

**RTM Education Questions
January 16, 2024**

<p>Does the proposed budget enhance student learning and improve (or, at least maintain) the quality of education and student experience within DPS?</p>	<p>Yes, there is no change in student learning or programs in this budget. Enhancements include new courses, expansion of Mandarin to 8th grade, more interventions for students, teacher coverage improving student experience, and expanded ELP program for more student learning.</p>
<p>Does the proposed budget eliminate any essential student and district employee support services, such as security, infrastructure, or transportation?</p>	<p>There is a proposed reduction of 1 campus monitor, with other staff covering those responsibilities. Reduced instructional paraprofessionals are replaced with substitute teachers.</p>
<p>Would any student-facing programs (classes, clubs, or activities) be eliminated as a result of the proposed budget?</p>	<p>No student facing programs would be eliminated in the proposed budget.</p>
<p>A 6.2% annual budget increase, combined with a 5.3% initial estimate for the year after, appears unsustainable long-term in a 3% inflation environment. Difficult budget choices must be made, but can the proposed personnel decisions be made without impacting student learning?</p>	<p>No, in order to drive the cost of future projected budget increases down, personnel reductions would have to be made. Given the budget is nearly 80% personnel costs significant reductions cannot happen without affecting personnel and student programming.</p>
<p>Regarding the proposed elimination of FTEs at the middle school and elementary school, if the class size limits established by the BOE are too high given (among other things) post-Covid teaching and learning demands, increased special education and SRBI demands, as well as the current social/emotional needs of students, then the conclusion that we have unnecessary staff as set forth by New Solutions may also be inaccurate. In addition, difficulty hiring staff for open positions should create a cautious environment when considering eliminating teachers and paraprofessionals. How many open positions for teachers/psychologists/paras/admins are currently outstanding? If cuts to FTEs are made, what impact will this have on students? How would the BOE monitor this change, if adopted? Will construction at three of the elementary schools possibly require additional staff or supervision and safety?</p>	<p>The current class size guidelines at the middle school are similar or lower than many of our peer districts. Changes in staffing at the middle school are correlated to enrollment declines at MMS and would still leave classes sizes lower than they were in FY21. There are no concerns about the difficulty of hiring teachers or paraprofessionals as a result of these reductions. The DEA contract allows for reduction of FTE at the secondary level through attrition. Reductions outside of the budget should be expected in the future as well due to this contract language.</p> <p>There is currently an open Art Teacher at the Elementary School and a Special Education Teacher at High School (Covered by a LTS) and a recent resignation of an elementary Special Education Teacher. All current openings are from teachers who resigned after the start of the current school year.</p> <p>There is no anticipated increase in supervisory staff at the HHR schools as this will not change enrollment.</p>

Per BOE budget responses from 1/6/24 meeting (DRG administrator question): Darien has 36 FTE administrators (of which 7 Dept Chairs) vs. New Canaan (1 DC) at 23.5 FTEs with a very similar number of students in the district (4,667 vs. 4,518 in '22-23). NC spends less per student and, at the same time, has a better accountability index that measures both academic and non-academic student achievements (per Superintendent's 1/4 budget slide presentation). Can the Superintendent provide his best explanation to this difference? Would the BOE study these differences to learn from NC to ensure our taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently without sacrificing student learning? Additionally, Dr. Addley mentioned that the proposed model that eliminates the World Language Dept Chair, among other positions, "with the resources we have, is the best for kids, staff and families." Should the district revisit the Dept Chair structure in its entirety?

- The main differences in cost between New Canaan and Darien include:
1. Darien has 70.2 FTE in core Teachers (Math, Science, Social Studies and English) while New Canaan has 57.2 FTE
 2. Darien has administrative department chairs while New Canaan has teacher leader department chairs
 3. New Canaan Technology Equipment is leased (finance over 4 years) through the capital budget while Darien does not finance technology purchases and it is an operating expense
 4. New Canaan does not pay for non FCIAC sanctioned sports, those are fully funded by the Booster Club
 5. Transportation costs in New Canaan are less due to a bus depot
 6. New Canaan has 54 Special Education Teachers vs. Darien 61.4 FTE
 7. Darien has 4 more psychologists than New Canaan at the secondary level
 8. New Canaan's out of district Tuition is approximately \$3 million less than Darien
 9. New Canaan pays approximately \$2 million more than Darien for Health Insurance
 10. Darien has 10 assistant principals at the elementary level and New Canaan has three elementary assistant principals
 11. Darien has a Director of Mental Health, New Canaan does not
 12. Darien has SSO's, New Canaan does not
 13. New Canaan has more secretarial support at their High School than Darien.
 14. New Canaan has 7 Nurses, Darien has 13
 15. Darien has 5 elementary schools vs. New Canaan's 3.
 16. New Canaan has 90 Special Education Paraprofessionals PreK-12 and Darien has 120 Special Education Paraprofessional PreK-12
 17. The accountability index difference is only 1.4 % and this is only one measure of overall student performance.

