

Board of Education Workshop

Thursday, January 14, 2021 9:00 AM

Via Zoom *Members of the public can view the meeting by watching the live stream on the WPS YouTube channel. Please view the Google Calendar on the District website for link and agenda., 24 School Road, Weston, CT 06883-1623

I. Call to Order, Verification of Quorum

II. Board Workshop on FY 22 Budget Request

III. Adjournment

FY 22 BOE Budget Questions & Answers
DRAFT -- 1.13.21

NB: Effective 1.13.21 -- This is a working document, with material being added from 1.13-1.19 as outlined in the Introduction.

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Education has submitted a set of questions as of January 12, 2021 regarding the FY 22 Recommended Operating and Capital Budgets. The submitted questions are ones most likely requiring a written response, both for clarity and to inform the public process. The administration will proceed with preparing written responses to these questions. (

The submitted questions and the responses are organized by themes and categories. They are presented as follows (not priority order) : **[PAGE NUMBERS TO BE ADDED WHEN FINAL.]**

- Overall p.
- Student Outcomes p.
- Enrollment p.
- Digital Learning & Technology p.
- PPS/SPED p.
- Staffing p.
- Stipends p.
- Substitutes p.
- Health Insurance/Benefits p.
- Human Resources p.
- Legal p.
- Facilities p.
- Capital p.
- Transportation p.
- Revenue Sources p.
- Other/MISC p.

Each question or set of questions are assigned to a specific administrator. The administrator is responsible for drafting the answer, or turning to the correct individuals to have the information drafted. Please note that a single answer may be used to address multiple questions within a given theme or category. That decision is left to the assigned administrator.

The draft material needs to be submitted via this document to Bill McKersie for review and editing. Whenever possible, please load responses directly below each question or sets of questions (if one answer addresses multiple questions).

Draft material must be back to Bill by noon on Tuesday, January 19, with the final document due to the BOE by the end of Wednesday, January 20.

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Overall

1. **BILL/PHIL** -- Stressing the budget is always a good discipline to determine the impact on the organization of further reductions in the operating budget. I would like to see what the next 1.25% reductions (not including the technology plan reductions already agreed to by the board) would look like and have that discussion with the board before we make a final decision on the overall budget. (AP)¹

Student Outcomes

2. **KEN** -- What quantifiable metrics are we using to measure where our students fall academically as compared with non-pandemic years so we can gauge whether additional resources are needed to catch students up? (MW)
3. **KEN** -- Do we have a consistent metric over time for quantifiably measuring student progress year to year? (VE)

Enrollment

4. **BILL** -- Please update the enrollment report by the WPS Administration (November 2020) on the withdrawals that have occurred during this school year. Please update from the final data captured by the November 2020 report so it is current as of January 7, 2021.
5. **PATTIE** -- WIS has a projected class size of 22.6 (5th grade) and 22.1 (4th grade). Have recent trends this academic year exceeded historic and projected growth? At what rate? How many new students have enrolled since August 2020 and is that number higher than years past? (MW)

¹ Initials accompanying each question indicate the source.

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6. **BILL** -- Please ask Milone and MacBroom to verify the accuracy of their long-term enrollment projections? Are we now where they told us we would be 5 or 10 years ago? (MW)

7. **BILL/KEN** -- Regarding enrollment sections, I would like to truly understand what is maxing out? What is the % occupancy rate in Weston? How can we get this number? It's very important for facilities and potential school building closure. (HK)

Digital Learning & Technology

8. **DiVito** -- How solid is the six year plan? What might be potential stress or risk areas? (Multiple BOE)

9. **DiVito** -- To what extent would shared services with the Town of Weston be a help financially and operational for technology? (Multiple BOE)

10. **DiVito** -- Do we participate in buy-back programs for technology? (RH)

11. **DiVito** -- What could be assigned to the capital budget versus operating budget with technology? (AP, RH)

