

Bethel Board of Education Regular Meeting - Budget Workshop - Schools/Athletics

Tuesday, February 4, 2025 7:00 PM

Board of Education Conference Room E, Live Stream:

<http://devos2.bethel.k12.ct.us/show?video=763ff4de0370> Materials can be viewed at: <https://meetings.boardbook.org/Public/Organization/2425> The opportunity for members of the public wishing to make comments can attend and comment in-person or may send public comments to the Board via email or letter and it will be included as part of the record of the meeting., 1 School Street, PO Box 253, Bethel, CT 06801

1. Call to Order

Speaker (s): Policy

9326

1.A. Roll Call for Quorum

1.B. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Budget Workshop (Schools/Athletics)

3. Correspondence

Speaker (s): Policy

9326

4. Public Comment

(Please note: The Board welcomes Public Comment and asks that speakers please limit their comments to 2 minutes. Speakers may offer objective comments of school operations and programs that concern them. The Board will not permit any expression of personal complaints or defamatory comments about Board of Education personnel and students, nor against any person connected with the Bethel Public School System.)

Speaker (s): Policy

9326

5. Adjourn

BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A
February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025

#	Name - Initials	Question(s)	Answer(s)
February 4, 2025 - Schools/Athletics			
1.	BF	<p>Is a breakdown available from UHC beyond “we have a high claim rate” to show the reasons we have such a large medical insurance increase? Could you review again the reasons we had such a low increase in our medical insurance rates for this year? Did any of this year's low rate increase only delay the increase until next year?</p>	<p>We joined the partnership plan in 2016. At the time, the Board of Education had tremendous savings by switching to the plan. For many years, increases were lower. During the course of the Partnership plan the 2% Fairfield County adjustments were made. In 2023, we were looking at a 10% increase in insurance costs. This caused us to work with our unions and go out to bid for a HDHP.</p> <p>We were able to save \$2.5M by switching away from the Partnership Plan for two years. In 23-24 we realized more savings than expected which enabled us to keep the 24-25 budget flat.</p> <p>In terms of the “high claim rates”, the simplest explanation for the 33% rate increase is the loss ratio. The ratio of claims to premium is 143% (a dollar difference of \$3.2 million). This is the amount of actual expenses that were absorbed by United Health Care.</p> <p>The actual underwriting is a more complicated formula using trend, fixed costs, large claim adjustments, etc. but the loss ratio speaks for itself.</p>
2.	BF	<p>Of the 13 towns shown in the Part 2 budget presentation showing insurance health cost increases 5 are self-insured with two of those showing only 8% increases. Obviously those 5 towns feel self-insured is their best option. Should we be doing</p>	<p>This is an option that could be explored, but it would take time to really look at the full cost. It would not necessarily save money for next year's budget, the question would be a long-term goal. Becoming self-insured could have some risks. Where communities struggle the most is to maintain the appropriate levels of cash reserve.</p> <p>If we were to be self-insured we would need to fund and maintain a cash reserve</p>

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		an in-depth, detailed investigation of whether self-insurance would be a better option for Bethel?	<p>of at least 25% of total claims, which would be \$2.6M. Admin fee to the insurance carrier is approximately \$300k. We would also need to buy stop-loss insurance, which would be \$1.3M per year. In addition, it would slightly increase work for the business office.</p> <p>We have requested an estimate on self pay from our insurance broker.</p>
3.	BF	It is my understanding that at BHS we try to work with student-athletes to find substitute ways for them to compete when we do not offer a particular sport. Is there a cost to our operating budget to do so? How much? From what accounts? Do these students pay the pay-to-participate fee?	<p>We participate on joint teams for Hockey (\$5,000) and Boys Swimming (\$10,772) & Girls Swimming (\$6,130), gymnastics (assistant coach \$3592 stipend).</p> <p>Generally speaking, the students pay the participation cost associated with participating on the team. On occasion, the athletic general fund was used to subsidize the fees for gymnastics (uniforms) and skiing (\$200 for tournament registration fees).</p> <p>The funds are from the Coaches and Advisors account, transportation and the General Supplies - Sports and Clubs account.</p>
4.	BF	The last board-approved pay-to-participate fee, Oct. 2022, is \$150 per sport/\$450 per family. Are those amounts being collected this year? next year? If not board approval should be obtained.	The Board of Education did move to the family cap to \$450.00. As we have mentioned we did not move the family cap because we were having so many families providing transportation for their students. Currently, the family cap is \$300. It will be moved to \$450 next year.
5.	SC BF	What is the total cost of the additional school psychologist? Where would this position be housed? What need would this fulfill?	<p>The new psychologist would be a districtwide evaluator and would provide support to all schools.</p> <p>The cost is estimated at \$80,000 plus health benefits.</p>
6.	SC	What roles are fulfilled in the	BMS includes club advisors and athletic coaches. The elementary schools include

