

RSD17 BOE Budget FAQ

When is the RSD #17 budget referendum and what are we voting on?

On May 3, 2022, the RSD #17 Board of Education 2022/23 School Gross Budget of \$45,030,679 will be brought to the towns of Haddam and Killingworth for a referendum. After revenue, grants, and fund balances, the towns will be assessed approximately \$41,502,868. Haddam and Killingworth pay a percentage of this amount based on the amount of students in the schools from each town. This year, Haddam's share will be \$25,391,151 and Killingworth's share will be \$16,111,717. Voting will take place at regular, local polling places.

Why does the budget keep going up when enrollment keeps going down?

For the last 10 years, the theme of District RSD #17 budget has been to pursue reductions in the annual budget carefully and strategically so as not to impact student programming and needs. Contractual salary increases and benefits paired with other categories push the budget up approximately 3%, each year due to student need or inflationary impact. In addition, 1% of the budget each year is added to care for the Capital of our buildings. Yet despite 4% in fixed increase expenditures each year, the budget increase over the last 10 years has remained at an average of 1.4%. Per pupil spending is below all neighboring towns as well as below the state average, and the impact of this is felt at the school level.

Though the board will always need to focus on finding savings, it has reached a point where creating these efficiencies are impacting student programs.

Now is the time to invest in our district to impact student achievement, improve aging facilities, and create efficient and compliant operations.

Are any positions being eliminated due to declining enrollment?

Yes, 3.9 full time positions (FTEs) have been reduced.

What are some of the major increases in this budget?

Salaries: Contractual increases and added staff \$1,026,980

Benefits: Health Insurance increased 8% \$542,361

Professional Services: Includes additional ESS counselor \$231,645

Purchased Services: Includes new Waste Removal contract/ field maintenance \$232,768

Supplies and Utilities: Inflationary increases in custodial supplies, oil, and diesel \$382,762

Capital Fund: Increase in state statute allows for 2% funding: \$436,104

Why do we need an Assistant Superintendent?

The Assistant Superintendent's primary role will be to direct the District's Human Resources. Our communities invest approximately \$32 million a year in its 361 employees and yet there is no one in a leadership role that can perform recruiting, onboarding, performance management, establishment of evaluation and assessment systems, and do the overall planning for the needs of our Human Resources. The person in this role will lead a systems-oriented process allowing everyone else to fulfill their roles more efficiently and keep the focus on the students. The certification required to be an Assistant Superintendent will add leadership and accountability where needed. This certification will also allow this person to be a backup should our Superintendent or any principal be out for any reason such as bereavement, medical leave, family emergency, or vacation.

In the surveys and interviews conducted for our Strategic Plan, as well as interviews by the Superintendent when he came on, the lack of HR and an Assistant Principal were emphasized by teachers, staff and leadership. The Assistant Superintendent will address these concerns while also building long term solutions to ensure that RSD #17 draws and retains the very best educators.

Why do we need a HKMS Assistant Principal and will the position of Lead Teacher of Student Life be eliminated?

When the Intermediate School (IS) was created, the Assistant Principal (AP) position at the Middle School (MS) was eliminated and the position of Lead Teacher (LT) was added. Our new Superintendent believes that while this was worth trying, the MS needs an AP with the required credentials and certifications to support and supervise teachers and help them improve instruction in the classroom. The AP will also work with students, parents, and teachers on student behavior and discipline issues, which is necessary to improve classroom instruction and school climate for all MS students. With the addition of the AP position, the LT position will be eliminated from the 2022/23 school year budget.

What support are students receiving for Covid-related learning loss in this budget?

From 2020-2021, The Federal Government supplemented RSD #17 with three Covid-related grants; ESSER I, ESSER II and ARP ESSER. All the ESSER I funds have been expended, mostly on software for distance learning. ESSER II and ARP ESSER, which were geared more towards COVID related learning loss, are both near the end of their balances. Last year, RSD17 hired 5.5 full time employees (FTE) to bridge the gap in math and literacy and to support their social-emotional well-being with the addition of a social worker. Though the money is running out, student needs are and will continue to need to be addressed. 4.5 of the previously grant funded positions will now be supported through the General Fund with the last grant funded FTE position eliminated; 1.0 Reading and 0.5 Math Interventionist at KES, 0.5 Math Interventionist at BES, and 0.5 Counselor, 0.5 Reading and 1.0 Math Interventionist at HKIS. In addition, a new Math Interventionist for HKMS will be added in this year's budget.

