

Legislative Council Questions March 15, 2017

- 1. Page 4. ECS Grant assumption is 0.00 change while Governors proposal is a loss of \$187,965. Should we assume this decrease and reduce by like amount?**

Yes, we have taken in account the loss of revenue for the current and proposed budgets.

- 2. Page 15. In the HS 15/16 to 18/19 we lose 93 students with the decline going to 481 in 24/25. This would clearly indicate overstaffing at the HS. Please explain why there should not be severe cuts there.**

October 1st enrollment – Newtown High School was at 1681 (prior to any early graduations). The enrollment predicted for 17-18 is 1638, which is a loss of 43 students. In a large high school with increasing academic demands and legislative mandates, next year's loss is not significant. However, the High School is cutting 1.0 FTE as a result of the decline.

Additionally, and as part of current legislation around high school reform, NHS students will be asked to complete a Senior Year Experience as an authentic way to meet school-wide learning expectations (NEASC) in critical thinking, written performance, spoken communication, and information literacy -- necessary to prepare them for college and career. This will require staff members to work with students in a mentorship role as students select senior "capstone" projects on their journey to graduation.

There is also the potential for this to increase the number of credits for students, but this will only be in pilot form until the Board of Education has the opportunity to review this in full.

We continue to fully support our high school students so they remain academically competitive and able to demonstrate 21st Century skills as capable, independent learners. This included the addition of new courses in the last two years (such as new AP Computer Science Principles, Engineering, Digital Academy), which utilize the skills of our teaching and support staff in new ways.

We have been mindful of class enrollments, and our leadership team worked diligently to review class sizes for next year throughout this budget season. As the enrollment drops (through 2024-25), we will again make decisions in staffing that will be fiscally responsible but also educationally appropriate for our students so they remain prepared for college and career.

- 3. Using 16/17 budget & student enrollment cost per student is roughly \$16,600. In 17/18 we lose 152 students which should equal -\$2,500,000. While I realize costs are not 1 to 1 please explain why we should not see a decrease (including contractual obligations) especially given what we can expect from Hartford.**

Comparing the budget to student enrollment on a one-to-one basis and making the assumption that due to a projected declining enrollment of 152 students should equate to a budget reduction of \$2,500,000 comes from a complete misunderstanding of how an educational budget is developed. Factors such as contractual obligations & benefits (which make up roughly 80% of the budget), out of district tuition, energy, building repair and maintenance, and professional services (just to name a few accounts), cannot be reduced based on student enrollment. The Board of Education; however, does recognize the projected decline and based on class sizes and programs, the budget has been reduced accordingly (pg. 28, changes to staffing).

In order to better understand the requested budget increase, page 35 displays a solid representation by object. Ninety percent of the increase is attributable to contractual salary obligations and benefits. The remaining ten-percent or \$148,464 is to be used for the balance of the budget. Detail for these accounts can be found on page 37.

4. From 00/01 to 17/18 we have a 90% increase in BOE budget, almost \$9,400 increase per student with 633 less students. Please explain once again why?

Please refer to page 4 of the BOE's PowerPoint Presentation that was recently shared with the BOFinance (on BOE website). On this page you will note that (like all districts) the per pupil expenditure has increased over time. However, also on this page you will note that Newtown which performs in the top 10% decile has a per pupil expenditure below the average for CT. You will also note that the increase from last year to this year was less than the average increase in CT. Finally, you will note that the data includes (like Newtown) a statewide decline of over 5,000 public school aged children.

5. Page 155. Should we start to require students to rent their instruments?

The issue with renting is that the cost of some of the more expensive instruments is high. Music classes are classes, not clubs or afterschool activities. In most cases, this is the fine arts elective chosen by students to fulfill credits toward graduation and to remain competitive as some students pursue music in college.

