

2019-20 Proposed Budget Questions & Answers



Presented March 6, 2019

1. **Middle schools: Can we get more details on where the 1 FTE reduction is coming from? (Position, not the person)**
 - a. Currently we cannot provide that level of detail. The projected reduction is based on the number of students and projected classroom needs. The actual reduction will be determined once the scheduling process is complete.
2. **How does this and other schedule changes made at the middle schools effect teaming model?**
 - a. The changes made to the middle school schedule preserve the benefits of the teaming model of a middle school, balance class size and adjust for declining enrollment.
3. **Can we receive additional information on the changes to MS schedules and proposed changes to ELT time?**
 - a. The administration will begin to roll out the changes to the middle school schedule over the next few weeks. There is a joint staff meeting scheduled with both schools for Friday March, 8th as the next step in the process. We hope that beginning the scheduling process this early will allow for us to address any conflicts.
4. **Can you provide average class size projections at the middle schools for core academic classes?**
 - a. Currently we are planning for classes no larger than 25 with anticipated range of 18-24 for core academic classes. Traditionally courses like Chorus and Physical Education have run higher.
5. **I understand that class size at the high school is hard to report on since schedules are not complete for next year. Is there is any information you are able to share on this?**
 - a. Currently it is too soon to project class size at the high school. Course registration is in the final stages now. The changes being made to the registration and course selection process should help create more balanced classes, but nothing in this budget process will impact class size directly.
6. **How is it that the high school is adding courses that do not require additional staffing?**
 - a. The amount of students enrolled in the high school is remaining relatively flat. The course selection and enrollment process will dictate which courses will actually run and the administration will be able to decide the minimum and maximum class sizes.

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7. Will we be getting more details regarding Alt Ed, how this will be accomplished?

a. We expect that, should we be able to move forward, there will be a dedicated presentation in the next two months. Currently we are assessing the plausibility of repurposing the house on the high school property to function as an alternative high school.

8. Transportation is up even though we reduced a bus, can we assume that is special ed related?

a. Bussing costs for special education rose \$230,000 in unbudgeted expenses for this school year. Those costs are incorporated as part of the increase to the 2019-2020 proposed budget. In addition there was an increase in the number of students in our transition program and transportation for expelled students that contribute to the cost increase. The reduction of the one bus is from general transportation. The district will receive 18 new buses next month and another 12 next year as part of our contract and will not add additional cost. As a region we continue to seek efficiencies and mitigate the rising costs of transportation services.

9. I am not familiar with recommendations that were made by NEASC. Would it be possible to get a summary of those we have taken on board and those we may be postponing?

a. NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Accreditation organization. The accreditation process happens every ten years and our last one was in 2014. The full report is on the high school website:
<http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/160/162/172/NEASCPomperaugHighSchoolFinalReport.pdf>

b. The NEASC staffing recommendation that we did not include in this year's budget was specific to the Library Media Center and the addition of another certified staff member. While we agree and support the recommendation, this year we were not able to make that a priority.

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10. What is the special education contingency and how have we fared over the past few years? Have the unexpected costs been consistent, or even increasing (or decreasing) linearly, or if they are proportional to the size of the incoming class?

- a. For the 2019-2020 school year the contingency for special education costs is budgeted at \$230,000, this is higher than the \$200,000 budgeted for the current school year, but less than the \$300,000 in 2017-2018.
- b. Unexpected costs have ranged from \$200,000-\$500,000
- c. We have not seen a clear relationship between the number of students and the amount of unexpected costs.
- d. While we have seen a trend where cost increases are in the 10-14% range each year, it has not been consistent or predictable in its application and there is no direct correlation to enrollment.

11. You said the budget does not include an elementary administrator, but I am curious to know where we would like to add an administrator and what their role might be.

- a. Long Meadow is the largest of our elementary schools and is where our preschool program is located. While this is an area we monitor, we believe that we can continue to provide appropriate supports under our current structure.

12. What assumptions have we made regarding Excess Cost and Education Cost Sharing?

- a. We budget Excess Cost at the rate of 66%. Historically the state's reimbursement amount has ranged from 65% to 70%.
- b. The Educational Cost Sharing Grant goes directly to municipalities and is not reflected in the school budget.

13. I would infer that the 2 middle school teacher enrollment-based reductions are in special education? Is there a reduced need for special education instruction at the middle schools?

- a. While the student needs for next year have not been finalized, at this time we do not expect any reduction in special education teachers and there are no proposed reductions in special education services.

14. Under classified personnel, the budget for BCBA is \$0 for 2018-2019 and "Adj Budget", but I thought that was approved in referendum last year. I'm just not sure it should show up as part of a net increase this year if it was part of last year's budget?

- a. The BCBA funds were moved from certified to non-certified. While the position does require a professional certification, it is not certified by the State Department of Education.

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15. There were several increases for substitute pay, and I wonder whether that was because of an increased need for substitutes or whether that is just to account for a rate increase?

a. The increase in the substitute pay line is a correction for the three year historical trend which has been short each year. We are now tracking substitutes monthly to try to dig deeper into any specific cause. Currently there are a variety of reasons and not a single driver.

The increase in the certified sub pay is based on a three year average of actual use.

