

<b>BOE Member Submitted Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. page 18: Lifeguard salary. Propose we move that to the recreation budget (\$7,000- time BRS would use pool = approx \$5,500 savings?)	The Superintendent's proposed budget assumed that the pool would be open and part of our FY24 curriculum. If the lifeguard is removed we would save \$7,000 plus payroll taxes That \$7,000 pays for the lifeguard when they are on duty for our students as part of their PE curriculum.
2. page 21: SPED line... could this potentially be offset with ECG received at the end of this year (\$167,666)? or has that money already been asked to offset costs this year?	The current FY23 budget will be increased by the \$167,500 of ECG funds that will be received in FY23. Best practices would be to budget for the full amount of outplaced tuition and BCBA services that we are anticipating to spend next year. The FY24 budget as proposed includes all costs that we are able to currently predict. We currently anticipate the excess costs for 2023-2024 school year to be significantly lower than this year.
3. page 24: EZRA nurse- propose we move this to the town budget.	The district is legally obligated to provide this funding for their nurse and it is an education related expense.
4. Regarding the Assistant Principal/ unfilled TA positions- explain how this change lines up with what was communicated last year regarding regular Ed Paras needed K-3.	Last year 10 para-educators were added to the FY23 budget. Despite our best efforts we have been unable to fill seven paras which were to be shared predominantly with general education teachers. (This is a nationwide problem.) The FY24 proposed budget suggests we take five of those vacancies and hire a split AP/SPED assistant position. The split AP/SPED assistant position rationale was fully explained during the superintendent's presentation. One of many benefits of this reallocation will allow us the capacity to train the paras we have, to ensure a better focus on improving student learning and also to increase para-educator job satisfaction and retention. As outlined in the budget presentation, the one Principal and AP model in a school this size with this many staff members is not sustainable. With the addition of the proposed split position, next year when the special education programs are evaluated we will not only have a better para-educator professional learning plan, we will also have a better sense of whether some paras may be more efficiently reallocated if we determine servicing and needs can be redistributed.

<p>5. Do we have projections of these expenses going forward, akin to our projections of increased headcount? Specifically, do we anticipate the ratio of students receiving special services to remain proportionate in a larger student body?</p>	<p>In the Superintendent's proposed budget for FY 23-24, the special education numbers and prevalence rate was shared from 2013 to 2023. Each year reveals an increase of students needing servicing, so we can expect that prevalence trend to continue. We cannot predict who will move out, or will move in requiring services and what may be on their IEP. An increasing number of new students in the last three years have a higher level of need than previously existed here. Again, in the chart that was shared, the percentage has increased, it has not stayed aligned with increased enrollment. An evaluation of the special education program will help determine if there is overidentification of students needing services, and a review of the SRBI process will help determine if adequate early intervention is being provided during general education.</p>
<p>6. If we don't have special education projections, do we have this information retrospectively to provide us with a sense of what might be coming in the future?</p>	<p>Predicting the future of special education enrollment is challenging. Students currently in an out of district placement may continue in that placement, may return to us, or may exit our school- these factors are in some cases unable to be planned for and for confidentiality purposes we cannot disclose how many students are currently in these placements. One point we are looking to gather data on in the future is: of our students with IEPs, how many of the students moved into this district after kindergarten? Sometimes people move to a district because they hear the special services offered are high caliber. It would be interesting to see if that is reflected in data in regard to how many of the students who have an IEP are with us since K and then identified at some point versus those who move to the district with an IEP. This is precisely the high level work that the special education director would be looking to do if we are able to add the split assistant position, thus freeing up some of her time to examine these trends and their impact.</p>