Will DHS be part of the efficiency study going forward and does the BOE intend to commission such study for next year's budget cycle?

DHS was not included in the study as the HS has made reductions over time with the change in the DEA contract allowing staff to teach 5 classes from 4.5. We do not intend to use New Solutions to study the High School.

We appreciate the Superintendent's desire to limit the budget increase by making some difficult personnel changes, but we would like to know whether the BOE would consider revenue generating suggestions such as pay to play for athletics and clubs and/or imposing a fee for parents to pay for bus service. Other towns have implemented these cost sharing initiatives. (a) How much would pay for play in athletics or clubs and activities generate? (b) How much could be generated by having parents pay a family fee for bus service? While some of

A fee for bus services is against the law in CT. CT BOE must provide transportation to students.

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/PS97/rpt/olr/htm/97-R-1438.htm#:~:text=School%20districts%20are%20required%20by,from%20school%20to%20get%20transportation.>

The BOE considered participation fees for athletics, theater and clubs but has currently tabled the discussion.

Fees for athletics are somewhat common in suburban communities (50% of the DRG charges fees, 50% does not) however fees for clubs are far less common.

<p>these ideas may seem extreme, other proposals involving staff are also pretty severe.</p>	<p>Currently only Easton, Redding and Wilton charge students for clubs.</p>
<p>With all of the funds being spent for mental health services, what can the BOE and administration do to address bullying effectively?</p>	<p>We routinely provide professional learning for our staff in the area of school climate and culture, social emotional learning, best practices for responsive interventions, and student support services. Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, legislation passed in 2023 requires that school districts provide training in these areas including restorative practices. (Public Act 23-167 Section 55). Our Director of Mental Health provides leadership and programming in this area.</p>
<p>How will the elimination of the World Language Chair affect the evaluation by NEASC?</p>	<p>The responsibility of providing oversight and support for the World Language Department will be assumed by the building administration in the proposed administrative restructure. Content specific support will be enhanced by the curriculum specialist stipends. NEASC evaluation matters related to this department will also be primarily facilitated by the building administration with contributions from department staff. A NEASC visit does not specifically advocate for certain teaching or administrative positions.</p>
<p>Account 102007: members of the Education Committee recommended increasing the parking fee above the current recommendation to the higher side of the DRG.</p>	<p>At \$150 per student only Ridgefield charges more at \$200.</p>
<p>Recently, DHS teachers moved from teaching 4 classes to 5. How is this working out and what would be the similarities and differences in asking Middlesex teachers to do the same?</p>	<p>This has been successful but can only be done through attrition. While we have made some changes at MMS with teachers teaching 5 through attrition it is more difficult due to the teaming structure to implement this through attrition. However, all of our peer districts middle schools teach five classes. Over time this will occur at MMS.</p>
<p>Regarding the elimination of teaching specialists in elementary schools and the proposed addition of long term substitutes, the committee is concerned about the loss of specialized, high quality instruction for students (especially those in SRBI tier 2/3) and the inability to hire long term subs as the latter position is not as desirable for qualified candidates. In addition, teaching specialists are needed at grades 2-5, in addition to K-1.</p>	<p>There is no proposal to eliminate teaching specialists in the elementary schools. The proposal is to eliminate paraprofessionals and replace them with permanent building substitutes. Permanent building substitutes must have a college degree. Paraprofessionals are only required to have the equivalent of an Associate's degree. Certified teachers provide specialized instruction, including for students in SRBI. There has been no elimination of either classroom teachers or interventionists at the elementary level.</p>
<p>When was the elementary foreign language program last evaluated? What were the results? Is the BOE or administration considering eliminating or reducing the elementary foreign language program?</p>	<p>It is best practice to introduce our youngest learners to world languages other than English as research indicates that children are able to acquire a new language with much greater proficiency if it is introduced before what is referred to as the "critical age" for language learning (ranging between 2 and 13 years of age). Like Darien,</p>

