

2020-2021 Proposed Budget Questions & Answers

Presented March 4, 2020

1. Are healthcare expenses anticipated to increase year over year or is the 8.7% increase a one year adjustment to the cost of the benefit.
 - a. The percentage increase is based on a 12 month claims trend.
2. How is the 8.7% increase in health insurance relevant to the 3.5% increase in the total budget?
 - a. \$800,000.00 is budgeted towards healthcare.
3. 1) Can you please explain the object summary increases for codes 329, 390 (is that an increase? Looks like a decrease elsewhere), 411, 540, 640?
 - a. 329: Refuse\ Inventory\ Snow\ Grass
 - b. 390: Other Purchased Services: Shifting of funds from other accounts, Curriculum Audit, but those funds are a shift in the DOI budget from the XX line
 - c. 411: Instructional Supplies
 - d. 540: Equipment
 - e. 640: Dues and Fees: \$32,000 of the increase is due the increased licensing costs related to technology. Including the move to hosted services and program upgrades. The remaining is the budgeting for the new CABE services and the annual membership being moved to this line.
4. Is it a possibility GES might need another kindergarten class? Will be addressed as part of the Elementary budget presentation.
 - a. The projection is higher than historical actuals and there is room for movement.
5. What additional PD will staff be getting?
 - a. Training in new Science Standards, ELA Middle and High School, Social Studies practice standards.
6. I'm concerned about the loss of teachers at RMS. How will this effect the teaming model? Will be discussed and explained during the Middle School Presentation.
7. Can you explain more about the need for instructional leaders in music and PE?
8. Who is doing the curriculum and instruction audit?
9. I see we get 2k in facility usage fees. Who pays this? Has this ever increased?
 - a. The facility usage fees are collected per policy 1130. The policy and regulation were last updated in 2013.
10. How much are we funding for post budget special education costs? \$150,000, this is 20% less than we have budgeted in the past, however the projected increase is budgeted based on

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actuals that reflect the costs added during the 2019-20 school year. The shift in budgeting should provide less risk and reduce the need of unexpected costs.

11. Why are we not doing all of NEASC's recommendations? Which ones are we not doing and will this affect our accreditation next time? This will be addressed as a part of the High School Presentation.

12. Can we look at possibly bringing some of our outplaced special ed services in house? What are the challenges that keep us from educating students in district? I assume the best scenario (for some) is that they are with us, with their siblings, peers and friends. I understand there can be difficulty in certain cases but do we need to rise to the challenge? And what is preventing us from doing that? On the financial side, would we save in the long run if we invest in growing and perfecting what we can do for our students here and having our students' home so to speak? Who better to ensure they are getting the best than our community of professionals?

13. How much does the district budget annually for police rovers? Heritage Village has a police officer that is assigned strictly to the village. I do not believe that Heritage Village residents pay for that through their common fees, rather it is assumed that the position is included in Southbury's overall budget. Is there a reason that the rover is not billed out the same way to the town like the officer assigned to heritage Village? One could assume if they do it for the village at no additional cost to the village (which is essentially a private community) that they could also provide the same service to the region. Also, one could assume the daily workload in the village is likely to be greater than monitoring the schools by vehicle. Also, if we are already paying for the officer to monitor by vehicle, could we look into having them have a more active role within the school buildings? Possibly develop relationships with the staff and students and be more of a daily presence inside of each building? I'm thinking in terms of community building. Much like the DARE officer gets to know the kids or the SRO at the high school gets to know the kids. Give them a chance to have another trusted adult that they know they can turn to in crisis.

14. Will Chromebooks ever fully replace textbooks and workbooks? No, Chrombooks will never fully replace textbooks and workbooks especially at the elementary school level.

15. If there are assignments given where a Chromebook needs to be used, are there options for students to take the Chromebook home? There are flexible options for students to complete an assignment. We allow for students to use whatever device they may have at home (phone, tablet, computer, etc). If a student does not have an alternative device to use at home we are flexible with the completion of the assignment. Currently, Chromebooks are not sent home.

