RSD17 Budget FAQs 2025-26

Updated July 26, 2025

When is the RSD17 budget referendum and what are we voting on?

On July 8, 2025, a third referendum for the RSD17 Board of Education 2025-26 School Annual Gross Budget of **$51,348,789** will be brought to the towns of Haddam and Killingworth. This budget represents an increase of $1,530,760 or 3.07%. After revenue, grants, and fund balances, the towns of Haddam and Killingworth will be assessed at approximately $29,065,326 (59.16%) and $20,064,705 (40.84%), respectively. This is based on October 1, 2024, student enrollment, which was 1719 students.

Voting will take place at all regular local polling locations. Absentee Ballots are available from June 24th until July 8th.

You can read an explanation of the progress to date here and the updated budget here

What are some of the major increases in this budget?

- **Salaries & Benefits**
  Total FY26 salaries equal $25,521,981, an increase of $1,385,578 over the FY25 budget. Over the past two years, there has been a reduction of 8 certified FTEs and 15 non-certified FTEs. This year's budget proposes an increase of 0.4 certified staff. Finally, health insurance premiums for FY26 are estimated to contribute an increase of $129,794 to this year's budget.

- **Transportation**
  This year is the final year of a 3-year student transportation contract, with a 5% rate increase for FY26. This rate increase, combined with the McKinney-Vento federal service requirements and increased PreK-SPED and SPED transportation, is combined for a total student transportation cost of $4,742,033 or an increase of $440,004 or 10.23% over FY25.

- **Special Education Tuition**
  The proposed Special Education increase of $298,029 is due to the changing needs of our student population. Tuition costs for both public and non-public tuitions (outplaced resident students for whom RSD17 is financially responsible) is budgeted at $3,283,371 or an increase of $298,029 or 9.98%.

- **Debt Service, Long-Term Investments, and Reserve Fund for Educational Expenditures** This year, the District will invest $1.2 million in the elementary schools and $200,000 in HKIMS from its Reserve Fund for Educational Expenditures. These investments will support the completion of elementary school security camera and viewboard upgrades, launch a four-year replacement plan for outdated furniture and fixtures, replacement of a boiler at Burr Elementary School, and of the driveway and lots at Killingworth Elementary. Finally, the budget includes $893,500 in debt service payments for the 2018 HKHS building improvements.

What budget adjustments were made from the Superintendent's original proposed budget until now?

For the FIRST referendum on May 6th, the Board reduced the Superintendent's proposed gross budget from a 5.49% increase to a 4.88% increase, through the following:

- Moved Debt Service back to the General Fund in the amount of $893,500
- Increased **Reserve Fund contribution** by $600,000, for a total budget line of $800,000 (1.53% of FY26 budget)
- Reduced Audit Services Budget by $35,000
- Reduced Salary Contingency Budget by $50,000
- Reduced Emergency Repairs & Maintenance Budget by $295,000
- Reduced Health Insurance Budget by $500,000
- Reduced Instructional and Other Supplies Budgets by $25,000

For the SECOND referendum on June 6th, the Board reduced the gross budget from a 4.88% increase to a 3.98% increase through the following:

- Decreased **Reserve Fund contribution** by $277,500 for a total budget line of $522,500 (1.01% of the FY26 budget)
- Decreased Auditing Services by $15,000
- Decreased Liability/Auto/Property Insurance by $50,000
- Decreased Health Insurance by $82,500
- Decreased Retiree Pay-Out by $8,000
- Decreased Equipment by $15,000
- Decreased Other Supplies by $2,000

For the THIRD referendum on July 8th, the Board reduced the gross budget from a 3.98% increase to a 3.07% increase through the following:

- Decreased Telephone system expenses at Burr Elementary School by $20,000
- Decreased Professional Services (LEARN) by $80,000

- Decreased Postage expenses by $3,463
- Decreased vehicle repair expenses by $3,000
- Decreased Electricity spending by $18,500
- Decreased Custodial uniforms by $5,000
- Decreased Health Insurance spending by $75,000
- Decreased Student Accident Insurance by $10,000
- Decreased Supplies by $45,000
- Decreased Software by $15,000
- Decreased Professional Development by $10,037
- Decreased School Climate position by $60,000
- Decreased KES Reading Coach (.5) by $40,000
- Decreased Central Office Administrative Assistant position by $40,000
- Decreased Social Security by $25,000

How much of the budget is spent on administration; is our district "Top Heavy"?

Over **92%** of the budget is invested directly in school-based student support, and the remaining **8%** includes critical services through positions RSD17 has strategically maintained to impact the district's goals of student growth, effectiveness, and efficiency.

