

## **2021-2022 Budget Presentation Questions and Answers**

1. Can you explain ESSR 2 and how it is used and why it is extended into the 2022-2023 budget year? (refer to slide 12)
  - a. The grant money's primary use is for the cost associated with the extra substitute teachers needed, the cost of PPE, custodial overtime, the cost of cleaning our buses and the rental costs for storage and outdoor tents.
  - b. The federal government extended the funds over the next two years. The grant can include increased costs due to loss of instruction. We have not seen the application for the 2021-2023 grant at this time.
  
2. If we have new graduation requirements how can we not fund them (refer to slide 17)?
  - a. The Capstone project will be phased in over time. It will be for the graduating class of 2024 and 2025. There will be some cost associated with creating that, but next year we won't have a bandwidth to start an initiative of that size.
  
3. When does the title "Teacher in Residence" just become "teacher"?
  - a. This is a position that we are not sure what the long-term impact of it is. We know we need this position now to seed new learning for staff. The difference between a "teacher in residence" and a "full time teacher" is the teacher that a teacher in residence is technically a 2nd grade teacher at LMES, the person has been removed from the classroom and there is a long term substitute put into the classroom for 1 year. At some point we may say "that is a standing position that exists every year in the district. If that should happen the title "teacher in residency" will no longer exist, it will be whatever we decide to call that position within the school budget.
  
4. \$525,776 - How does the ESSR 2 money in slide 12 relate to the buckets in slide 35? Did you say that once the grant app is out, we could apply and reimbursed for funds spent this year?
  - a. The funds tied to the state and federal entitlement grants have very specific criteria they can be used for and are not categorized in the same way as the general revenue sources outlined on slide 35. There are expenditures that have been incurred this year that could potentially qualify.
  - b. The funding will be applied to cover the increased cost of additional substitutes.
  - c. We are applying the funds to one time costs associated with the operation of schools during a pandemic. Grant funds will not be used to supplant the annual operating budget and create the potential for compounding effects to future educational costs.

5. The public commentator last night asked about the CREC teacher residency program. Will we be going ahead with that?
  - a. Currently, the Region is looking at possibly funding this through a grant but there are still many variables related to the program. The program's cost is dependent on state and federal funding. In addition there have to be applicants from the Region 15 area. We have received initial approval to use available grant funding should the opportunity arise. The grant funding provides more flexibility should the costs change substantially.
  
6. Can you calculate the actual cost per student for this year and the projected cost per student for next year and the % increase between the actual cost and the projected cost? Number of students divided by the total cost we spent this year.
  - a. see appendix document
  
7. Will the math coach keep us at the level we are at and will it bring us to where we need to go?
  - a. The loss of student Math skills are emerging as the biggest instructional challenge COVID has created for our students, especially among students in grades K-8. The lack of progress or regression has been documented through the assessments done over the past 10 months. We have one math coach spread out through 4 of our elementary schools and one shared between the two middle schools. Adding an additional math coach will increase our ability to strengthen the skills needed to address the individual gaps in student learning. An instructional coach magnifies what the teacher can deliver to their students.
  
8. Please explain the "Cycle in Tech Program". We started a cycle 7 years ago, based on how we were bringing in computers, did that fall by the wayside to get us into this 7-year cycle again?
  - a. Generally speaking, we are still replacing Desktops on a 6 year cycle and Laptops/Chromebooks on a 4 year cycle. We sometimes need to replace devices not under warranty during a "cycle" if they break or become too unreliable before they are scheduled for replacement. The issue we have is that there is no formal, predictable, funding structure in place to allow consistent planning for future purchases. When it is time to replace and acquire new equipment to meet the demand, we make funding requests and present them to the board yearly. As with any requests, funding is not guaranteed to survive through the budget process. This sometimes hinders our ability to maintain the cycle. With the increased number of devices added

to the district during the 2020-21 school year, the need for a dependable cycle has an increased importance.

Moving forward, we are looking to establish a fixed payment lease structure that will help to stabilize the replacement cycle, flatten out the peaks and valleys that we have seen with device purchasing over many years and provide cost predictability for all parties involved.