<p>7. Theoretically, if we could hire the open para-educator positions where would they go? Will each Kindergarten still have a full-time para-educator or will this be part-time? Will each grade have one? (echoed the need for clear narrative for the town)</p>	<p>The district currently has five paras covering six K sections. In the superintendent's presentation it was stated that administration decides based on scheduling needs where the general education positions would be assigned for 23-24. Administration sees K as the one grade level to try and sustain para education staffing if positions don't end up needing to be realigned to special education. Taking the time to train paraeducators and investing the time to evaluate the program may allow us to redistribute our current para workload thus freeing up more paras for other assignments.</p>
<p>8. Not exactly a question - but please clarify message around the \$167,000 and what % our requested increase represents.</p>	<p>In the last page of the superintendent's PPT budget proposal, for FY23, the district adopted \$16,419,701, knowing that it would need an additional \$167,500 to be granted once the ECG funds arrived. It was made clear that the true budget number for 22-23 would become \$16,587,201. That information makes the superintendent's proposed 23-24 budget a 2.98% increase over the 22-23 current year once this additional appropriation has been awarded.</p>
<p>9. Does this budget include the assumption that we are continuing with Open Choice and if so how many spaces in K?</p>	<p>The budget assumes that the district will have the same number of Open Choice students next year and that any special services needed can be provided by the staffing levels we currently have. Open Choice paras, if needed, are funded by the sending district.</p>
<p>10. What are the thoughts/plans for the end of ESSER?</p>	<p>There is one Special Ed position and one Social Worker position covered by ARP ESSER funds next year. The grant ends in 2024 so the two positions will need to be absorbed through reallocation and/or additional funding in FY25. If the district wants to retain the positions, the positions will need to be brought into the LEA budget in FY25 at a cost of approximately \$148K (benefits are already in LEA budget) Through possible attrition, if the needs still exist for these positions, these positions may potentially be absorbed at no cost to the district. Next year when the special education programs are evaluated we will have a better sense of whether these positions will need to be fully added into the next budget or if the positions can be reduced or reallocated. Minimally the district may be able to reduce each by half thus only looking for one position to fill, with a strong reevaluation and restructuring the district may be able to reduce both positions, but again, identified needs will determine this decision.</p>

<p>11 Driver #5/#4: What are the feasible alternatives to adding an additional assistant principal that would meet the ‘specific’ needs identified in the budget presentation pertaining to supporting teachers and managing the incremental increase in PPTs? Is there information on DRG B (or other DRG) schools for comparison?</p>	<p>This position has been needed for many years, the Director of Special Services is acting as a building level administrator, not Central Office level, because there is no one else to assist with PPTs and evaluation of special education staff thus we keep throwing positions at the increasing number of students with IEPs as opposed to evaluating our programs. Additional time will be needed to obtain DRG B evaluation ratios.</p>
<p>12. Does the addition of an administrative position takes away from classroom support? We have been trying hard to cut back on non-instruction costs and this is one of them.</p>	<p>This is all about instruction, this position directly benefits our students in providing much needed training and support to our teachers and staff. Without guidance, supervision, formative evaluative feedback and support, classroom instruction is impacted in a negative way as potential growth is not achieved. There is also no time for administration to work on curriculum.</p>
<p>13. Do we just need support in SPED specifically with respect to completing PPTs?</p>	<p>This additional position offers much support to both SPED and BRS administration and teachers- is not only a person to lead PPTs and 504 meetings, although that may be part of it. With this position then other administrators can also lead PPTs and 504s. This split position's support may also include low level discipline support, and oversight of specific programming like TAG, which will free up the building administration and special education director to work more closely with paraeducators and teachers, and to be in classrooms more, serving as instructional leaders, providing formative feedback and support with curriculum development and consistent implementation, as well as to complete required evaluations and promote growth of all teachers. This position will allow the SPED director to observe programs and support staff through the delivery of instruction through professional learning targeted at areas of need and growth. Finally, this additional position will afford all administrators time to participate in their own professional learning and grow as instructional leaders themselves, which will help all of our teachers learn and grow as well.</p>

