Workshop - Superintendent presented the [third round of adjustments](#) and the [BoE reached consensus to move forward](#) with the budget proposals.

May 20th - 5:30 p.m. Joint Board Meeting with HK Boards of Selectmen and Board of Finance

May 26th - 5:30 p.m. Budget Workshop

May 26th- 6:30 p.m. Annual Hearing and Special Meeting of the BoE to Adopt the BoE Budget

June 2nd- 5:30 p.m. Regular Meeting - Board Final Discussion and Vote on Budget

The Proposed Budget stands at (and is still subject to change):

Gross budget: \$41,887,638.40 or 1.09% less than the 2019-20 budget

Net budget: \$40,773,479.35, or 1.53% less than the 2019-20 budget.

The Board will meet with leadership from both towns one more time and still requests input from the community. On May 26th, the BoE will adopt a 2020-21 Budget and on June 2nd, the BoE will vote on the Budget.

2. Will there be a surplus because of closing the schools this Spring?

While we have closed the schools, the business of educating our town's children has not paused. The vast majority of costs associated with the continuity of learning will be the same as the RSD17 19/20 budget. The largest expense of our RSD17 budget is related to salaries and health care costs, all of which are still being paid as we continue to employ all of our RSD17 Teachers and Staff. Likewise, special education tuition is still being paid for our students who attend schools outside our towns as their education is still being provided.

We are negotiating with all other vendors possible to reduce services and costs, most notably STA, our transportation provider, however many of these service providers are protected under various State Orders for continuity of payment.

That being said, we do expect there to be savings and are identifying them within our budget. Some of the 19/20 budget year's remaining funds will be returned to the towns in audited fund balance of the 21/22 budget and some will continue to be used to support necessary school operations and investments.

3. What is the \$150k cut called 'Bond Premium'?

The \$150,000 is not a cut – it is using a portion of our premium to flatten the 20/21 debt service .

Several years ago we passed a referendum to complete the High School Energy Project, where we replaced the roof, lighting, boilers and auditorium and added Solar Panels at the High School. We bonded just over \$7.27 million. When the district went to bond in October, investors purchasing bonds from municipalities paid a 'Premium' over par to purchase the bonds; this means they will pay more than face value for the bonds and the municipality receives that money. However, receiving the premium means the municipality pays back the bond at a higher interest rate. The idea is that if you use the premium towards the payments of your interest and principal, the NIC (net interest cost) is estimated at 1.4% on the bond. The premium was paid to the District at the closing in addition to the par amount of the bonds and brings the NIC to current market levels.

In our case we received a premium of about \$1.4 million. The premium is to be used for the payment of the bond either in principal or in interest. The \$150k budget item called “Bond Premium” means we will take \$150k of the premium and use that to offset a portion of the expense in 2020-21 for the debt service, which is an appropriate use of the premium and it will allow us to keep the year-over-year cost associated with debt service close to flat.

4. Are the Late Buses being removed?

Late buses for the Middle School and High School students are proposed to be removed. The District analyzed the usage of late buses for both schools. Presently three buses run from the High School to the Middle School and proceed to bus stops on the main roads of both towns. Daily ridership ranged from 7 to 20 students a day with the largest usage from Middle School students. Now, being proposed to replace the late busses, is to extend pick up times until 6 p.m. at the Middle School. HKMS After School monitors would be available until 4:30 p.m. and HK Rec will provide after school care, for a fee, from 4:30 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. HKHS After School will remain largely unchanged, with a Certified Teacher in the library for students, closing a half hour earlier each day.

5. Why is there a reduction of four teacher positions at HKMS?

The reduction of four middle school teacher positions is an adjustment due to declining enrollment over the last few years. This year's eighth grade class is graduating 173 students while the incoming 6th grade has 141. Since 2009, a total of 32 teacher and administrator positions have been removed due to declining enrollment.