As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency and fiscal responsibility, the Board of Education would like to provide insight into the structure and purpose of our administrative and staff. These positions are designed to maximize efficiency, ensure compliance with state and federal mandates, and provide essential support to our schools, educators, and students. Every role is carefully evaluated to ensure it delivers value to the district, supports student learning, and helps maintain smooth day-to-day operations while minimizing unnecessary costs.

In Regional School District 17, the **Superintendent** serves as the chief executive officer, responsible for the overall administration and leadership of the district's schools. They oversee daily operations, develop and implement policies, manage budgets, and work with the school board to achieve the district's educational goals. They also play a key role in hiring and evaluating staff, providing professional development, and fostering a positive school climate. The Key Responsibilities of the superintendent include:

Leadership and Vision:
The superintendent sets the vision and direction for the district, working with the Board of Education to develop and implement policies that support student achievement and overall district goals.

Administrative Management:
This includes overseeing the day-to-day operations of the district, managing budgets, and ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to support teaching and learning. The superintendent, with support from their administrative team, is also responsible for developing the annual district budget and presenting a proposed budget to the Board of Education for review and consideration.

Personnel Management:
The superintendent is responsible for hiring, supervising, and evaluating key district staff, including principals, department heads, and other administrative personnel.They also play a role in teacher recruitment and professional development.

Community Engagement:
The superintendent acts as a liaison between the school district and the community, building relationships with parents, local businesses, and other stakeholders.

Ensuring Compliance:
The superintendent ensures that the district adheres to all applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

Coordination & Advocacy
The superintendent coordinates services and resources across both towns in the district.
They also act as an advocate for the district's needs at the state level, working with legislators and other stakeholders to secure funding and support.

<u>Certified Administrators Reporting Directly to the Superintendent</u>

- Assistant Superintendent
- Director of Student Services
- STEM Curriculum Coordinator (science, technology, engineering, math)
- Humanities Curriculum Coordinator (reading, writing, social studies, library media)
- 5 Principals (one per school)
- 2 Assistant Principals (MS and HS)

The Assistant Superintendent is a vital leadership position that brings both strategic value and operational stability to our school district. This role oversees Human Resources—a complex and highly regulated area that directly impacts every employee, every classroom, and ultimately,

every student. Key HR responsibilities to maintain our high-quality staff of 350+ employees include:

- Oversee certification, contracts, and staff evaluations
- Supports labor relations, grievances, and negotiations support
- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators and other staff positions, resulting in all teaching positions filled on the first day of school for the past three years
- Manages Human Resource functions: workers' compensation, FMLA, benefits administration, employee orientation, handbooks, onboarding/exiting staff, and state/federal reporting. Beyond HR functions, this position contributes significantly to instructional quality and operational efficiency. For example, initiatives led by the Assistant Superintendent have improved how schools support student learning and streamlined internal systems by digitizing time-consuming manual processes. In addition to these responsibilities, the Assistant Superintendent brings a high level of professional expertise to the district, holding a valid Connecticut Superintendent certification. This provides the district with an additional layer of leadership stability.

The Director of Student Services leads and oversees all special education, 504, counseling, mental health, and other student support services for the district, ensuring compliance with federal, state, and local laws. This role manages programs and placements for students from birth to age 21, including out-of-district services, and coordinates support in academic, social-emotional, and behavioral areas. The Director supervises a broad team of specialized staff, oversees department budgets and grants, and ensures accurate reporting and record-keeping. Additionally, the Director serves as a liaison with families and agencies, supports strategic planning, and plays a key role in developing equitable, inclusive services that meet diverse student needs.

The Humanities and STEM Curriculum Coordinators ensure that all preschool–12th grade instruction is aligned with state standards and supported by strong curriculum and assessments. These school-based staff lead efforts to support struggling students through research-based interventions, manage the district's assessment calendar, and oversee curriculum pacing and planning. These roles also provide direct instructional coaching to teachers and coordinate professional development to improve teaching and learning across all subjects. By monitoring technology use and guiding collaborative planning, they help ensure classrooms are both innovative and effective. Their leadership strengthens academic achievement districtwide and makes a direct, lasting impact on student success.