The substitutes for professional development have also increased as the district works to build capacity around several major instructional and curriculum shifts.

16. There were several reductions in Extra Pay/Tutors for SIP tutoring, pretty much across the board, and I wonder what the rationale for that is?

- a. Some of the reduction does come from the SIP tutor line based on actuals. In a climate of almost full employment, these positions are often hard to fill.
- b. The other reductions to that line are in Homebound Tutoring, Lifeguards, based on three year actuals, and the sunset of the Early Retirement Payout of \$397,000.

17. I see we have made some reduction in custodial overtime, and I think we did this last year as well. I guess I would like to understand when overtime typically happens. If it takes overtime hours to disinfect lunchroom tables during a flu outbreak for example, that is a trade-off I'd want to be aware of.

- a. Overtime happens for several reasons:
 1. Emergencies between 11pm and 5am or on some weekends
 2. Staff illness
- b. Actual overtime costs are down over the past three years. The main reason for the reduced cost in overtime is an increasingly deep substitute pool. The increase in available substitutes means that there is less of a need for our custodial staff to work additional shifts.

Questions asked at the 3.6.2019 BOE Budget Workshop Meeting

1. Mr. Suriani referred to the School Community Highlights slide and asked the elementary principals how does this directly correlate to the budget? Mr. Romeo replied that this slide represents what the elementary schools were able to fund with the current budget, but if the new proposed budget was not approved these would be items that they would have to consider cutting.

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2. Mr. Suriani asked if the Superintendent's budget has an addition of a social worker at the elementary level. Mr. Smith responded that the current proposed budget has the possibility of shifting the contracted services away from Spectrum and have 2 FTE social workers employed by the Region. This would be a 0 net increase because the money used to pay for Spectrum would offset the cost of 2 FTE Social Workers hired in the Region. If this were to happen 1 social worker would be k-8 and the other would be at the high school.
3. Mr. Brennan asked where does the social emotional learning and restorative practices fit into the traditional learning of reading, writing, math, social studies and science? Mrs. Pellicone responded that elementary students are in a singular classroom all day and their elementary teachers are charged with teaching all of these subjects everyday and the social emotional feeling of community are woven into their lessons.
4. Mr. Watson asked about the replacement of equipment in elementary schools. Mr. Romeo responded that they feel supported when they come forward with equipment that needs to be replaced, especially when it is a safety concern. The "risers" at MES do need to be replaced and that cost was built into the MES budget, but the rest of the elementary schools are ok.
5. Mr. Watson asked about the class size in 5th grade at MES if the 1 FTE teacher is not approved for 2019-20 budget? Ms. Pellicone responded that currently the 4th grade class has 2 sections with 24 and 24 students. She continued to state that historically over the summer 5th grade enrollment goes up. Mr. Smith clarified that the budget proposal is moving a teacher to grade 5 for next year making classroom size at 16.
6. Ms. Dwyer inquired about the phonics program for 2019-20 school year. Ms. Pellicone responded that the phonics program that elementary is currently using is from Teacher College and it directly correlates with the reading and writing units of studies. It might not look like a "traditional" phonics program but the purpose of the program is to teach the phonics but also emphasizes transfer. The first grade piloted this program this year.
7. Ms. Manzo asked if there is still a "Readers and Writers" workshop. Ms. Pellicone responded yes. Teachers College is the provider of the "Readers and Writers workshop" program.
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15. Mr. Surini asked about the impact of last year's elimination of a music teacher had on the elementary schools? Mr. Romeo responded that the elementary schools do miss having an "in house" music teacher but they have adjusted their schedules. Going forward they are planning on making it a k-8 schedule adjustment instead of just an elementary. This will allow a music teacher per building for next year.

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16. Ms. Connelly inquired what an ideal Middle School Advisory Program would like. Mr. Bernardi responded that ideally 1 advisor for every 8 – 10 students over a course of 3 years. They would meet regularly and their lessons would have focus and purpose.
17. Mr. Cookson asked if the Middle School principals felt that both communities will support these new ideas that we are approaching in teaching. Ms. Murphy feels very positive about the changes and feels that the Region is being very innovative.
18. Ms. Manzo asked for clarification between the Bridges Math Program vs. Big Ideas. Mr. Bernardi responded that Bridges is the actual math curriculum and Big Ideas is the resource which is supplemental materials.
19. Ms. Dwyer asked if the Region's technology investment need to include more than just Chromebook Carts. Mr. Bernardi responded that the Chromebook carts that were in added to the RMS budget were added to have more consistency with availability to the students.
20. Ms. Manzo asked who provided the 3D printers, robotic arm, and other technology at RMS. Mr. Bernardi said the PTO has provided all of the funding for extra technology.
21. Mr. Suriani asked how the MS schedule was working with the reduction of 1FTE music teacher. Ms. Murphy replied that the MS schedule is working out well.
22. Ms. Dwyer asked the middle school principals their thoughts about on-line resources? Both principals agree that on-line resources are necessary for innovative learning.
23. Mr. Cookson asked if the middle schools have enough money to fund technology. Mr. Smith responded that no, there is never enough money; it is all about prioritizing where we want to place our funds.