9. Please explain what the “curriculum audit” will encompass. Will the audit assess or evaluate what we assess our children on?
  - a. Dr. Chiappetta will explain this during her budget presentation to the board.
  
10. If the need for an additional elementary school teacher does not come to fruition, would you consider using that budgeted position as an additional math coach for the district?
  - a. Should student enrollment not manifest as projected the administration could explore how to reallocate those funds. Additional instructional support for Math is warranted, however we would need to review our overall financial position before making the final decision.
  
11. Please explain the need for an Assistant Principal at Long Meadow Elementary School.
  - a. Slides 24 and 25 provide a summary of reasons. This topic will also be reviewed during the budget presentations on March 3rd.
  
12. Please explain the internal audit and what will a budgeted \$15,000 get us?
  - a. At this time the district has not released a bid process for an internal audit. We believe that the costs will align to the scope of the request and we will be able to scale the initial project to the available funds. The budgeted amount is a placeholder to begin the process, however we believe that to fully audit a wide variety of accounts the project will be a multiyear initiative.
  
  - a. Other than the high school are there any other schools that have Assistant Principals?
  - b. The 2 middle schools each have 1 assistant principal. No elementary school has an assistant principal.
  
13. How many students are we projected to gain or lose next year, and how does that impact the school budget?
  - a. For the 2021-22 school year we are projected to have 63 students fewer than the current year. The 63 students are dispersed across 7 schools, 2

towns and 14 grades. Staffing needs depend more on where the students are more than the number of students

- b. There are 3.6 enrollment driven staffing reductions and a .5 program reduction in our proposed budget (slide 33).
14. What happened to cost savings from the 2019-2020 school year?
- a. The cost savings from last year were discussed as a part of the 2020-21 budget adoption process last Spring. At the April 20th 2020 BOE meeting, the costs savings were reviewed and outlined in a presentation to the Board, slide 3 of the presentation captures where the savings came from and how they were applied to the proposed budget. \$450,000 in savings from last year were approved by the Board to buy down the current year budget resulting in a change from 3.59% to 2.96% proposed increase.
15. What steps have we taken to keep costs down this year and long term?
- a. The proposed budget presentation highlights the larger cost savings impacting this budget proposal as well as longer term costs. The following can be found on slide 14 of the presentation.
    - Invested in energy efficiencies
    - Renegotiated out of district bus contracts
    - Continue to manage health care costs and mitigate market increases
    - Leveraged Leasing options to bring one to one access to the district
16. Your presentation highlights the school to administrator ratio. How does that compare to total student to administrator ratio in the district on a statewide comparison?
- a. The statewide average of administrator:student is 1:129.7, Region 15's ratio is 1:167. That ranks Region at 165 of the 200 public and charter schools in the state. (based on data from 2019-20 school year, this year's data is not available yet)
17. Are you looking to replace the Bridges Math Program?
- a. No, we are asking to replenish and replace materials for the program.

### **MATH COACH**

18. The district currently has 2 math coaches. Please explain how an additional coach will be utilized.

- a. Currently, there is one elementary math coach for grades k-4 and one middle school math coach for grades 5-8. The one math coach at the elementary school covers 72 elementary classrooms across 4 elementary schools. There is one middle school math coach who works with seven middle school math teachers and four grade 5 elementary teachers across 6 schools. If the board approves an additional math coach at the elementary level grades(k-4) this coach may only be responsible for 2 elementary schools.

19. How are Math Coaches evaluated?

- a. Math coaches are certified teachers and fall under the same evaluation process as all other teachers. All instructional coaches fall under the supervision of the Assistant Superintendent. Dr. Chiappetta meets with them regularly to review and collaborate on their instructional focus.

20. Are teachers required to utilize the Math Coach?

- a. At some point during the year, all of our elementary and middle school teachers meet with our coaches. Whether it is one on one in the classroom or during professional development days our teachers have the opportunity to utilize our coaches.

