

**RTM EDUCATION QUESTIONS
JANUARY 22, 2024**

<p>Staffing consultant/changes in MMS - While there is certainly a lot of discussion with reducing teaching positions in line with enrollment changes at MMS, what has been the practice at the elementary schools in recent years? The high school? We recall that sections could be added when needed at elementary level (this was the whole debate about budget control), but were sections eliminated if they were not needed, so long as the BoE class size guidelines were followed? With sections eliminated, what happened with those teaching positions?</p>	<p>The BOE sets class sections at the elementary school each year in August which includes increases and decreases in class sections based on enrollment. As is the case for next year there is a recommendation to reduce a teacher at Hindley due to enrollment and increase teachers at Holmes and Tokeneke due to enrollment. If there are no teacher vacancies they are non-renewed.</p> <p>At the High School we have reduced staff over time as teachers have left the district and expanded teachers workload from 4 classes to 5 classes. Additionally, at the high school we have reduced classes that have seen enrollment declined and allocated the FTE to classes that have increased enrollment due to student interests.</p>
<p>With respect to the consultant's work, wouldn't it make sense to have this firm assess efficiencies across the district, not just the middle school? This isn't necessarily about reducing headcount, but delivering better services to students with the resources we have.</p>	<p>We do not feel expanding the work is warranted at this time.</p>
<p>Besides enrollment/demographics, and a separate committee member question below about consultants to advise on special education, are there other large operating areas within the budget where consultants might yield value by helping us better match resources with demand, or by helping us deliver better services to students more efficiently?</p>	<p>Currently, we use a consultant to evaluate Health Insurance and have had a consultant review Transportation in the past. There are no other areas other than enrollment/demographics.</p>
<p>1 or 2 years ago, the district added a bus at the request of parents, outside of policy, because students were crossing the street by Noroton Heights to get to Avalon. One of us recalls that the use of the bus was quite low compared to the students it was projected to carry. Several of us see students walking and taking the same crossing that the bus was put in place to avoid. Perhaps the bus route has since been ended? Should we have a minimum required usage of buses if they are for routes that are</p>	<p>Bus 25, which was added a few years ago is still in place and attendance ranges from 25 to 39 students daily at DHS. The administration is not recommending removing this bus from service.</p>

<p>not required under our policy? If the bus was put in place because it was "unsafe" to cross, how can we allow students to then, in fact, cross? So, if it's safe, we didn't really need the bus??</p>	
<p>RC 1 - Account 102007 - Parking: Should BoE consider increasing the parking fee to \$200 (in line with Ridgefield). What would the \$ impact be? (p. 12 of pdf packet to tonight's meeting [actual pages are not enumerated]) Additionally, on parking fees, perhaps the district should consider value based parking fees, analogous to how personal property taxes are assessed. Certain members of the committee feel that a 16 year old driving a brand new BMW should be assessed higher fees than someone in a 10 year Corolla.</p>	<p>As discussed at the BOE level if the fee were raised to \$200 additional revenue would be \$13,500. We are not recommending a fee based on the assessed value of a vehicle.</p>
<p>RC11 - Boys Diving is listed as having 2 participants. Is there a minimum required number of participants to field a team/club? Diving happens to have significant "fixed" costs, which drives up the per participant costs. Must swim teams field a dive team in order to compete at meets? Unless our budget for athletics and activities are unlimited, what is the way to assess when student interest has declined such that the sport/club should no longer be offered?</p>	<p>Diving is one component of a swim meet when calculating the score. The points divers earn during the diving portion of the meet go towards the total meet score when competing against an opponent. There is not a minimum number required to field a team. Not having a dive team/score would hamper the team's ability to compete against our opponents both during the regular and postseason. Due to limitations with the pool depth at the Darien Y, diving is not permitted at that facility which is why we rent space to practice and compete at the NC Y.</p>
<p>RC 12: Our "auditorium [facility rental fees] are lower than other districts" (p. 13 of pdf). Why, esp. given our recent equipment improvements, and should we increase them in line?</p>	<p>As discussed during the BOE meeting, we rarely rent out our auditorium given its availability when school functions are not taking place. If we were to increase our rate to mirror that of Westport we would collect an additional \$7,812 based on previous usage.</p>
<p>RC 16 - Scheduling Consultant: Music reorg "update analysis" has not been addressed (answer to last question on pdf p.13 with language that "there are no proposed cuts to music." I thought that the admin were to do further "scheduling" analysis w/r/t music given its teacher non-fungibility specifics.</p>	<p>We have discussed with the scheduling consultant and the Director of Music and they have confirmed the reductions proposed can be realized through reductions in staff who teach general music.</p>

<p>RC 24 - Given "higher IED identification rates in Darien" (p.16 of pdf) and thus higher and growing Special Ed budget (+12% for FY24-25), would <u>BoE</u> consider engaging a consultant to evaluate our program, esp. in light of our 19% IEP rate vs. 15% in our DRG and vs. 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 IEPs.</p>
<p>RC 24 - Account 143001 (p.17 of pdf) - Tuition Non-Public: refers to 20% of the \$1.5m increase relates to "new transition program costs". Can you kindly clarify what these are?</p>	<p>Costs for transition programs are for students between the ages of 18 and 22.</p>
<p>Food Service - regarding p.311 of the budget: Moving part time custodians to Food service from RC12 to the food service fund only this year, to "bring reduction to the operating budget" (p.15 of pdf) seems out of place/misleading (a technical term...:) - are these custodians only/primarily engaged in cleaning cafeterias?</p>	<p>This would be a permanent change not for just 1 year.</p>
<p>Benefits - regarding p.279 of the budget: "\$10 increase in the accrued liability" (p.18 of pdf) in one year seems excessive especially given higher discount rates of future benefits. Can you kindly provide some detail?</p>	<p>The last full valuation done by the Town's actuaries was in 2021.</p> <p>Milliman Valuation</p>