<p>14. Can an options other than a new administrative position include additional 0.5 appointment for a psychologist, social worker and or a school counselor who can not only assist with PPTs but also can address the curriculum needs that the State led changes might bring about?</p>	<p>These positions are not trained to assist with curriculum. After a review of the special education program that has already been referenced, there may be the need to reduce these positions.</p>
<p>15. Driver #5/#3: The opportunity cost of an additional assistant principal comes at a cost (even though it has been argued that this is cost neutral). The cost is the loss of 4-5 paraeducators. Have we thought about alternative mechanisms to ensure we can keep this vital support structure in the classrooms? In the 2022/2023 budget, we argued the need for additional TAs/ paraeducators to support teachers in the classroom and now we are dropping that line of reasoning – what has changed?</p>	<p>Across the state and country, school districts are unable to hire paraeducators. As was answered earlier, the district is not currently losing 4-5 paraeducators as those positions are not filled and have not been able to be filled. It is not that they are no longer important. It is that there is an opportunity to take a closer look at our programming to see exactly what is needed and where the needs are best addressed. Many paraeducators who do apply leave within weeks of hire, often because they are not prepared for what the position entails. It takes resources (time and personnel) to properly orient and train people for the diverse and challenging role of a paraeducator. As structured in this 2024 budget, the support of the new position may provide the potential to reallocate these positions in 18-24 months after careful review of programming.</p>
<p>16. The number of TAs/paraeducators was a constant 15 across the school up until five years ago when the number was cut. In the last budget, we reinstated 5 of these positions and were looking to add more. Does this current budget bring this number down to around 5 or 6 in general education?</p>	<p>There remain 9.6 general education paraeducators in this proposed budget, thus kindergarten classes will still have access to para support as well as some other areas in the building based on administrative assignments. It is very important to remember the role of para-educators as well as how they are assigned. Para-educators support teachers and students in the learning process and in becoming independent learners. The most highly qualified person to be teaching our learners is the certified classroom teacher. It is not common practice to have a paraeducator assigned to each classroom for the sake of the classroom 'having a para.' Assignment of paraeducators is an administrative decision and the decision is based on student need. The contract doesn't delineate between special education and general education, so again, the movement is fluid and based on need. In many cases and in many districts the role of a paraeducator may be changed throughtout the school year based on what is best for student learning and how the student population needs may fluctuate.</p>

<p>17. Have we consulted with the teachers on their thoughts with respect to teaching support in the classroom? Do they have any suggestions?</p>	<p>Again, this is an administrative decision. Paraeducator placement and staffing is based on student need. While it is likely that many or most teachers would want a para in their classroom to help them, this is not a feasible or sustainable support that fosters independence. Again, the most qualified person to work with our students is the certified teacher. Given the current learning landscape, teachers may benefit more from having more focused feedback and time with their administrative evaluator, having additional funding in professional learning, curriculum, and a solid substitute bank.</p>
<p>18. We have also cut the line on interns. Again, once you remove this line item then it is going to be difficult to add it back in future years. How we can attract interns – the model may have to change in line with the way Colleges have changed - and maybe offer a stipend so that we can get this support in the classroom as well as have a hand in nurturing future educators.</p>	<p>There is not the ability to hire multiple interns each year as universities do not have the enrollment. Prior to this school year, BRS has never had a true substitute bank. They relied on interns and a few building subs. Thus constantly pulling teachers/specialists to cover for absent staff members. This resulted in teachers being very frustrated when pulled from their work, which was a major concern during negotiations. The teachers and administration see value in the substitute bank. We have not had to pull specialists this year. This budget permits for three interns, which is an adequate number to train each year. As a reminder, during the superintendent's budget presentation, it was clarified that universities have changed their process which results in interns needing to student teach for up to 16 weeks of time when they are placed with us. This leaves us essentially paying for an intern/sub and still having to hire a sub as needed for classroom coverage for those 16 weeks, which is fiscally not logical.</p>
<p>19. Driver #2: The ARPA/ESSER funding will disappear by the end of 2025, and we are currently funding two positions using these funds. What is the plan with respect to these positions? Will we need them going forward or is the plan to raise the budget by the end of 2024 by about 1.5%? Recall, there will be a significant increase in salaries/wages around the same time that was negotiated in the last labor contract (around 3%). This will put the budget increase for 2024 around 4-5% without anything else.</p>	<p>Regarding the ARPA/ESSER funds ending, this was answered during the budget presentation and in a previous question. The percentage salary increase for all teachers is calculated into the current 23-24 budget as that contract begins on July 1, 2023.</p>