12. **DiVito** -- To what extent should we be considering desktops versus laptops for teachers and other staff? (GA)

13. **DiVito** -- What are the financing options for the technology plan and what are the pros and cons? (Multiple BOE)

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PPS/SPED

14. **Tracy/Phil** -- Can we project the Excess Cost Reimbursement for the next five years based on historic trends? Pg. 161 (MW)

15. **Tracy/Phil** -- What is the justification for reducing the SPED tuition/settlement allowance from \$300k to \$150k? (MW)

16. **Tracy/Phil** -- As much as we talk about SPED cost volatility, the history is relatively stable. Please comment. Pg 26 Code 9205. (VE)

17. **Tracy** -- On page 23, there is a reference to a homebound teacher - is this a specific teacher? Is this overtime? (HK)

18. **Tracy** -- Did you decrease hours of school psychologist? (HK)

19. **Tracy/Lisa** -- Support model for Alternative Pathways that leads to a \$40k reduction in operating budget vs ESS. (AP)

20. **Tracy/Lisa** -- I went back to our May 18, 2020 meeting and reviewed the ESS presentation. On page 7 of their presentation, they provide the following details:
 - Current Census: 16
 - Individual sessions conducted: 134
 - Family sessions conducted: 36
 - Group Sessions Attended: 259
 - PRN Sessions conducted: 72
 - Home Visits- 11

Current Census

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The question that has been lingering in my mind since our initial discussion about the proposed WHS Alternative Pathways is about the # of participants and scalability. Our initial discussion indicated 5 students were anticipated to participate in the WHS Alt Pathways. If ESS had 16 participants as of May 2020, how are we servicing the 11 delta in the number of students? Also, what is the scalability of the WHS Alt Pathways program? How many other students can the program handle at the current staffing level? How quickly can the WHS Alt Pathways program adapt if participation changes, particularly an increase? (GA)

Staffing

21. **Phil** -- Is the early retirement incentive savings on Pg. 24, conditional on anything? (MW)

22. **Doak** -- On Page 82, there is a reduction of 1.0 for math FTE in WMS. Didn't we just hire a math teacher at WMS last year? (MW)

23. **Doak/Lisa** -- On page 115, why is there a budget dollar increase for academic assistants in WMS and WHS, but an FTE reduction or minimal increase? (MW)

24. **Ken** -- On page 117, what is the .2 FTE reduction for Gifted & Talented and how is that reconciled with a budget increase in dollars of 1.24%? (MW)

25. **Phil** -- On page 93, what is the reduction to be determined 1.0 FTE? (HK)

26. **Lisa/Tracy** -- On page 107 what is the decrease with high school counselor ? (HK)

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27. **Phil** -- On page 117 TAG is listed as districtwide? Is it only for grades 3-8? (HK)
28. **Ken** -- On page 132, ELL is a relatively new staff need. Please provide context. (VE)
29. **Phil** -- Nursing has 1 on pg 138 and 4 on page 140. Does that mean we have 5 nursing staff? (VE)
30. **Phil/Ken** --- Please provide in graph format the distribution of staff by step levels districtwide as well as by each building. (Sample of graph provided with the question.) Please provide for both certified and non-certified staff per step. (VE)

Stipends

31. **Phil** -- Non-Certified Stipends (page 156): Details of what is included in the \$180k of non-certified stipends. (AP)
32. **Phil/Ken** ---t appears that we do not anticipate stipend savings this year even though many activities did not happen this year. I would like to have a discussion on whether there will be further savings at the end of the year from this category. (AP)

Substitutes

33. **Ken** -- We have budgeted almost \$500k in substitutes for 2021/22 (page 134 in budget book). How do we arrive at these figures? Is there scope for reductions in this category? (AP)
34. **Ken** -- Please explain the strategy for staffing and budgeting for substitute teachers in the coming fiscal year? On page 23, there is a decrease of \$118,000. In past years (pre-covid) we were at \$235k and \$242k? Is that \$118,000 just transferred to the long-term substitute position and if so why? Also, on page 134, there is \$29k allocated per school which is lower than in all pre-covid years? (MW)