Other District Staff Reporting Directly to the Superintendent

- Director of Finance and Operations
- Comptroller

- Technology and Data Manager
- Facilities Manager

The Director of Finance and Operations is a key executive leader responsible for managing the financial and operational functions of the school district, including Business Services, Facilities, Maintenance, Food Services, Childcare, Transportation, and Technology. This role oversees budget development, financial planning, audits, compliance, and reporting while ensuring efficient use of district resources and adherence to legal and regulatory requirements. The position also provides leadership and supervision to multiple departments, supports principals and administrators with budget implementation, and manages risk, benefits, and procurement processes. As a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, the Director contributes to strategic planning and policy development, ensuring alignment with the district's goals and long-term financial health.

The Comptroller is responsible for managing all accounting operations in the district to ensure compliance with government regulations and best financial practices. This includes overseeing payroll, accounts payable/receivable, grants, and cash management while ensuring accuracy in all financial transactions and reports. The role supports budgeting, financial audits, and state-required reporting, and also maintains oversight of district contracts to ensure compliance with policies and funding guidelines. As the administrator of the district's financial software, the Comptroller manages system access, troubleshooting, and coordination with vendors. Working closely with finance, operations, and audit staff, the Comptroller plays a critical role in maintaining financial integrity and supporting the day-to-day and strategic financial needs of the district.

The Facilities Manager oversees the maintenance, safety, and functionality of all district buildings and grounds, ensuring they support a high-quality educational environment. This role manages maintenance staff, coordinates with contractors, plans preventive maintenance, and ensures compliance with safety standards and inspection requirements. The Facilities Manager also monitors budgets, tracks repairs and inventory, and handles administrative tasks such as scheduling, evaluations, and time approvals. Additionally, they play a key role in project oversight, snow removal, and responding to urgent facility concerns, while collaborating with district leadership to support operational goals.

The Technology and Data Manager leads the district's technology department, overseeing infrastructure, digital tools, and data systems to support both instructional and operational goals. This role manages the Student Information System, ensures compliance with state reporting requirements, and provides data analysis and reporting for state and federal agencies. They are responsible for budgeting, planning, and maintaining hardware, software, and systems while supervising technology staff and supporting districtwide technology needs. The manager also maintains district and school websites, oversees communication systems, and ensures data security and internet safety. Through strategic planning and hands-on support, the Technology and Data Manager ensures that technology enhances learning and operational efficiency across the district.

Why is the Assistant Superintendent Role Essential to Our District?

The Assistant Superintendent is a vital leadership position that brings both strategic value and operational stability to our school district. This role oversees Human Resources—a complex and highly regulated area that directly impacts every employee, every classroom, and ultimately, every student.

Key HR responsibilities include:

- Oversee certification, contracts, staff evaluations
- Supports labor relations, grievances, and negotiations support
- Manages Human Resource functions: worker's compensation, FMLA, benefits administration, employee orientation, handbooks, onboarding/exiting staff, state/federal reporting

These functions are essential to maintaining a highly qualified, well-supported staff of approximately 350 employees while minimizing legal and financial risk to the district.

In today's environment—marked by a statewide teacher shortage—having strong, credentialed leadership in this area is more important than ever. It's important to note, that with our Assistant Superintendent in place, RSD17 has opened schools with a certified teacher in every position on the first day of school for the last three school years. The Assistant Superintendent plays a central role in recruiting, retaining, and supporting educators so that students can thrive.

Beyond HR functions, this position contributes significantly to instructional quality and operational efficiency. For example, initiatives led by the Assistant Superintendent have improved how schools support student learning and streamlined internal systems by digitizing time-consuming manual processes. These improvements allow our staff to focus more time and energy on the work that matters most: educating students.

In addition to these responsibilities, the Assistant Superintendent brings a high level of professional expertise to the district, holding valid Connecticut Superintendent certification. This provides the district with an additional layer of leadership stability, as the Assistant Superintendent is qualified to serve in a superintendent capacity should the need arise. Together, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent form a leadership team that is both visionary and operationally strong, ensuring that the district continues to meet the needs of students, staff, and the broader community with excellence and integrity.

Without this role, the district would face significant challenges—gaps in compliance, slower hiring and onboarding, decreased staff support, and less capacity to manage day-to-day operations and long-term planning. It would strain our leadership team and increase risk.

In short, the Assistant Superintendent is not just an expense—it's an investment in the district's people, performance, and future.

Why is there a 5.74% increase in salaries?

The 5.74% increase in salaries is primarily due to both strategic investments in student support and necessary adjustments to ensure the budget more accurately reflects actual staffing needs. Here's a breakdown of the key reasons:

Support Salaries Increase

- The budget now more closely reflects the actual number of needed paraeducator positions, which are essential for inclusive education and individualized student support. Last year this line item was underbudgeted and this year it is appropriately budgeted for student needs.
- Registered Behavior Technician positions have been added to their own specific budget lines, increasing transparency and reflecting the district's focus on behavior and mental health services.