### **Assistant Principal at LMES**

21. Please explain the role the role and Assistant Principal will play at LMES.

- a. Adding an Assistant Principal at LMES will help balance the responsibilities of the Principal. Currently, LMES has 532 students and 1 administrator. LMES is the 2nd largest school in the district and smaller only to the High School. The school serves the widest range of students and ages in the district in its PK-5 configuration: Six grades of students ranging in ages from 3-10 years old. LMES manages the most transportation needs, including an additional bus tier. There are times when the Principal has to pull support from other administrators in the building taking away from their core responsibilities.
- b. An Assistant Principal will help the Principal with day to day responsibilities: building issues, behavior management, student meetings, lead staff meetings, meeting with teacher teams, guide instructional initiatives and work with data.

22. Will an AP conduct teacher evaluation? Yes, the Assistant Principal will follow a similar administrative role to those at the middle school level.

23. Please describe the condition of the MES parking lot.

a. The parking lot is in a state of disrepair. There is a large crater at the end of the sidewalk. We've patched, used concrete, and filled the potholes over the past couple of years, however we have reached a point where repairs are more complicated and erode quickly.

24. Is there still a need for a "data coach"?

a. At this point we are teaching our teachers how to interpret their own data and help them to understand what or where they need to focus on.

## **ENROLLMENT DATA**

25. What is the projected kindergarten enrollment for next year at PES?

a. The kindergarten projected numbers at PES for next year are 66 students.

26. What is the "tipping point" of student enrollment to allocate another kindergarten teacher?

a. There is no one specific tipping point, however as classes at the Kindergarten level exceed 20 students there are supports that can be provided, or another section could be added. It depends on the timing, space availability, and the resources available.

27. What is the ratio of student to administrator in Region 15?

a. The current ratio is 1 administrator to 168 students. This is an overall ratio and includes all administrators in the district. That ratio places Region 15 at 164th out of the approximately 200 public districts in the state.

## **Board of Finance (Middlebury & Southbury) March 24, 2021 Meeting**

1. Mr. Michaels is pleased that the district allocated money for an internal audit.
2. Mr. St. John asked which company was awarded the bid for Region 15's auditors for 2021-2023? Mr. Martino replied that the Board of Education voted for Charles Heaven & Co. as the auditors for Region 15. They were the only bidder that sent in a bid during the RFP period.
3. Mr. Tolley asked how much is the district under running the 2021 fiscal budget? And if it is a significant amount what happens to the "leftover" money? Mr. Smith responded that any funds that are "leftover" can be used towards a one-time capital project item. For instance, the parking lot at MES, roof replacement, or the lockers at PHS.
4. Mr. Connors asked what the process is when establishing a capital budget? Mr. Martino responded that he makes site visits regularly. MES parking lot needs to be replaced, MIJ roof needs to be replaced, the lockers at PHS, the elevators at PHS need to be fixed. Mr. Connors asked how much money would you like in your capital reserve account? Mr. Smith responded that \$700,000.00 would make us comfortable if we needed to make an emergency repair or replacement.
5. Mr. Drauss asked about enrollment for special education. If there are more students enrolled in September than planned for do you have a contingency fund to educate the students? Mr. Smith replied that the district has \$150,000 contingency fund for Special Education students. Mr. Drauss asked what if the district goes over that amount, where do you get the money from to educate these students? Mr. Smith replied that the district would have to look at areas that have favorable accounts or freeze the budget.
6. Mr. Stowell asked if the "use of facility" fees generate revenue? Mr. Martino responded that in a normal "non-covid" year the use of facility fees generates a small amount of money. The towns of Middlebury and Southbury are the main tenants of our buildings and we do not charge them for town programs.
7. Mr. Tolley asked how much it costs to educate each special education student. He asked for a breakdown. Mr. Smith replied that he could not individualize cost/student because of FERPA/HIPPA laws. By doing this the students can become identifiable.
8. Mr. Connor asked how the district measures our "return on investment". Superintendent Smith replied that Region 15 schools "grew" during a global pandemic. There was no regression in student growth. There was "low growth" but not "no growth" in learning.

9. Mr. Jenusaitis asked for an explanation of what line item “pupil/non-payroll services” is. Mr. Smith explained that is outside services that we use for testing special education students.