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16. What happens when a Chromebook gets accidentally damaged? Are they insured? It is quite rare that a Chromebook gets damaged, but when it does we have in house supplies that we can use to fix them. Also, Chromebooks are relatively inexpensive so on the occasion we have to replace them we can.
17. Do we lease Chromebooks? No, we do not lease them.
18. What percentage of the day are elementary students on Chromebooks? There is a low percentage of the day that the students are on Chromebooks. For instance in Math students are rarely on them, for Writers Workshop they use the Chromebooks for about 50% of the lesson; reading is a very low percentage and for Science and Social Studies the percentage varies due to the lessons that are being taught.
19. Do the consumable math books change every year? Bridges will update their consumable math books in the next couple of years.
20. When planning for a new classroom, do you modernize the furniture when you place your order? Yes, we take this opportunity to modernize our classroom furniture.
21. What type of books are you looking to include in the elementary library? The elementary libraries are looking for books that are more diverse and inclusive. The elementary libraries are in need of more non-fiction books and more robust selections that compliment units of study in social studies and science.
22. What is the maximum size of a class that the district deems appropriate? There isn't a "max" number that the district allows for class size. The district follows a guideline for each grade level. For instance, the guideline for kindergarten is 15 – 18 students per class.
23. At the elementary level, how does the Phonics Program and the Bridges Math Curriculum prepare students for the upper level grades, (middle and high school)? These programs build a foundation for upper level math and English language arts.
24. At the middle school level do students still engage in Library media? If so, what are they learning? Library Media is used to demonstrate to students how to conduct research and during this time students work on curriculum they are learning inside their classroom (social studies, science, etc). The students are engaged in a research assignment drive students to think and work collaboratively with their peers.
25. Are Instructional Team Leaders shared between both middle schools? Currently, each middle school has Instructional Team Leaders (ITL) for Math, English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and World Language. In the 2020-2021 school year the middle schools will share the ITL for each subject area except for World Language. In addition, we are adding a k-12 ITL for Art & Technology and we are adding 1 ITL for PE/Health.

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26. Please explain the teaming model. The teaming model refers to pairing a group of teachers (typically between four and six) with a group of sixty to eighty students. Teaming allows teachers to discuss the students they have in common and to establish stronger teacher-student relationships. Most teams are built around the core-subject-area teachers in English language arts, math, science, and social studies, but some teams are consisting of guidance counselors, special-education teachers, and other specialists. The general goal of teaming is to provide a more personalized learning experience for students—i.e., to ensure that students are well known by adults in the school, that their learning needs are understood and addressed, and that they receive the social, emotional, and academic support from teachers and staff that they need to succeed academically and remain in school.
27. Are there math coaches available at each middle school? Currently there is one math coach for the 4 elementary schools. In 2020-202, we are adding one math coach to go between the 2 middle schools.
28. What is the ratio of “typical” pre-k student’s vs “special education” pre-k students at LMES? We would like to see a 1:1 ratio however space at LMES is limited. We do not have the space to accept all of our “typical” students into the program. At the moment we have a waiting list.
29. Are we adding another administrator at LMES? No, we are not.

Presented March 23, 2020

30. Is your goal to have one Chromebook available at the high school for every student for every class? Yes, that is our goal for every teacher who needs a device in their class to have access to one at that time.
31. At the high school level, are students encouraged to bring in and use their own laptops or Chromebooks? We do not encourage lower classman to bring in their own devices; however we do not discourage students from using their own.
32. Why is the district not completing all of the NEASC recommendations? The NEASC recommendations are always “recommendations” not mandates. We are completing some of the recommendations.
33. Are the repairs for the PHS locker rooms and tennis courts reflected in this Athletic budget? The locker rooms are not part of this budget presentation, but they are part of the 5 year capital budget plan. The cost of this is not in the operating budget.

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34. Please explain the increase to athletic dues and fees? The coach's yearly state coaches fees to be citified. These were not increased by 100% they were just moved to their own line for transparency.
35. Please explain with "other or miscellaneous" means in the athletic budget. The term "other" or "miscellaneous" in the athletic budget refers to the awards banquets, supply items. The new accounting system will reflect a more detail of the expenses.
36. If there is a cancellation of all spring sports for the 2019-2020 school year, is there an opportunity to use funds from the that Athletic budget to roll it into the 2020 athletic budget to offset the increase? If there is a cancellation of spring sports for the 2020 season, some of that money can be used to purchase one time capital expenses, such as furniture.
37. Do the boys and girls varsity golf teams still use the Heritage Village golf course? Yes, PHS still uses Heritage Village for golf.
38. Is there any one piece of equipment that is needed more than another? No, there is not one piece of equipment that is needed over another. The money budgeted is for foul poles, ring lines for the pool and wrestling mats.
39. What is the current status on our tennis courts? Our tennis courts are beyond repair. We currently use Edgewood for our home matches and practices. The PHS tennis courts are on our long term capital plan.
40. Why does the district purchase football helmets and not lacrosse or skiing helmets? The football helmets are used only doing the fall season. Most football players do not play off season. The football helmets are used during practice and games. The athletes do not use them in the off season, where as lacrosse and skiing athletes play these sports during the off season which means that they already have their own helmets.
41. Please explain the "safe school" platform. Do teachers get the same training year after year or does the training change? The training correlates with new state mandates and requirements.
42. The line item in the budget for AIMS WEB, is that for professional development? No, that line item is for the subscription to the program.
43. Is the teacher union supporting you hiring a Residence for Diversity and Culture FTE outside of the union? The Teacher in Residency is/will be one of our current active teachers; they will