	<p>our neighboring DRG A districts have invested in world language instruction by expanding such opportunities at the elementary level. Proficiency in a second language supports post secondary success in college and career. Our DPS students graduate with impressive competency in this area as evidenced by the growing number of students who are earning the CT Seal of Biliteracy prior to graduation. There has been discussion about eliminating elementary languages.</p>
<p>Please clarify the instructions given to Nate Levinson on use of projected numbers in the elementary schools versus real numbers at the secondary level.</p>	<p>NewSolutions was provided projected enrollment for the elementary schools as changes in projected class sections have a direct impact in special areas. Given that we have three schools with changes in class sections (Hindley, Holmes and Tokeneke) projected enrollment needed to be used. It is typical in DRG A districts to reduce special area FTEs when adjusting for classroom FTEs.</p> <p>At MMS, actual enrollment was given considering there is little to no change in enrollment at MMS next year. This coupled with more student choice in specials meant actual enrollment was more appropriate than projected as we do not project special area enrollment at MMS.</p>
<p>With multiple opportunities for differentiation, and the Genius program at MMS, is the IDEA program (founded more than 50 years ago) necessary? While there is a mandate to identify exceptional students, there is not a requirement to offer special services. What savings would there be if this program were to end or be phased out?</p>	<p>If talented and gifted were eliminated the district would save approximately \$492,000. There is no proposal to make such a change.</p>
<p>Account 72001: Have we contacted other janitorial providers prior to executing a one-year \$320k contract extension?</p>	<p>Yes, we reached out to a number of companies. Given the minimum wage increase in CT this was the least expensive option should we remain with contracted cleaning service at night at DHS. The administration is looking into whether it would be financially advantageous to hire part time cleaners (which we already do) in place of a contracted cleaning company. The extension can be terminated with 60 days notice.</p>
<p>p. 185: Why are proposed facilities rental rates so significantly below surrounding town's districts?</p>	<p>Only the auditorium is lower than other districts. We typically do not rent out the auditorium often as it is not available given the number of district wide events which have priority over rentals. The majority of rental revenue comes from per participation fee on our fields.</p>
<p>p. 204 Does the \$20k figure cover the cost of the New Solutions consultant for the to-date work or does it include (i) updated analysis for the music department specifics and (ii) provide support with scheduling? Additionally, please provide the updated analysis with respect to the music department proposed efficiencies, once available. Our</p>	<p>The next level of support from New Solutions which include professional development for our administrators and the building of schedules is for \$100,000. There are no proposed program cuts to Music. General Music has the same level of minutes that PE has in a 6 day cycle yet has more FTE than PE currently.</p>

committee would like to see that there would be no impact on student learning and experience (including band, orchestra, chorus or other music programs) and this efficiency proposal would remain "invisible to students."

Account 11032 Executive Assistant - personnel cost for the position is 20% higher than other executive assistants in the district. Is this position's compensation based on tenure?

Yes, this individual has been with the district for over 40 years.

Account 41002 Nurses - personnel cost was \$600k range prior to last year but ~\$1 million in the last two fiscal years (and similar for the budget year). Are 13 nurses necessary covering 7 school buildings in the post-Covid world?

As mentioned at a previous BOE meeting, historically we had some nurses coded to RC24. All costs for nurses were moved to RC17 in FY23. Combining the historical costs in both RC17 and RC24 is \$946,000. We have not added any nurses post covid.

Fiscal Year	FTE	Cost
FY25 Budget	13	\$1,032,566
FY24	13	\$1,005,454
FY23	13	\$975,713
FY22	13	\$946,635
FY21	13	\$907,681

Account 11027: Contract support: what are the non-affiliated and paraprofessional wage increase assumptions implied in the \$734k figure? How many individuals are included in these groups? Does this line item include an estimate for the Superintendent's contract renewal?

This account includes 48 unaffiliated employees (including the Superintendent). Plus 157 paraprofessionals.

Account 11028: Cert Staff "Column" Change (\$108k): what is this "adjustment" related to?