<p>20. SPED expenditures have ballooned significantly over the past decade with another 33% increase forecast for 2023/24. To what degree are these costs predictable and how do we go about learning from our experience on this line item? I am also concerned that in order to balance the budget, we generally reduce the expenditure on the per pupil cost in general education to fund incremental increases in SPED. Can you give us a breakdown on this and show us whether this is true or not (and by how much)?</p>	<p>The total increase of all SPED accounts in the LEA budget over the prior year as proposed is 3%. We need to educate all of our students, and fair is not always equal. There will not always be the same amount spent on each child. Our SPED expenses continue to grow because the number of identified students is also rising. We are serving more kids with roughly the same size staff.</p>
<p>21. Given the discussions around network and security enhancement in the past year, where are these costs built into the budget? I see a decrease in this expenditure item.</p>	<p>We have purchased a \$36K milestone server and \$30K of new wireless access points from ARP ESSER. School security was added to the building committee charge and additional phases of the security audit will be part of the future building project.</p>
<p>22. The budget is forecasting an increase in computer equipment. I suppose this is because we are moving away from Apple products. Have you considered the lease versus buy option rather than the purchase option? The lease spreads out the costs over many years and maintains a constant budget item with on-going renewal, insurance and maintenance. Does this mean we will have both apple and IBM compatible operating systems at the same time?</p>	<p>As outlined in the superintendent's budget presentation the option of utilizing funds for Apple or Chromebook/PC products is a conversation and decision to be made at a later time. The placeholder amount is needed, and it was pointed out that the funds simply buy more product if the decision was to switch away from iPads. The superintendent's budget presentation briefly touched upon one option of transitioning products at the upper grade levels to start. Many districts have a mix of products and platforms that serve different needs.</p>
<p>23. The budget calls for an increase in substitutes. Can you please provide data on building substitutes over the past 5 years? I am seeing an increase but trying to work out why, at least over the past year or two as the number of teachers is constant over this time, which must mean that teachers are off on more days. Can you address briefly how you plan to address this?</p>	<p>The increase in the substitute line is related to the decrease in the intern line and was discussed in the presentation of the budget. It is a fact that absences have increased over the past three years. In the past, many times our teachers would report to work even when not feeling well as they feel responsible to their students. This is not a good thing. We are encouraging staff to stay home if they are not feeling well, and this may contribute to increasing absences along with all the commonly known health factors since 2020. The fiscally beneficial aspect of a substitute line and a bank of substitutes is we only pay them when they work....so if the world becomes a healthier place in the next year or two then this line may not spend all the funds.</p>

<p>24. There is a general 20% increase in teaching supplies. Inflation is running at 10% so I feel this is much higher than that. I also see the FY2022 expenditure in line with the FY2023 budget, so why the increase? In my experience, when we move from a pool and needs based budgeting to allocating funds per person, we notice a significant uptick and the perennial problem that there will be a rush of spending in the last quarter before the year end.</p>	<p>We have not budgeted per person. It was explained in the December budget presentation how we determined the funding level for each grade by using a placeholder of approximately \$700 per teacher. This is not to indicate that each teacher has only a \$700 allowance, but that there was no consistency to the number after several years of making adjustments and reductions. Allocation of funds at the building level remains a team and administrative decision and it is based on need.</p>
<p>25. MERF and medical insurance costs are not in line with prior increases/volatility. We have noticed that these costs have been increasing at a faster rate than in prior years. The bigger concern is medical insurance costs. Our policy is tied with the town, and they can afford to play a waiting game until other town union contracts come up for renewal. In the past year, we were given a payment (of around \$70,000) from the town to continue with the current policy. Will the town continue to make this payment toward subsidizing this cost in coming years if we stay with the same plan as the town? Did we check with other providers to see if we could save money on medical expenses going forward? Maybe a cooperative plan?</p>	<p>Based on meetings with our insurance brokers, the district/town have had favorable claims numbers this year. The broker has prepared us for a 5-6% increase in premium for the FY24 year. We have put slightly more than 6% in the budget model. If the eventual rates come in higher than 6% it would be a good idea to get quotes/bids from other insurers.</p>