New and Previously Unbudgeted Positions

- Staff that was added last year but we are seeing for the first time in this budget: High school security and finance office support.
- The staff we are adding this year: .4 certified staff.
- Increased hours for academic support at the middle school level to support the change in scheduling with an emphasis on math improvement.
- Movement of positions previously funded by grants into the school budget to ensure continuity of services.
- Introduction of stipends for safety coverage at high school events.

Contractual Increases

- Most staff received 2.5%–4% salary increases, depending on contractual agreements.
- However, additional increases have occurred due to longevity and educational advancement per the collective bargaining agreement.
- In addition, new collective bargaining agreements will begin this year that ensure fair and competitive compensation. While RSD17 is not among the highest-paying districts, we are working to remain competitive by aligning our compensation with the average pay levels in comparable districts

The 5.74% salary line increase reflects a deliberate and strategic effort to enhance student academic and behavioral support, ensure staffing costs are accurately and

transparently accounted for, and uphold fair, contractually obligated compensation for staff.

What is our cost per student in our district?

The student to dollar ratio, or Net Expenditure per Pupil, is a metric tracked by the State each year to assess the spending efficiency of school districts. In the most recent State of CT report, the Region 17 (RSD17) NEP is $25,947; a lower per pupil expenditure compared to our similarly sized neighboring districts. It highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing budget constraints with the goal of providing a high-quality education for all students in RSD17. For reference, the NEP for Region 13 is $28,300, Old Saybrook: $27,652, Region 4: $29,496 and Clinton: $24,911.

Does the school budget directly take money away from other town services?

For a comprehensive understanding of how town services are funded and whether the school budget impacts other services, it is advisable to consult with the Board of Finance in your town. They are best positioned to provide insights into the interplay between the school budget and the broader allocation of resources for municipal services.

How much does it cost to conduct a school budget referendum?

Each referendum costs each town approximately $5,000-$7,000, but the question of specific amounts should be directed to the Haddam and Killingworth Boards of Finance.

Is this a Referendum for the Master Plan/HKHS Plan?

No, this is a vote for the annual school budget, not a vote for the high school project. At this point, a date has not been chosen for the high school project referendum

What is the ELA and Math Proficiency in the district compared to the rest of the state?

The latest recorded data is from the 2023-24 school year, and RSD17's District Performance Index (DPI) for ELA was 72.4%, compared to the statewide average of 63.9%. The RSD17 Math DPI was 70.4%, compared to the statewide average of 60.2%.

Why is Killingworth's share increasing this year?

Haddam and Killingworth contribute to the school budget based on their respective student enrollments as of October 1st of the preceding year, known as the "Average Daily Membership (ADM)." This academic year, enrollment shifted and Haddam has 52 fewer students, while

Killingworth experienced a decrease of 1. Consequently, Haddam's net assessment has decreased to 59.16% with a total of 1,017 enrolled students, while Killingworth's share is now 40.84% with 702. While Killingworth's share is increasing this year, it's important to understand that these numbers fluctuate yearly depending on the number of students graduating and entering Kindergarten in each town.

A more historical picture shows that in the 2007-2008 school year, the total enrollment was 2,493 students: Haddam had 1,359 students (54%), and Killingworth had 1,134 (46%). Over the past two decades, while there have been ups and downs, Killingworth's overall share of the responsibility has shifted down several percentage points. And even though this year is up, this is still not the highest Killingworth has seen in those decades. Killingworth last peaked some time ago in 2011-2012 with 45.70% of the total enrollment, while Haddam reached its highest proportion of students recently in 2023-2024 at 61.46%.

Is enrollment still declining?

There have been two recent demographic studies done; one by the NEASC committee and one by Tecton, the architectural firm hired by the district for the Master Plan. Both studies show that we should hold steady around this amount of students for a few years and will then begin to see a small rise in numbers.

What are the current class sizes in HK?

Average Class size by school and grade:

Burr Elementary School
Kindergarten - 14.25
First - 16
Second - 19.5
Third - 20.25

Killingworth Elementary School
PreK - 10.6
Kindergarten - 14
First - 16.33
Second - 17.33
Third - 21.67

Haddam Killingworth Intermediate School

Fourth - 22
Fifth - 24.67

Haddam Killingworth Middle School

Sixth - 23
Seventh - 21.5
Eighth - 19.38

Haddam Killingworth High School

Total Class Size by Year:

Ninth - 97
Tenth - 120
Eleventh - 126
Twelfth - 125