



BERLIN-BOYLSTON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Budget, Facilities, and Safety Subcommittee
Berlin-Boylston Regional School District Offices | 215 Main Street, Boylston, MA
Tuesday, March 4th, 2025 | 12:00PM

Revised 2/28/25 at 10:40AM

Stream link <https://www.youtube.com/@bbrsdlive2893/streams>

Present: Mr. Albert G. Ganem, Interim Superintendent of Schools; Ms. Nicole Bilotta, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent; Mrs. Meagan Grill, School Committee Vice Chair; Mrs. Lisa Mair, School Committee Member; Mrs. Beth Mancini, School Committee Member; Mr. Aaron Osborne, Director of Finance and Operations; Ms. Mary Porter, Berlin Finance Committee Member; Ms. Karen McGahie, Boylston Finance Committee Member

I. Call to Order - Mrs. Grill called the meeting to order at 12:02pm.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Reports

- a. FY26 Budget Presentation** - Mr. Albert G. Ganem Jr. and Mr. Aaron Osborne- The meeting was to help the subcommittee to review the FY26 Budget before the whole committee votes on March 11th. Mr. Osborne reviewed each slide with the committee and explained it is a working document still being updated. It is a below service level budget as of right now. BBRSD is not at point to share specific positions that could be cut.

In December, the school committee voted on an official budget number due to issues at town meeting for FY25. They do not want to have that happen on the floor of town meeting again. The number voted on March 11th can be amended within the 45 days.

The starting assessment number for FY26 is a higher number. Voters will be able to see what the increase will be in the presentation. The number may change due to cuts or adding school choice funds. The big piece of information they are in the middle of is teacher negotiations. Mrs. Grill felt the BBRSD numbers would match well with the Boylston numbers.

Mr. Osborne broke things down in terms of cost centers, which were broken down by superintendent, director of finance, pupil personnel services, school principals, etc. Each cost center was broken down by major line items. He included graphs to show where the money is being spent and reviewed those items. A vast majority is instruction and salaries. Insurance has gone up by 18% this year for general health insurance and retirees. In the past, each elementary school was allocated 25% percent and 50% for Tahanto and continues for this year.

Mr. Osborne reviewed the offsets that helped reduce the budget. They are proposing to use school choice and believed there would be E&D funds to use. This year E&D will not be certified by time of the vote. Normally, it would have been. Circuit breaker and grant funds will also be used for offsetting the budget. They have put the definition of school choice in the presentation to clarify what it is.

Mr. Osborne reviewed the assessment offsets that are used(ex. Chapter 70, Chapter 71). They are explained in the presentation and it is explained how they work with the regional agreement. As a regional school district they have to provide transportation for all students. They are not able to use smaller buses and the routes cannot be longer than an hour. He noted the regional agreement is silent to the minimum local contribution and above minimum contribution.

Key driver information will be updated for the budget version that will be posted at the end of the week. The numbers have decreased for the operating assessments for each town for the elementary schools. The committee discussed the Berlin process for assessment approval.

Mr. Osborne reviewed the total operating assessment for each town and the increases from last year. There is an increase of 7% for Berlin and 4.18% for Boylston. For the past two years there has been an error in the debt assessments. It was short of \$250k a year combined and the district was picking up the cost. Mr. Osborne corrected that in the presentation and is the reason for the increase. Ms. Mary Porter noted it has been helpful to see the debt schedules.

Capital items are listed in priority order as requested by the towns. They are hoping to work with the towns to see what they might be able to do with the capital items. The middle school furniture is elementary school sized, which is why the request for the replacement is being made. BBRSD went through technology items and was able to reduce the number. Mr. Joseph Sposato will have a five year plan for technology he will present to the school committee down the line. Ms. Porter expressed potential issues with keeping technology in capital. It would be Mr. Osborne's preference is to have technology in operations eventually. It would mean although the budget would go up and could be the potential of cutting a position. This year would not be a good year to make the shift. The priority for capital is exterior cameras for the schools to ensure the safety of the students and staff. Mrs. Grill suggested going forward they could slowly shift small amounts into the operating budget and it would come out of Tahanto.

The debt assessments were reviewed in addition to the capital requests. Mr. Osborne hopes to have further discussions with the towns on where things can be worked on. They hope to present this to the school committee and realize the towns may need to come back to them and have discussions. The vote on March 11th should be the highest number. The number can only be reduced after the vote, not made higher.

They will add some information on the cuts they are making, but not specific positions since conversations need to be held. They will give general areas that will be cut. Mrs. Grill expressed wanting to know the specific cuts so the school committee is not voting blindly and could there be a potential for an executive session. The cuts they are proposing are very mindful. Last year the cuts were more publicized.

Boylston needs the vocational allocations for Assabet for current students. Member communities get spots first at Assabet. There may be opportunities for students, but not necessarily in 9th grade. Boylston has roughly 10 students involved. This upcoming year Berlin will be at 44. Mr. Osborne will get the information if there are other vocational school students.

Ms. Karen McGahie shared that based on estimated new growth Boylston would potentially have \$500k for BBRSD to work with, which includes Tahanto capital. Ms. Mary Porter explained Berlin new growth is estimated at \$200K and that their revenue is dropping, which puts the town in a difficult position. Last year, they funded around \$832k versus Boylston at \$500k, with a much smaller number of students. She explained that they could not do that kind of number to the taxpayers again. It could be a potential 10% tax increase that is not feasible. Ms. Porter had

concerns about the percentage breakdowns from the FY25 budget. Mr. Osborne explained the budget doesn't relay perfectly to the assessments. He explained how the budget last year played out and what he worked with when he came on board. The goal this year is to come together on the vote the school committee makes and then come together after with the towns and see what can be done. BBRSD was directed by DESE on how to proceed.

Ms. Porter noted the towns cannot spend more than what they vote on. She asked for BBRSD to go back and look at the district allocations in FY25. She felt the potential number for BBRSD should be around \$200k-\$300k. Berlin has $\frac{2}{3}$ the students and $\frac{1}{3}$ the population. Mr. Osborne noted that there were areas with some costs that were allocated just to Tahanto versus two all three areas of the region. BBRSD has had the auditors in and they are still trying to figure it out. Ms. Porter expressed concern with building this year's budget from FY25. Mr. Osborne noted BBRSD is not just carrying numbers over from FY25. BBRSD is continuing to find ways to cut in every department line by line. Ms. Porter commended the transparency they have been receiving, that they previously had not. Ms. McGahie explained BBRSD comes up with a budget that works for them and the town lets them know what they can contribute. Both towns wanted to fix last year's number.

Mrs. Grill explained the errors during town meeting last year. The school committee voted not to change the assessments in December. They did not change what the town was giving them. What they changed is the authority of how the district could use the money. Mrs. Grill thanked Ms. Porter and Ms. McGahie for taking the time to attend the meeting.

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Mrs. Lisa Mair and seconded by Mrs. Beth Mancini at 1:42pm.

The listing of items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may, in fact, be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

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