The DEA contract allows for teachers to get degree level changes. Annually, by November, teachers are required to submit to the district whether they anticipate earning enough credits to move a lane in the teacher salary schedule. This amount

	<p>reflects the teachers who have indicated they will receive a column change.</p>
<p>Account 25003 Professional Development (\$145k; p.225): are these driven by teachers asking or by state requirements or by the curriculum RC? Do our elementary math teachers (with 15+ experience) need a 9-day, \$20,000 math consultant to tell them how to teach elementary school math? Or \$25k "responsive classroom" course for our elementary teachers?</p>	<p>Professional learning opportunities are driven by State legislation, District, department and school goals as well as are designed to be responsive to the needs and interests of our staff of professional educators. Professional learning is aligned to the development and revision of curricula, content standards and serves to support necessary shifts in instructional practice and best practices for assessing learning. Schools must be places where students and teachers both learn.</p>
<p>How many hours are spent on PD during school days, including full days, late start, early dismissal, etc. What is the cost to the district in terms of time teachers spend away from students and cost of substitutes? Is there follow up to see how teachers implement what they have learned in their classrooms? Some PD appears to be mandated by the State, but which others are discretionary for the district?</p>	<p>The vast majority of professional learning takes place during contractual times when school is not in session (August, November, January and February). This is by design so as to limit interruptions to instructional time. Department Chairs, school and district administrators collaborate with educators regarding implementing learning from professional development experiences as well as sharing what is learned more widely across the department, school and district as appropriate.</p>
<p>.231 Where is the accountant FTE decrease captured?</p>	<p>As discussed on January 6th, the accountant position resides in the food service fund. This position was reduced as shown on page 311 of the budget book and part time custodians were moved from RC12 to the food service fund, to bring a reduction to the operating budget.</p>
<p>Account 24001 (\$74k) includes \$30k for robotics. How many students participate at this activity?</p>	<p>There are over 340 students participating in robotics.</p>
<p>Would the BOE consider engaging a third party consultant to evaluate our special education programs and how they compare to others in our DRG across various metrics (such as on-boarding process, quality of services, enrollment percentage, costs), especially in light of our 19% IEP enrollment rate vs. 15% in our DRG (12.5% in New Canaan)?</p>	<p>This would be a BOE decision; however, when districts across the State have employed an outside consultant, it is not uncommon for it to result in a reduction of services such as paraprofessionals and related service providers, many of which ultimately get added back in future years due to IEP's.</p>
<p>It was noted on Saturday that by law, a parent can opt for as many PPTs as needed. Can you provide an average number per year, as well as the high and low numbers in the range? Would more robust service at the outset reduce the number of PPTs ?</p>	<p>Connecticut State Regulation requires that the PPT convene for a variety of procedural reasons. PPTs can convene as frequently as necessary in order to ensure the student receives an appropriate program.</p> <p>It is difficult to average the number of PPTs per family as they vary based on need and programming. Perhaps 2-3 PPTs annually would be a reasonable average in</p>

	<p>grades ELP-12+.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initial Referral PPT Meeting (PPT 1) ● Determine Eligibility PPT Meeting (PPT 2) ● Diagnostic Placement ● Annual Review ● Three-year Reevaluation ● Program Review ● Review Interim Assessments ● Manifestation Determination
<p>Are other districts struggling with how to provide time for administrators to attend PPTs? Are they adding staff?</p>	<p>The Higher Identification rate in Darien adds to the number of PPT's in Darien compared to our peers; however, in the last five years other districts that have added staff due to increasing special education needs include Weston, Norwalk, Greenwich, Stamford, New Canaan & Fairfield.</p>
<p>Does SRBI unnecessarily prolong the time before a child is referred for special education?</p>	<p>IDEA legislation requires that schools provide all children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IDEA reauthorized in 20024 requires the implementation of research-based interventions in order to support student achievement in the general education setting. SRBI is a process that is designed to align general education interventions to demonstrated student need as a pre-referral process to ensure that there is not an overidentification for special education services.</p>
<p>Assistant Superintendent for SESS Org Chart (p.126) - org chart shows four FTEs as executive assistants to this position. Is this number correct and if yes, could you explain the need for additional support?</p>	<p>Yes the number is correct. The four administrative assistants include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent of SESS ● FERPA Administrative Assistant ● Administrative Assistant to Program Director who handles purchasing and requisitions ● Administrative Assistant to Program Director, Excess Cost and ELP registration
<p>Account 12004: Legal Services: YTD \$70k seems to be running below the budgeted \$250k for both this as well as budgeted school year. Are there incremental pending legal actions that make you budget at these levels?</p>	<p>Legal fees are billed two months in arrears by Shipman and Goodwin. Actuals through the Budget Book are only through October 2023.</p>
<p>Account 21308: Summer School + PPT (+\$288k; +28%): We see the narrative explanation, but have a hard time understanding the sudden increase in this line item. Have</p>	<p>No, as explained this represents the days in June 2025 that for accounting purposes must be recorded in FY25. The only way to reduce this cost would be to start ESY July of each year, which is not recommended educationally.</p>