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not lose their union membership. We will backfill their teaching position with a yearlong sub, just like would for something like a maternity leave. The cost is already in our sub account budget so there is no added cost to the budget. We also have high quality long term subs in the district and expect they will be happy to stay with us.

44. Does the current professional development budget allow for teachers to have opportunities to go to out of district for trainings? Yes, some of the operating budget does provide for external professional development. It is in the Assistant Superintendent's budget but also in each of the specific department budgets. The bulk of our external PD comes from entitlement grants, Title II (aprox. \$56,000) and Title IV (\$10,000). The entitlement grants do not offset any operational costs and have never been a part of our budget process. This is true for IDEA and Title III (bilingual grant) as well.
45. How many Chromebooks are needed to complete the HS long term plan for Chromebooks? What is the cost of that?? We need a total of 7 more carts to meet the goal set in the high school plan. One is scheduled to be purchased this year, 3 are in next year's budget and we would need 3 in the following year's budget. For cost estimate, we budget \$7,000 per cart, or about \$49,000 over the next two years.
46. Hire an Auditor to review Education Budget (DMG – District Management Group). The district does have a curriculum and instruction audit in the proposed budget. While we do not expect specific cost savings as the primary purpose, it will help the district prioritize funds and find efficiencies in programs. Several administrators in the district are familiar with the audit process of DMG and do not feel at this time that the cost of the audit will result in recommendations that will meet with the community expectations for our schools or substantial savings.
47. Review monthly/quarterly Expenditures during the year. The Board of Education has a Finance Subcommittee that meets monthly, the minutes and documents from the meetings are posted on the district website: <http://www.region15.org/content/2002/2245/default.aspx>
48. Can some line items be reduced or eliminated? The district is currently in the process of migrating our financial software system. Our current system has been sunset and the company will no longer support it. We will switch to the new software on July 1st and staff are currently building the new system and receiving training As part of the migration process we are combining redundant account codes and increasing the specificity of other accounts.
49. Questions on Electricity costs:
- What are our rates and are we using a broker?

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- Have you taken advantage of Eversource LED Programs?
- Have you looked into State/Federal programs for Grants to upgrade lighting/fixtures?

Answer:

- Our current rate is .0816 for supply we do use a broker to bid rates
- Yes, all schools have been a part of the LED program with all but PHS and GES completed.
- Yes, the solar projects at RMS and LMES are funded through grant programs and are cost neutral to the district.

50. How is the district addressing transportation costs? The district is entering year three of a five year contract for general student transportation. The contract was entered into in August of 2018. In each year of the 5 year contract there is a cost increase. For the 20-21 budget the cost increase is 4.5%. In the Spring of 2019, the district bid out all special education transportation runs.

51. What is our Prevalence Rate vs. State? The details on Prevalence Rate, Regional and State comparisons as well as specifics related to the program and historical percentages can be found in the March 4th budget presentation by the PPS Director. Available on the district website: [http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2522/25260/2020 -
2021 Student Services Budget Presentation.pdf](http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2522/25260/2020-_2021_Student_Services_Budget_Presentation.pdf)

52. Are there savings we can leverage? Over the past several years the district has been strategic in developing programs that have a cost benefit to the community. Some recent examples were bringing Social Workers into the district and the Wellspring program at Pomperaug High School.

53. Has the district thought about adding teacher aides and increasing class sizes instead of having more classroom teachers? The district's projected classes and class size is based on demographer's student enrollment projections and the district's class size guidelines. In some cases, should the actuals be higher than projected, the district has added paraprofessionals as a support to the classroom instead of creating a new class. This is a case by case decision based on the context and timing. The administration's proposed budget has a reduction of 3 full time teaching positions.