6. Why is there a reduction from 2 to 1.5 nursing positions at HKIMS?

The reduction was a result of declining student enrollment. When HKMS Opened in 2007-08, and through 2016-17, enrollment ranged from a high of 849 students to a low of 730, with an average of 784 students over those 10 years. In those years there was only one nurse for the school. Next year enrollment at HKIS and HKMS, inside the one building, will decline by another 31 students for a total of 701 students.

The District reviewed both the students' needs next year and the flow into the Health Office and feel comfortable that the .5 reduction will still safely care for all of the students during the duration of both schools programs.

7. Why is there a larger increase in the Town Assessment for Haddam than Killingworth?

According to State Statute 10-51, RSD 17 determines the share of the budget each town pays based on the number of students from each town enrolled on October 1st of the prior year. This "Average Daily Membership" (ADM) determines the Assessment to each town in the form of a percentage of the number of students each town has related to total enrollment. Each year, several factors such as graduation class size and pre-K/Kindergarten enrollment, students choosing a school outside of the district or moving out of the district impact annual ADM. In school year 19/20, Killingworth's enrollment decreased by 76 and Haddam's increased by 6 students. This resulted in a change in the percentage of the number of students each town has related to total enrollment from 58.95% to 61.40% for Haddam. As a result, Haddam will be assessed a larger percentage of the budget.

8. Can you explain the proposed change from 182 days to 180 day school year?

The Superintendent proposed reducing the number of student days from 182 to 180. This can be done without actually reducing instructional hours. The present calendar offers students six early release Teacher Professional Development (PD) days. By extending those early release days to full school days and reducing the amount of school days for students from 182 to 180 days, there is no change in instructional hours for students. Those extra two days would be used for full PD days, which are more efficient for teachers and would result in cost savings by reducing student transportation and some staff.

9. What planning is in this budget if we continue distance learning next year?

Currently there is no clear State guidance on what requirements will need to be fulfilled to return to school. The State is gathering input right now to make decisions on how that would look, which has many different possibilities. The Administration will develop several contingency plans for different scenarios. It is anticipated that online learning platforms will continue to provide continuity of instruction in some regard. Budgetary impact to any changes is impossible to predict, and therefore the District is remaining adaptable to making changes as necessary.

The Board will vote on a Gross Budget and the District will have the flexibility to allocate resources as needed as the situation unfolds.

Community Input Emails

From Alan Aranow, Haddam

1) Can you explain the \$150,000 cut called 'bond premium'?

2) One question about FY2020. I suspect the closing of the schools through the end of FY2020 will result in a huge surplus against the approved budget. I assume the BOE has made an analysis of how large that surplus will be? Can you share that figure with me?

3) Do you expect further budget reductions before the June BOE vote?

More information for this comment are in numbers 1,2 &3 of the FAQ

From Maura Wallin, Haddam -

First, thank you! Due to covid and everything going on I have not paid nearly as much attention to the budget as I have in years past however, I know how much work you all have put in.

I am writing to implore you to not cut the late buses from next year's budget. It is due to these late busses that my children, and many, are able to participate in extracurricular activities including sports. These children have worked diligently up until this point to not only foster relationships with their peers and teammates but also with the trusted adults who coach them day in and day out. They have also developed determination, resilience, self-esteem and self-confidence. The very thing that I, along with most of you, worked hard to assist and encourage in them as one facet of developing strong mental health not to mention the physical benefits of these activities.

Is this what we want? To save a few dollars? You want to chip away at any mental health gains; any self-esteem gains these kids have had? I do not believe that you, as a Board, want that. In an era where these kids have lost so much of this school year and where many are suffering from mental health strains, an increase in depression, anxiety and substance use has been proven in many areas of the country I wouldn't imagine HK is any different. Is this the message you want to send? To save a few dollars, we don't want you to regain anything you lost? Because, that is the message.

Again, thank you! I appreciate you and, I'm this case of covid-19, I do not envy you at all!
Stay safe!