<p>26. The excess cost grant funds promised by the town that were received late and therefore can only be applied to the 2023/2024 budget was already accounted for in the 2022/2023 budget. Thus, the 2022/23 budget should be reporting a deficit of this amount (all else equal). As a result, we have lost this amount in the current year and are applying this to the next budget cycle. I am concerned that we should not be relying on this amount unless the town establishes a funding formula/agreement that we apply on an ongoing basis. Say, 70% of the excess cost grant received in the prior year can be applied to the budget in the following year to offset ever increasing SPED costs that have been drawing funds away from general education. Can the administration please provide a chart that compares SPED costs (total) divided by general education costs (total) and a chart that shows average SPED costs per child versus average general education costs per child.</p>	<p>Excess Cost Grant funds are always received in Feb(2/3) and May (1/3). Our FY23 budget was designed to have \$167,500 of ECG funds added to our budget once they are received this year.</p>
<p>27. In the 2022/2023 budget, a STEAM specialist was cut from the budget. Do you have any intentions of reinstating this position given that many of our peers have a STEAM specialist and an additional language option?</p>	<p>One potential plan for this was outlined in the superintendent's budget presentation in December. To restate: last year a STEAM teacher/science specialist position was eliminated toward the end of the cycle. This position has not been added to the budget, however the BoE is reminded that there is a current grade with seven sections which will age out at the end of the FY24. At this point administration and the BoE may wish to discuss adding that position or a different position into the budget if the teaching section is not needed in another grade level.</p>

<p>28. Driver #4: Energy costs are forecast to increase significantly, especially natural gas. What are the ways in which we can mitigate such increases? Are we locked into long-term contracts? What is the energy cost forecast based on?</p>	<p>The largest increase in energy costs us due to natural gas being 2.5 times more expensive than in the previous year. As we use natural gas to heat our building the most obvious way to mitigate that would be to keep the building colder. The usage can vary based on how cold next winter will be. Our current natural gas rate is locked until June 2025. Once a year goes by, if rates are favorable, we should be able to "blend and extend" to more favorable rate. Natural gas budget is based on average annual decathems used (provided by Spark Energy Consultant) at the current contracted price.</p>
<p>29. I noticed that utilities are expected to decline from the prior budget. My guess is its probably due to the pool being closed. Can you confirm this? What is the real cost increase in utilities (without the pool expenses) and how much are they forecast to increase? Are we on a contract for utilities and when does this end?</p>	<p>The proposed Electricity and Water budget lines are based on actual usage/expenses for the past six years and how we are looking this year. Electricity rates are locked at a very favorable rate until October 2024.</p>
<p>30. I also noticed that there is a decrease forecast for water/sewerage costs, which seems out of synch with other utilities increasing – can you explain why? If we are under contract, then please let us know when this will expire?</p>	<p>Staff is not aware of a sewer contract. Sewer is typically based on prior year usage. Due to covid, disposable kitchen products were used last year and we are trending favorable in FY23. Staff estimated based on a pre covid sewer rate and current water usage.</p>
<p>31. How are you accounting for inflation in the budget currently around 9%? Are you just going off of last year’s budget or are you building inflation into current product and service costs?</p>	<p>A combination of techniques were used. Staff always looks at prior year actuals. The last six years of actuals are readily available in Munis. For large expenses like health insurance, liability insurance and facilities maintenance contracts we get broker/vendor input.</p>
<p>32. We currently receive \$70,000 and an excess cost contribution that has exceeded \$100,000 each year from the school choice program. There have been discussions to discontinue this program, and so have you considered the impact of this contingency in the budget?</p>	<p>Even if the BOE decides to not take students in the future the current students remain, so for six more years there would be students as part of open choice, you’d lose around four each year. The cost for the paras is covered by expected revenue from New Haven, so when those student leave the budget would not then reflect an increase. Four students leaving at a grade level would not impact the number of sections at a grade level. The biggest impact would be where we apply revenue from the State to transportation.</p>