The issue with asking students to buy or rent their own instruments (more expensive instruments) is educationally inappropriate. While some students purchase their own smaller instruments to own and practice at home (clarinets, etc.), other students and families might not be able to afford. Larger instruments are too expensive to rent and cannot be transported by bus as they are considered a safety hazard. All of these instruments are essential to create balanced ensembles and are considered resources for our program like textbooks, computers and equipment for other classes. Further, this would be similar to requiring a science student to pay for the cost of microscopes or other costly equipment necessary for learning.

Our band parents have supported what they can in the past regarding the purchase of instruments and other equipment, and we have continued to explore rental fees. However, the issue with our renting equipment is that it binds the district to lengthier rental fee contracts over a given period of time, which could be problematic during budget seasons in the future.

We also keep large instruments here – since students are not allowed to bring tubas (or similar large instruments) on the bus. We, therefore, take full responsibility for this equipment at school.

Each year, music equipment hardly ever makes it into the actual budget. When we can, we find other alternatives, often pushing these purchases to another year while the equipment is still holding up. This year, we felt compelled that the music department deserved instructional support.

6. Page 185. Pupil Personnel Salaries are up 10% (\$226,000)--Why?

Please see page 191 in the Budget Book, line item 111 under Social Workers, etc. Salaries for 2 Social Workers (\$69,264 and \$64,433) were added to the budget after the SERV Grant ended. However, these salaries have since been removed due to a donation from the Dalio grant subsidizing these positions. All other increases are due to both the Teacher's/Administrators Union Contract which references percentage increases for salaries.

7. Page 220. Security. In 15/16 we were told there was a plan in place to decrease security in 17/18 yet there was an increase of \$14,000 from budgeted. Please explain. Let us know what changes if any in this line item have already been addressed in the BOF recommendation.

Chief Viadero, Lt. Robinson, Mark Pompano, Pat Llodra, and I met to assess school security and reach consensus on the 17-18 plan. This was a very successful meeting. Details to the design and to the proposed plan, upon request, would be shared with the LC in executive session.

8. How much of the \$322K BOE Building projects can be funded from the \$475K (or what is late) surplus in the current budget?

We will be funding \$26,727 in the current year.

9. Given there is a \$475k surplus in the current year, shouldn't the starting point for next year's proposal automatically be that much lower as well?

It is important for all to understand that 1/3 of the fiscal year is still in front of the BOE. In addition, line item proposed adjustments (if applicable) have been calculated in the 1718 plan. Within the black ink were significant dollars that offer a one-time cost savings/avoidance such as the ability to hire at a greater savings than projected and a significant calming in special education.

10. Did the BOE reduce a bus last year? Why is there one more showing from 2015-16? How did we manage then with less when our population was higher?

In the 2015-16 budget year, there was a Board directive to remove 2.5 full-size busses. The bus company was unable to do so; therefore, reducing 1.5 full-size busses and 1 type II bus. Since this time, the total number of busses had remained constant, only the configuration has changed.

11. Was the ECS reimbursement due at the end of the month included in the \$475k projected surplus? I was not clear on your earlier response how the reimbursement has or has not been accounted for in this year's budget or next year (17/18). I believe the reimbursement was announced after the current budget was made so shouldn't there be some adjustment? If it is just goes into fund balance can it be spent to offset any current costs?

Yes, the receipt of this grant was included in the balance. Also included is the projected remaining balance of this grant which will be received in May. Each year, we calculate a new ECS budget projection based on actual expenditures. This number is always included in the various line items it affects throughout the new budget document. In the current budget, adjustments are made to the grant amount based on projections, actual expenses and receipts.

12. Is Pre-K enrollment limited to Newtown Residents? If not, is allowing outside pupils a state mandate or a district choice? Again, if not, what are the costs associated with out-of-district enrollment?

Pre-k enrollment, both special education and regular education, is not limited to Newtown Residents, however, residents are given first priority. Currently, all of our classes have been filled with residents.

The Director of Pupil Personnel has offered the pre-k program to surrounding districts, however, at this time, area districts do not have the need to utilize Newtown's program. The cost associated with a student attending from another district would be:

- Special Education student- \$12,000.00 per year
- Typical Play Partner- \$4,000.00 per year