<p>we changed any policies related to these services provided?</p>	
<p>Account 143001: Tuition-Non-public school (+\$1.5m; +24%): please provide details on "same institution" tuition increases vs. enrollment.</p>	<p>30% of the increase is related to rate increases for existing placements/settlements 50% are new placements/pending settlements 20% are new transition program costs</p>
<p>Accounts 141001 and 143001 totaling \$8.1 million: how many students receive out-of-district tuition payments?</p>	<p>There are 87 students.</p>
<p>Account 82003 Health Insurance: +\$1.05m increase implies a +6.8% in health premiums vs. Superintendent's 1/6 presentation shows +13.9% "health rate increase" (p.22). Why the difference?</p>	<p>Due to position eliminations, changes in employee premium share contribution, census changes, flat h.s.a funding, the account represents only a 6.8% increase. The cost of each premium for each covered life is increasing 13.85%.</p>
<p>During the 1/6 presentation, Mr. Rudl indicated that a larger purchasing block (from \$100m book of business to \$200m) would result in a lower premium growth for the district. What exact steps are we/Brown & Brown taking to engage other districts to join our purchasing block?</p>	<p>This is a long process in which various municipalities and districts are contacted and their insurance programs are reviewed and determined if there is a benefit to joining the purchasing block. They also have to have the same insurance provider (Anthem). Over ten municipalities/BOE are being considered to be added to the purchasing block.</p>
<p>Thank you for providing a comparison chart of other preschool programs in the area. ELP charges a relatively similar tuition yet will operate with a \$1.4 million deficit. What are likely the key differences vs. other programs or do we think that those operate at a loss prior to donations/endowments?</p>	<p>ELP program supports students with special needs, while other area preschools do not. As a result, we have more paraprofessional support and related services that other preschools are not required by state law to provide. They do not have endowments.</p>
<p>Following up on a question by Mr. Maroney - The presentation seemed to indicate that ELP is effectively using staff time as relates to evaluations and service to students. Is this a model for the other schools?</p>	<p>During the 2023-2024 school year and in previous years, Fridays were used for scheduling PPTs, 504s and other meetings as the program has been a 4 day program. This model would not work for the other elementary and secondary levels as students in grades kindergarten through grade 12 attend school 5 days a week, with staff providing instruction Monday through Friday. Educationally, it is recommended for our young learners enrolled in ELP to have access to a high quality program that meets 5 days per week.</p>
<p>Account 72021: Given the district already purchased uniforms and equipment for SSOs, does it make sense to keep this budget item flat at \$116k vs. current school year?</p>	<p>This item is more than just uniforms and equipment for SSOs. It includes central station monitoring, camera maintenance, Alertus repairs, anonymous alerts, ID badges, emergency lighting, radio programming, emergency response book.</p> <p>Uniforms are increased due to the inclusion of campus monitor uniforms.</p>

<p>p.262 - please provide detail regarding proposed \$571k cost increase in Admin personnel (top chart).</p>	<p>This account includes contract support for unsettled wages. Because the paraprofessional contract was not settled at the time of the budget wages are set aside in this account.</p>
<p>p.279 - Retirement: Please provide the actuarial assessment/reasoning behind the +15% (\$268k) increase in this line item. Is it covering more employees going forward?</p>	<p>The Town's pension board hire Miliman to provide actuarial assessments. Their recommendation was to fund the pension fund at the full mortality rate with an interest rate of 6.25%. This is a total contribution of \$1,625,226. Then there is \$17,160 set aside for 401A contributions for the SSO's. The large increase in pension contribution is attributed to a nearly \$10 million increase in the accrued liability.</p>
<p>p.311: Where within the actual budget RC's does food services appear? What are the key terms of the \$2.3m management contract and who is the counterparty? Please explain who owns the existing \$637k "fund" balance.</p>	<p>Food Service fund is a separate enterprise fund required by the State of CT. The management company who operates our school lunch program is Chartwells. The district owns the food service fund balance. These funds have to be used to support cafeteria/school lunch operations. We have used these funds in the past to update kitchen equipment rather than asking for those funds in the capital budget.</p>
<p>p. 312: Can these be bonded or do they have to be funded through annual tax appropriation?</p>	<p>Yes potentially, but that is a decision for the BOF to consider.</p>