More information for this comment is in number 4 of the FAQ

From Carol A. Flanagan-Dupuis, RN , Haddam

To the Attention of the BOE of RSD17 regarding Budget for 2020-2021:

I am writing to you as a citizen of Higganum for 26 years. Beginning in August 1987, I became the School Nurse Supervisor and served as such for over 20 years. During that time, I served as the RN for the HS/MS campus, assisted by an LPN. After she retired, I had another RN helping me, as she prepared to become the Nurse for the new MS. When the new MS opened, I was the Supervisor, as well as RN for the HS. I loved what I did so much, that I continued subbing as a Nurse for the District. I have done long term, per diem and as an assistant when orienting new nurses and during heavy paperwork times such as the opening of school and beginnings of sports seasons to expedite getting athletes cleared for sports.

The nurses must operate under the State Nurse Practice Act and provide care that meets current Standards of Care and best practices. In the past, and I assume still, as many of us as possible have attended continuing education programs, are members of the National School Nurses' Association, and trying to keep up with their journal, to provide the best care possible to our students.

I was absolutely horrified to see that you are considering cutting a 0.5 Nurse at the I/MS. These 2 schools are crucial in the life of a student. There are so many ways for things to go awry, causing anxiety, stress and so many social-emotional issues. Frequently, the school nurse is the first to notice that "something is going on". These nurses are also tasked with caring for students with medical needs. Do any of you have an idea of how many significant allergies some of our students have. Most of them have EpiPens at school and a Health Care Plan done by the nurse, for the teachers of those students. There are students with seizure disorders, also needing a Health Care Plan and possible medication. The number of students with Diabetes Type 1, requiring monitoring of their blood glucose: before and after recess, before and after gym, before lunch and before dismissal. The students, most of whom are not completely independent, report these numbers to the nurse, who then works with the student to plan the insulin dose, which may be by an injection open or by an insulin pump attached to the student's body. They consider the glucose level, the level of activity, the number of carbohydrates in their snack or lunch and adjust the dose of insulin. I believe there may be as many as 5 students needing Diabetic Health Care Plans. During all of that, the nurse is teaching the student to become more independent. Frequently, the parent is contacted for their input at any given time listed above. There are students with crutches, orthopedic boots and wheelchairs at any given time. The nurse is also responsible for planning for safe passage for them, level of PE activity. On top of all of that are the students coming in for daily meds, usually around lunch time, when the diabetic students are needing attention. This is the tip of the iceberg. ALL of this must be documented, in detail on each visit.

This does not take into consideration the daily occurrences of illness or injury. Do you have any idea how many phone calls can be involved in getting a student dismissed home? If parents are divorced, it gets even more involved, depending on whose "day" it is.

Don't get me wrong, I loved what I do, as a professional School Nurse and I believe all of the nurses also do. There is so much more, that I haven't covered, such as the fact that the nurse absolutely should be considered part of the team dealing with students' issues. The nurse is often part of a behavior plan and should be a part of planning it.

Consider walking a day in their shoes, or a day when your child needs help and the 0.5 nurse is gone for the day! I believe you will be making a huge mistake taking this measure, not only because student care will become more difficult, but consider the liability that could possibly result.

I have story after story in which the School Nurse made a HUGE difference in the life of a child, perhaps even saved the life of a child or staff member! I will be happy to answer any questions you have. I also truly believe that the position of School Nurse Supervisor should be reinstated.

Thank you for allowing me to present my thoughts,

More information for this comment is in number 5 of the FAQ

From Ed Munster, Haddam

I understand that the RSD #17 budget is still a work in progress. The situation at present if I understand the gross budget numbers is that the school budget is down 0.68 % or \$271,282 in dollars and I know that this could change in either direction.

The scary thing for the town of Haddam is that even with this present budget the assessment for Haddam will be an increase of 1.98% or \$476,195 whereas Killingworth will see a decrease of 8.18% of \$1,368,913 and this is caused by the change in the number of students in Haddam relative to those from Killingworth. Budget changes will not make this disparity go away.

Now I also understand that the state has offered to allow residents, because of the economic impact of the COVID-19 issue, to delay their first town tax payment by three months if they choose. This creates problems for the town because if the taxes do not come into the tax office the town will not be able to meet their obligation to make payments to the school district on time. Then the town may need to dip into reserves or take short term loans to meet obligations.