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		“coaches and advisors” line at Berry, Rockwell, Johnson, and the Middle School? Are these after-school clubs?	stipends for music performances, Unified Sports. The stipend amounts are listed in the BEA Collective Bargaining Agreement . All coaches and advisors are only afterschool activities, as they are being compensated for work beyond the school day.
7.	JL	Line 5201 BHS other student transportation shows a small increase, what exactly is this for?	I think this question is regarding line 5101. The cost of transportation is increasing 3% per our contract with First Student. There are minor adjustments from the 3% to bring it down to 2.8%. This line is for athletic transportation.
8.	JL	BHS shows only 6 paraeducators for the whole building, does this include out SPED programs that are off-site?	These are the paraeducators that are funded in the operating budget. As you are aware from our presentation, the IDEA grant pays for Para educators also. There are 13 total at BHS.
9.	JL KD	BMS line 6502 Tech supplies & software subscriptions are increased by 5500.00 what is this for?	The increase is funding for the IXL program. The IXL program provides diagnostic assessments, in both literacy and mathematics. It then tailors lessons for the students in specific skills. It also provides progress monitoring.
10.	JL	BMS line 4303 Equipment repair is increased from 0, is that moving things around?	Yes. Overall, purchased property services are flat year to year.
11.	JL	Across all schools I see the number of paraprofessionals is the same as last year, how do we plan for new students who will need support that arrive after the start of the school year, what line does that come out of? I know this has happened almost every year.	We hope to fund additional paras with excess cost funding.
12.	JL	In the substitute teacher line is this for building subs as well as day and long-term subs?	Yes. We moved to a building sub model since COVID. This provides stability in services to the schools. We do have to employ long term substitutes for teachers who go on maternity leaves, long term maternity leaves, etc.

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13.	KD	BHS: Why is there an increase in Prof. Development/Travel/Mileage? (line 5800)	The major increase was in school counselors. They have been doing more college visits. In addition the federal mileage rate has increased .70 a mile.
14.	KD	BHS: Why is there an increase in General Supplies- Sports and Clubs? What are the general supplies?	This account is used to purchase athletic uniforms per our uniform replacement cycle. The cost of uniforms has increased due to inflation.
15.	KD	JS: What tutor positions have been cut? What population of students does this impact? Is it all students?	Tutoring hours for literacy, math, academic support, and MLL tutors will be reduced. It will be across all areas. It will be in all schools and affect group size and/or the number of students seen.
16.	KD	JS: Why is there an increase in Coaches and Advisors? Same question for Custodians overtime.	Stipend positions increased per the teacher's contract. The negotiated increase was 2% per year. The increase in custodial overtime was to match actual spending. Custodians do overtime for a variety of reasons, including school sponsored events on weekends, snow removal, building issues, etc.
17.	KD	RS: Please explain the increase in Prof Development/Travel/ Mileage as well as Conference Registration fees. What are the anticipated conferences? What is the anticipated Professional development?	It provides more professional development opportunities for teachers. This is reimbursement for travel expenses.
18.	KD	Overall, what software subscriptions have been cut across the district? Are you referring to platforms such as IXL? Or are those platforms under a different line?	We did not cut any district wide software. The reductions primarily are in hardware. We did not cut IXL. IXL Math for BMS and Johnson is in the district Technology Budget (Tech Supplies & Subscriptions 6502). The IXL ELA subscription is in the BMS building subscription line.
19.	KD	Why is there a decrease in the cost of copier leases?	Funding was reallocated across schools to better reflect copying needs. Also, there was a slight decrease as we intend to reduce printing
20.	BF	Please explain superintendent	The Superintendent salary line corresponds to the current Superintendent salary,

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		variation of \$13,200 object code 101.1111 and secretary variation of \$7,039 object code 1214.	which was increased after last year’s budget was approved. The secretary line also reflects the current secretary wages which were increased after last year’s budget was approved.
21.	SC	Account 6502. There is a \$30, 396 increase in tech supplies and software. Why the increase?	This reflects the annual increase needed to maintain our current software platforms such as Google Workspace, PowerSchool, filtering software, MFA, and other annual subscriptions for productivity, device/system management, cybersecurity and online safety management. This increase also includes S2 service hitting the operating budget, as a multiyear contract was previously purchased under the renovations. Increased subscription costs and S2 is a 6% change on last year’s budget—with a flat Technology budget these costs have been shifted from other lines.
22.	SC	Account 5601. Why the increase in regular ed tuition of \$17,946?	We have more students attending Shepaug. Their tuition also increased.
23.	SC	Account 5100. There is a one-year increase of \$490k. Why?	This account reflects transportation, regular and special education. The First Student contract is a 3% increase. The rest is special education transportation, which include rate increases and additional students in outplacements.
24.	SC	Do we currently pay for any outside consultants for anything?	We paid for an enrollment study this year. We have not brought in any other consultants, even through the grants.
25.	SC	What dues and fees do we pay that amount to \$94k? Is there any room for reduction?	We already reduced this line as much as possible. In addition to professional memberships, this line includes fees associated with student events. The largest memberships include: C.A.B.E. \$24,397 PARTNERS FOR EDUCATIONAL \$9,420 - Reduced by approximately 1/2 ED ADVANCE \$7,381 C.A.S. \$6,475 C.A.P.S.S. \$5,922 SOUTH-WEST CONFERENCE \$5,300

