

Regional School District #14
Budget Workshop #1
Board Questions and Responses
March 20, 2023

1. Can you explain what type of costs evaluating testing may include?

Testing students is on a very individual basis, however, that being said, upon conducting an initial evaluation the plan must be comprehensive. A typical in house evaluation would include a Psychoeducational Evaluation -Cognitive/Intellectual Evaluation, Social/Emotional/Behavioral/ Executive Functioning/Adaptive Rating Scales, Academic Achievement-Reading/Writing/ Math/Phonological Awareness, Speech/Language-Expressive/Receptive/Pragmatic Language/Phonological Processing, Occupational Therapy-Fine/Visual Motor/Sensory Processing, Physical Therapy-Gross Motor, Functional Behavior Assessment and a Psycho/Social Developmental History. In addition to initial evaluations, each student in Special Education gets a comprehensive reevaluation every three years. Students are also recommended for outside evaluations by staff for input from medical professionals to acquire additional information for programming when a student is presenting with challenging behaviors or significant social/emotional/cognitive presentations. These evaluations may include Psychiatric Evaluations/ Psychiatric Risk Assessments/Developmental Pediatric Evaluations and Neuropsychological Evaluations. In addition, parents also have the right to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at the expense of the district. These evaluations often consist of, but are not limited to, a Neuropsychological Evaluation and/or a Psychiatric Evaluation. The frequency of these requests have increased greatly over the years as parents have become more educated in Special Education Rights and Policies.

2. What services are included with Auditor/Consultants for \$50K?

The Auditors (\$31K) and the Actuarial Services (\$19K)

3. A formula error has been corrected on the Average Daily Membership regarding the Transition Average for Woodbury and Bethlehem. The overall percent estimation between the Towns did not change as the result of the formula correction. An updated copy has been provided for the Board to review.

4. Why was the Pre School Tuition only increased by \$5,000 when another Pre School Teacher was added to the budget and there will be additional students who can pay as a peer?

It is the districts intent to maintain a ratio of 50% special education students to 50% peers as per special education guidelines for inclusion. The district advertises for the

integrated preschool program and holds a screening in April to place peers in the program. When possible, based on the number of students that attend the preschool screening, the district accepts additional typical peers above and beyond the number of anticipated incoming IEP'd students to maintain the ratio throughout the year as the special education population grows. The conservative approach is warranted due to the limited number of peers that are currently registered for the screening at this time.

5. Can we budget more for the Interest Income reflecting that the current interest rates have increased?

A conservative approach was used in consideration. The rates can decline as quickly as they have increased.

6. Why the significant increase in student IEP's as compared to prior year?

There has been a significant increase of both parent referrals and referrals from the in house Student Success Team Tiered Intervention Process resulting in an increased number of IEP's in district. Parents and staff have been diligent about identifying students' limited progress since the start of COVID resulting in students not having reached expected grade level standards. Once a PPT is requested, an evaluation is most likely to be conducted in which weaknesses are identified. Since the majority of these students have already been in the tiered process with limited success, the next step is special education intervention. There is also a significant push at this time in identifying students with reading weaknesses as Dyslexic as the criteria has greatly expanded. The district has also accepted several students with current IEP's into district as they moved to town. Another reason for the increase of students with IEP's is a result of the identification of students with emotional struggles. New regulations identify students as having a disability under "Emotional Disability" rather than the former "Emotional Disturbance". This includes students whose emotionality is affecting their school performance. There has been a significant increase of students presenting with emotional dysregulation. Guidelines provided by the state regarding chronic absenteeism/truancy (10+ absences) also results in a referral to Special Education.

7. The Paraprofessional line as shown in Bethlehem appears to be switched with the benefit line. Please explain.

The Paraprofessional line for each of the Schools reflects just the Cafeteria Aides and the interventionists. The Benefit line reflects the benefits for all the classified salaries related to the school (custodian, clerical etc.). The Special Education budget reflects all the Paraprofessionals for the District.

8. Why is the class size for Bethlehem with two teachers (23:1) larger than the class size for Mitchell with three teachers (17:1)? Is this a factor as to why Mitchell

was a school of Distinction and Bethlehem was not as it reflects with the most recent scores?

The participation rate in testing for BES for 2021-2022 was above 95%, which normally would have resulted in their receiving school of distinction status based on their math growth results. However, the State looked back at the 2020-2021 participation rate as well, which is not typically done. Due to the number of COVID absences in 2020-2021 during testing time, BES's participation rate was below 95% that year and is the reason they did not receive school of distinction status.

SBAC testing is only for grades 3-5 at the elementary level, so the kindergarten class sizes and absences would not have been a factor in the school of distinction status.

The projected student to teacher ratio is consistent with the current student to teacher ratio.

9. There is currently \$55k budgeted for interns and there hasn't been anything spent again this year? Why did we continue to budget for this cost?

The District continues to work with participating institutions such as Sacred Hart University and the University of Bridgeport for candidate in need of an internship opportunity for both teachers and nurses. There were no candidates brought forward for the current year by any of the participating institutions.

10. Is budgeting \$153K necessary when the athletic transportation lines have been consistently low even after COVID?

There was a bus driver shortage at the beginning of the current year where parents were asked to drive students' away games. There were enough drivers to cover the contractual bus runs, but no spares were available for the afterschool trips. The amount requested in the budget reflects what is anticipated into back to normal as the bus company continues to fill the void. The athletic lines have been decreased for the budget request and the \$153k also includes all field trips anticipated for the District.

11. Is it necessary to replace the lockers at the Middle School over a three year period with a total cost of \$180k?

There have been requests to start replacing the original lockers at the Middle School starting with the sixth grade wing.

12. Can you provide the make and model of the gator that is looking to be replaced?

It is a 2011 John Deer 4 wheel Gator TX