There is no good solution. It is hard to believe that the person who is financially strapped in July is going to be able to pay three months later. The budget reductions to date are good but our BOE must continue to work to find ways to reduce the budget in spite of the state proposal.

More information for this comment is in number 7 of the FAQ

From Ed Munster, Haddam

This morning I listened to the BOE meeting on 4/14/20 and I would like to comment on one item in particular.

The proposal as I understood it was to reduce the number of school days from 182 to the state minimum of 180. This would entail making 6 half days during which teachers are currently using the afternoons for PD into full school days and also having the teachers attend two full days of PD instead. This results in two less actual schooldays on the calendar.

This would provide a savings of \$160,000 (if I understood the discussion) and better PD because of concentration of the PD effort and less teacher time lost in getting to the PD meetings.

I called my granddaughter (Victoria Munster in 8th grade) to ask her thoughts on half days. She had two comments. The half days that occur during the regular school year are disruptive to learning. And the two which occur at the end of the school year are a complete waste of time because nothing gets done during the half day that is supposed to be school time. She likes the idea of six full days of school instead of these half days.

More information for this comment is in number 8 of the FAQ

From Cheryl Fine, Killingworth

I was unable to access the meeting last night and a friend of mine got the same error message something like "Google can not find this on server".

I have four questions:

1. Has the BOE developed a bare bones survival budget(worse case scenario)- where everything not critical to education is eliminated(ie sports and clubs,some maintenance, some purchases),and assuming children go back to the physical buildings but the state contributes nothing and maybe all property taxes don't get paid?
2. If students don't come back, is live web teaching (as is done in universties) being investigated so as to have teachers actually teach and interact with students as opposed to just sending out assignments?
3. Does proceeding with expensive capital projects at this time (especially if students don't return to the buildings) an appropriate use of taxpayers money when that money may be needed for something DIRECTLY impacting your mission of education as we must be prepared for an unknown future? ie, like having live internet classes. I understand there are designated funds for projects but it still all comes from the taxpayer.
4. How many janitors are employed in each of our schools and how many employees (of all types) were removed from the district employment roles when HES was closed?

This is a time for the Board of Education, as the biggest consumer of tax money in our town, show extreme restraint, empathy and leadership. We are all in the same storm but we are not all in the same boat. Many of our boats are sinking and you can't turn a blind eye to that. It is actually happening. We must find a way to hold all the good people of our town together and value them, no matter what their income is in the future. Everyone in the school system is being paid with benefits maintained. That is not true for many in our town.

Thank you for your consideration and answers.

More information for this comment is in number 1 & 2 of the FAQ

From Robert Waz, Haddam

Some thoughts on Budget and Disaster Planning for the "new normal" which will hopefully get back to near the "old normal":

* No specific comments on the 20/21 budget proposal details except I did not see any accounting for funds saved from the last budget on spring sports and bus transportation and other areas. Not sure if it is shown anywhere, or if it is possible, but it may be wise to have a contingency fund or otherwise move these funds forward (if that is possible) to react to this new normal or future disruptions (at a time when funding from normal sources may not be available). Enhanced Information Systems come to mind especially to ensure all students have the proper resources for home learning.

State Federal and Local funding will surely be extraordinarily tight as the costs of the pandemic need to be repaid. All government entities will need to be especially frugal.

* Unfortunately, the current pandemic is not the only consequence of Federal mismanagement over the last few years. The CDC pandemic early warning and response programs were not the only cuts made during this Administration that make us less safe. Programs to keep our water and food supply safe, programs that warn and protect us from radiation release (dirty bomb) events, programs that provide early warning and response to weather events and others risk management systems have been frozen, gutted or eliminated.

I have seen first hand H-K-s student evacuation plan work well during a drill. It may also be necessary to revisit "shelter-in-place" planning as it is not impossible that there could be events that require prolonged stays for students at their schools.

More information for this comment is in number 9 of the FAQ