54. World Language Instruction:

- a. Spanish is most popular and needs a Teacher
- b. Other languages can be taught via Rosetta Stone vs adding Teacher(s)

Answer:

- Currently our staffing for Spanish instruction is within the expected class size guidelines. We are adding a 0.4 Italian teacher to meet the student demands for the class.

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- While online language courses are currently an option for students through independent study, there are contractual limitations to replacing teaching staff with online, independent instructional models.
55. Has the district considered using retired PD vs. FT officers for building security? (cost savings)
- a. Currently all security personnel hired by the district are retired police officers and are not active law enforcement.
 - b. The district does contract with Middlebury and Southbury for additional coverage and traffic control as our security officers are not permitted by town charter to direct traffic.
56. Analyzing of hiring permanent Substitute Teachers vs. Daily Subs and hiring PT Teachers wherever possible.
- Currently the district has permanent substitutes hired and allocated to each school building.
 - While we do hire part time teachers when appropriate, it is difficult to attract and retain quality professionals in areas where there are teachers shortages. This is especially difficult for part time positions.
57. Are other Regions keeping their Budgets flat YOY?
- Currently we pay attention to the school budgets in other communities. We are seeing ranges from 0% to 6.8%. Often times the budgets reflect very localized issues surrounding building projects, insurance costs, and debt payments.
 - The current situation we are all facing will have an impact on the budgets for both this year and next. The Board of Education and Administration are paying close attention to all of the variables and will make adjustments accordingly.
58. Any available Grants to offset costs
- Below is a list of grants the district currently receives and offset operating costs. In addition the district receives federal and local grants for Special Education and professional development that do not offset current costs and provide services that would be eliminated if the grants no longer existed.
 - Excess Cost \$2,050,000
 - Adult Education Grant \$900
 - Magnet Transportation \$27,000
 - E-Rate/ Telecom Reimbursement \$20,000
59. Are you doing a spend-down towards Year End to get to \$0? The district is not in the practice of deliberately spending down unexpended accounts. The district does delay some projects

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and purchases to the later half of the fiscal year in the event there are unpredicted financial pressures that have to be accounted for.

60. Have you considered having some lecture courses (as they will receive in college) in High School as a way of cutting back in teachers?

- Some courses, such as Band, Chorus, Theatre and PE already run with large numbers and high student to teacher ratios
- Pomperaug High School does have a selection of courses that include large lectures, however this is not considered best practice for student instruction and even at the college level, this practice has been decreasing. As a district we work to maintain class size close to the desired numbers that have been established by the district.

61. Why are the test results for young people in the mid to high 70%^s, but fall to the 50%^s when they reach 8th grade?

- According to the data results presentation provided to the BOE on October 7, 2019, the results for literacy for elementary and middle school students in Region 15 range from 77% in Grade 3 to 76% in Grade 8. For mathematics, the results range from 85% in Grade 3 to 64% in Grade 8 (which was on par with the DRG as a whole for Grade 8).
- The 70% and 50% referenced in the question refer to the growth targets achieved and do not refer to overall achievement.
- While Region 15 is working on improving growth targets, currently those targets on similar to other districts in the reference group. Additionally, the curriculum audit that is budgeted for next year will help determine strategies to improve these growth targets.

62. Is it really necessary for the High School to have approx. 150 different courses for the students?

- Courses run based on the interest and number of student requests. So while there are 150 possible courses, not all of them run in any given semester.
- Many of our courses are required for students in order to meet the mandated graduation requirements for the State of Connecticut. In addition, we offer high interest courses that are in line with the offerings of other academically competitive high schools in the state. The addition of new courses is based on a great deal of research and student interest. Annually we also audit courses that may not meet district or student needs and remove them for our course offerings.

63. What measures of quality of education are tracked actively? (other than AP testing) E.g. how would we rate within the state relative to something like the US News rankings [and if we do not feel it pays to participate in this fully, then what about some of the subcategories used

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in that style of ranking?] While rankings like the one US News puts out is an indicator we monitor, it does weight participation in Advanced Placement courses fairly heavily. The District looks at a variety of measures, including the State of Connecticut's NextGen accountability metric. The indicators look to a district overall achievement, but also indicators like graduation rates, attendance and access to courses aligned with career readiness and the arts. A full description and details are available in the district's performance report that can be found on our website:

[http://www.region15.org/filestorage/2002/2245/24282/BOE_Data_Presentation_Oct_22_2018_\(rev\).pdf](http://www.region15.org/filestorage/2002/2245/24282/BOE_Data_Presentation_Oct_22_2018_(rev).pdf)