<p>33. What's the role of the SPED Director with respect to PPTs ? Is the Director of SPED the only person that attends PPTs or is there a rotation among the other administrators? Do we have a PPT teacher? Do we have a PPT Chair who can deputize from other staff?</p>	<p>Right now only the SPED director attends PPTs. Some districts have a PPT facilitator as a role, but at this time with only 2 other administrators in the building, pulling them to run PPTs is not feasible due to their respective responsibilities. A PPT chair can be put into place as an option, however, that also creates district vulnerability for requests with significant financial implications to be considered, without an administrator present. This person would then be allowed to allocate district funds. This would also mean the need for an additional teacher in the budget, as current duties cannot be given to another individual.</p>
<p>34. Who is responsible for the paperwork for the SPED Director and inputting information in CT-SEDS?</p>	<p>Currently the SPED director spends between 30 min to 4 hours per IEP to finalize, deal with issues for CTSEDS, etc. It has been a complicated implementation statewide and some of the changes and corrections that need to be made cannot be done with teacher access in the system. Additionally, this new system is extremely cumbersome for teachers and their time should be spent with students, not behind a computer. Teachers are responsible for goals and objectives, however the clerical end falls on the Director.</p>
<p>35. How many PPTs are held per student per year?</p>	<p>Some students have 1 PPT, just an annual review. Others, such as initial evaluations that move forward with testing, have 2 meetings. There are also some students who require frequent meetings (monthly or more) that last 2-3 hours each. Additionally, BRS chairs any meetings for students in out of district placements. In addition to the PPTs, the teams meet to discuss their proposed plans with each other ahead of meetings and gather information from General Education teachers. For some of these meetings, it is important that the person chairing PPT participate in this process as well.</p>
<p>36. What percentage of our SPED population is in self-contained classrooms? How many of our SPED teachers does this use up?</p>	<p>23% of the students in Special Education are in a "self contained" program. This looks a bit different for each student given their individual needs. There are 4 classrooms and 4 teachers. Given the structure of a self-contained program and the number of students who we serve, we manage to keep nearly all students in district. Our out of district placement needs is currently much lower than most surrounding districts.</p>
<p>37. Who does the 504 plans?</p>	<p>The AP conducts all 504 meetings for the school and currently 64 students have 504 plans. Some student plans require one meeting per year and other plans require much more frequent monitoring and adjusting.</p>

<p>38. What are we counting in the 500 PPT meetings for 108 students? How long is each meeting on average?</p>	<p>There are currently 123 special education students with IEPs. Each IEP is a minimum of 1 hour. As stated in Q. 3, some meetings go for 2 hours. Any time an evaluation is completed it has to be reviewed in a PPT. This includes school evaluations, parent provided private evaluations, Assistive Technology evaluations, psychiatrics, etc. Often the evaluation meetings are longer in order to review the results and modify the plans for the student. Additionally, in the spring, all students who are moving onto Amity have an additional transitional meeting. Intial evaluations are at least 2 meetings and any students entering from out of district usually require a few meetings per year.</p>
<p>39. Have we had any feedback from the teacher's union about the proposed removal of para-professionals in lieu of the additional assistant principal?</p>	<p>At this point no feedback has been received.</p>