

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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RSD 17 Community Members,

On Tuesday night, April 7, 2015, the Board of Education passed a budget request of \$40,377,144.91, which is a 3.3% increase from last years budget. This was a very difficult budget development process and the Board worked with Administration to balance the need to control spending and increases with the desire to assure that RSD 17 continues to offer excellent instruction and programming.

There were three major factors out of our direct control that affected the development of the 2015-2016 budget:

- Health Insurance costs are projected to rise by \$1,368,494 due to high claims experience over the last 12-18 months.
- Special Education costs are projected to rise by \$626,920 due to the doubling of the number of students requiring education outside the District.
- Electricity costs will increase by \$140,428 due to utility rate increases.

Combined these three factors are increasing the budget by over \$2.1 million when the total RSD 17 proposed budget increase is only \$1.4 million. As you can see, these three factors account for more than 100% of the proposed budget increase.

Out of a commitment to financial responsibility, the Board of Education and Administrative team worked hard together to limit the increase to the budget. Enrollment continues to decrease in our schools. Over the past 7 years District enrollment has declined by 369 students. Next year we are projecting a reduction in kindergarten and elementary sections due to a decrease in enrollment. This decrease in enrollment will also result in a reduction in the number of paraprofessionals. This continues a trend where our overall staffing is decreasing to better align to our current enrollment. Amidst these staffing reductions, the Board and Administrative team remain committed to instructionally appropriate class sizes. At this time, we are projecting an average of 16.5 students per class at the elementary schools, 21 per class in core subjects at HKMS and 20 per class in core subjects at HKHS. These class sizes put us ahead of most of the surrounding school districts and well within the appropriate range for effective instruction.

In addition to staffing reductions the Board voted to remove the portable classrooms at KES and HES due to declining enrollment. This will reduce all costs associated with these structures including maintenance, utilities and custodial care. The Board also chose to defer some general maintenance such as parking lot striping and curb repair while shifting other maintenance over to the capital savings account so as not to increase the operating budget.

Two of the more difficult cost savings strategies were the elimination of late bus service at the middle school and high school. The Board felt strongly that this service was a positive one for students. The elimination of these services saved roughly \$100,000, which is the cost of two teachers. This difficult decision was just one of the many ways the Board tried to keep cost reductions away from instruction and the classroom. Many school districts in Connecticut have eliminated late bus service over the last ten years. The Board added hours to both the after school monitor at the middle school and the after school library program at the high school so that students would have a place, if needed, to wait for their ride home from after school activities.

The proposed 2015-2016 budget supports educational excellence as well. As mentioned previously, instructionally appropriate class sizes continue to be a priority. In addition, this budget supports exciting new technology at all levels including a new iPad initiative at all three elementary schools. Readers and Writers Workshop will continue to be an instructional priority in grades K-8. At the high school two exciting new Project Lead the Way courses, Biological Engineering and Computer Science will be offered. We will also be exploring new and exciting opportunities for students in the fine arts to demonstrate their skills.

One of the more complex instructional initiatives supported by the budget is our work in the area of World Language Instruction. This program has been under evaluation over the past few years. We believe we can develop an exciting new model that will offer students the opportunity to reach higher levels of world language in middle school and high school and even the possibility of additional languages beyond the French and Spanish offered now. This change involved the difficult decision to eliminate world language at the elementary level but will offer students the opportunity to increase their language acquisition by as much as two years' worth by the end of eighth grade. Our goal in this program is to make our world language program a statewide model of excellence focused on development of all students' ability to communicate effectively in a second language and sometimes even a third. The elementary schools will be developing curricular strands across the subjects to assure that we are exposing students to many cultures, languages and global awareness.

One of the most exciting educational initiatives supported by the proposed 2015-2016 budget is the makerspace initiative. Makerspaces in all of our schools will increase the opportunity for student self directed enrichment and exploration. These spaces will provide low-tech, medium-tech and high-tech resources for students along with access to expertise and collaboration so that students can pursue self directed research and development in the area of their passion. Our vision for these makerspaces will extend opportunities in science, mathematics, technology, computer science, video production, fine arts, culinary arts writing and engineering. This initiative will support all of our students acquiring key 21st century skills while developing individual and collaborative creativity in the areas of their interest.

The Board of Education and Administrative team along with all the professional staff and faculty of RSD17 remain committed to educational excellence for all of our students. If you have any questions about the proposed 2015-2016 budget we encourage you to reach out to Superintendent Thiery at hthiery@rsd17.org to discuss any questions you may have.

Best Regards,

Sue Twachtman
Chairperson
RSD 17 BOE

Howard Thiery
Superintendent
RSD 17