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			N.E.A.S.C. \$4,470 C.A.S.B.O. \$1,565
26.	SC	Account 3203. Explain the “requirement” for an adult ed program. I know we partner with “WeRace” in Danbury.	Chapter 164 Sections 10-67 to 10-73(d), inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S) require that the adult education services described in this section be provided by local school districts, free of charge, to any adult 17 years of age or older who is not enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school program. Adult Education Instructional Programs - CT.gov These mandated services include: GED, HS Diploma, Citizenship and ESL services.
27.	SC	What “equipment and furniture” is needed for \$146k?	This includes the district Technology Equipment—one grade of Chromebooks, UPS’s and UPS batteries (power supply for network/servers), and funding to replace classroom displays and staff devices which are no longer under warranty. This includes instructional equipment at the school level, which may include science, art, music or PE equipment in addition to AV replacements (e.g. cameras, microphones). The equipment and furniture line is down \$26,593 from the 24-25 budget.
28.	SC	Account 6411 & 6412. What library books and reference materials are needed for \$27,200? Is there an itemized list?	This line covers print titles for collection maintenance and development. This also includes book repair and processing materials. Additionally, librarians purchase materials for summer reading, and multi-copy requests for literature circles and independent reading. There are minimal costs associated with magazine and periodicals to support curriculum and departments, and one copy of the News-Times. The libraries have also purchased books to support emotional intelligence and literacy programs across the district.
29.	SC	Account 6110. Can you provide the board with an itemized list of what textbooks and instructional supplies are needed totaling \$409k?	We do not have an itemized list. This looks at year to year spending for instructional supplies, including paper, office supplies, pencils, markers, crayons, children white boards, gyms equipment, art supplies, as well as Health Supplies, Athletic Supplies and Testing Materials.
30.	JA	What bargaining group the Athletic Trainer would fall under?	It is a non-union union position or “Other Staff”.

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31.	JA	<p>Would it be a 10-month or 12-month position? If 10 months, are there per diem options to support summer athletics that take place (weight room, etc)? Would our position be in line with the other trainers in the SWC? Locally.</p>	<p>The position is currently 12 months, and provides support to multiple summer programs including summer conditioning and summer coaching. None of the responsibilities would change. There are some outlier salaries in the SWC. The proposed salary would be in line with most of our area towns.</p>
32.	JA	<p>In the past, our ATC has also served as a Capstone mentor and we have used her to support students in the Healthcare Pathways program. Is this still going to be a part of that position?</p>	<p>The responsibilities will not change.</p>
33.	JS	<p>Although the overall budget for the tutors has not changed, it looks like allocations are changing quite a bit. What is driving the changes?</p>	<p>Budget was moved to reflect where we are currently providing tutoring services.</p>
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To: Honorable Members of the Committee for Children

From: Dr. Christine Carver, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Dan Carter, First Selectman, Town of Bethel, and Mr. Nick Ellis, Chair, Bethel Board of Finance

Date: February 4, 2025

RE: Written Testimony - Raised Bill 1217: An Act Providing Free Meals to All Students

Please accept this testimony in opposition to Raised Bill 1217: [An Act Providing Free Lunches to All Students](#). Put directly and simply, this is an unfunded mandate to place on Boards of Education, in arguably one of the toughest economically challenging times we have experienced as a community. If implemented, this bill would cost the Bethel Board of Education and the Town of Bethel an additional \$900,000 (\$874,290 to \$937,090 estimated).

[Current state law requires districts](#) to provide breakfast and lunch to students, prohibiting districts from providing meals if a student does not have money in their accounts. This has already proved extremely problematic from a financial standpoint, but it already sets the parameters that all students receive a lunch and/or breakfast if needed. Boards of Education are already required to absorb those costs if the balances are not paid. This year to date, we have \$21,373 in unpaid breakfast and lunch debt. If left unpaid, we are on track to have to absorb an additional \$40,300 in expenses. Again, to require Boards of Education to expand this, even to families that can afford to pay those expenses, puts an unfair burden on local taxpayers to assume those expenses.

In addition, if the State of Connecticut were considering offering grants for the program, which we currently do not read as part of the raised bill, those dollars should be diverted to support full funding of the Excess Cost Grant. Our fiscal challenges to provide mandated services to students with disabilities, which has resulted in a loss of approximately \$1.5 million in the past three years to the Town of Bethel, should be the state's priority.