Explain the other additions for elementary students in this budget.

Beyond the interventionist roles at the elementary level, this budget will add one Effective School Solutions (ESS) counselor to run a dual-diagnosis program for our youngest students. In 2019, the District hired ESS to provide support for our high school students with identified special education needs and in some cases prevent expensive outplacements. Since engaging with ESS, several out-placed students have returned to attend HK schools, saving the District tuition and transportation costs and allowing it to expand the program into the Middle and Intermediate Schools. For the first time in several years, the Pupil Services budget will be decreasing.

In addition to the ESS counselor, a new Special Education Elementary Coordinator will be located at KES. This position will be **100% funded by the IDEA grant** which the District receives from the government every year. The Coordinator will further the work in our Preschool program and Developmental Learning Programs (DLP). Long-term goals include expanding the preschool to a full day program and preparing for NAEYC accreditation.

Explain the Capital Fund; how much of it will be funded and how much is already there?

In Connecticut, Regional School Districts own and maintain the school buildings, as opposed to municipal or local school districts which include building costs in their town budgets. This year, state statute has increased allowable allocations to the Capital Fund from 1% to 2% to cover planned maintenance. We have chosen to fully fund this line at 2%, in the amount of \$854,981.

The State offers school districts reimbursement for specific capital projects, such as the 2018 High School Energy Project and the 2020 Field House renovation. However, delays at the state level have left the District without expected reimbursements, diminishing the Capital Fund to \$751,592. This year's Capital Projects includes investments such as water filtration at KES and work on the HKHS Cafeteria, which are expected to cost approximately \$900,000.

How much debt is left on the Bonds?

The District has two outstanding bonds for a total debt of \$8,160,175. The balance of \$1,177,175 for building HKMS will be paid off in 2024, and the balance is \$6,983,000 for the HKHS Energy Project which will be paid off in 2030.

What will the Towns Audited Fund balance be?

The Audited Fund Balance is any leftover funds the towns paid to run the schools, which the District did not use. Those funds are returned to the towns after the yearly audit has been completed, **by way of reduction from the District's Gross budget**. This year's audited fund balance that will be returned to the towns in this budget is \$606,491.

What is this \$1.7 million coming to the towns called "Self-Insurance Fund"?

The Self-Insurance Reserve Fund, was created in or around 1988 as a mechanism for a third-party administrator to pay health insurance claims on behalf of the District's employees. As employee insurance claims came in, the third party administrator would pay those claims out of the fund. The balance in this account fluctuated from year-to-year, depending on the variations in claims. Some years, the fund balance would increase due to minimal claims while other years the balance would run low due to an excess in claims for expensive medical procedures. This fund remained active until 2018, when the District switched to the State Partnership Plan for health insurance. The Self-Insurance Reserve Fund intentionally remained dormant for the next three years, available to pay out any outstanding claims or penalties and in place to use again should the District decide to revert back to self-insurance. In March, the Board voted to discontinue the fund immediately and transfer the balance into the general fund. Having already been audited during its dormancy, the balance will be immediately applied to reduce the net expenses of the district for 2022-2023 fiscal year.

I understand the goals of adding Interventionists to help students at ES & MS, and the need to address student discipline and teacher support at the MS. Is anything being added at HKHS?

Beyond the instructional support being put in K-8 levels there are several other investments being made. At the High School two textbooks are being replaced as they are over 10 years old and in need of updating; A World History textbook to support the new HS Social Studies Curriculum and an AP Biology textbook. Additionally, the social-emotional wellness advisory lessons, which were previously grant funded, have been kept and are included in this budget. PSATs will be added for the 9th grade to help improve student performance on the SAT to help jumpstart stamina and familiarity skills in taking the SAT.

Any District-Wide initiatives for students in this budget?

A thorough review of all school library resources was done and revealed gaps in reading material at all levels. School libraries will have additional money to offer a more complete selection for all students.

Will transportation costs go down this year?

Yes. There will be one less bus next year.

Do you have a question about the budget? Click below and we will add it to our FAQ.

<https://forms.gle/Csh5cvLcgsDd5gmf6>

You can read more about the 2022-2023 Budget here:

https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1649936329/rsd17org/wcwxypcyic7gu5tknjib/2022_23BudgetArticle.docx.pdf

You can view the entire budget here:

<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1649115609/rsd17org/gwnafx6ph51pgpyc8rcf/DOC040422-04042022193342.pdf>