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- 35. **Ken** -- We need to discuss strategy what happens when a class has no available substitute teacher? (HK)
- 36. **Ken** -- P.134 why the decrease in projected subs ? P 158 has subs ? (HK)
- 37. **Ken** -- Substitute expenses have doubled since 2017/18. Pg 134. Please explain why. (VE)
- 38. **Ken** -- A one or two pager describing the substitute model. It can be either a narrative or a diagram. (VE)

Health Insurance/Benefits

- 39. **Phil** -- Can we project our health insurance costs for the next five years based on historic trends? (MW)
- 40. **Phil** -- What percentage of district employees are at 100% FTE vs part-time? What is the breakdown by percentage of time worked? We would like to see the raw data? (VE)
- 41. **Phil** -- What is the time threshold for being eligible for benefits? (VE)
- 42. **Phil** -- How many individual employees are part-time but receiving full benefits? (VE)
- 43. **Phil** -- Pg 24 Social Security decreased. What is the driver when all other benefit costs are increasing? (VE)
- 44. **Phil** -- Pg 168. Is the Health Consultant a yearly expense? What is the scope of their services? (VE)

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45. **Phil** -- We need a more in-depth discussion of Dental Insurance; (a) moving from self-funding to a private plan? (b) risks of taking from ISF this year to cover dental costs. (AP)
46. **Phil** -- Please review the potential and cost benefits of shifting from the State Plan to an alternative health plan. (AP, MW)

Human Resources

47. **Ken** -- Do we have a hiring strategy specific to each building relative to teacher experience and age-appropriate student need? (VE)
48. **Ken** -- Similarly, do we have a strategy for retention of certified staff pre-tenure that differs from post-tenure? And how does it differ? (MW, VE)
49. **Bill/Ken** -- Where is the CREC Teacher Residency Program listed in the budget? (HK)

Legal

50. **Phil/Bill** -- Look at financial analysis and trade-off vs having in-house HR Director/Lawyer. (AP)
51. **Phil/Bill** -- I would like to see a more specific breakdown of the District's legal fees. Pg. 24 and 172. This is a 46.4% increase. How much is associated with covid-related costs? I've also noted that these costs have been increasing every year. What is driving this increase year after year? (MW)
52. **Phil/Bill** -- How much of these legal costs would have been absorbed by a within district Legal Counsel? (HK)

Facilities

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53. **Phil/Mike** -- On page 25, there is an 18.5% fire alarm system increase. Please explain? (HK)
54. **Phil/Mike** -- Please confirm cost considerations for Zenon Plan are adequately addressed in the budget. (Multiple BOE)
55. **Phil/Mike** -- Is rubbish removal cost based on weight or contracted amounts? (RH)
56. **Phil/Mike** -- How are the cleaning services with Affineco going? Satisfactory? At what rate are their rates increasing? How long is our contract term? (MW)

Capital

57. **Phil/Doak/Mike** -- What are the priority items for WMS that will absolutely need to get done in the next 2-3 years. I would propose that we have a WMS capital plan (assuming that any major renovation projects would not be started for at least 3 years) that prioritizes the items that cannot wait for a large renovation project. (AP)
58. **Phil/Doak/Mike** -- What are the most critical investments needed in the WMS to ensure that it is a safe and effective building to optimize student learning for the next few years? (MW)

Transportation

59. **Phil** -- Have the school buses all been replaced as per last year's contract? Was the rollout delayed due to covid, and if so, is there any savings we should be receiving for the delay? (MW)

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60. **Phil** -- How many FTE and job functions behind the \$200k budgeted for Bus Aides? (AP)
61. **Phil** -- Please address the cost benefits of continuing with Third Party/Contracted provision of transportation as opposed to in-house provision and management. (RH)
62. **Phil** -- Transportation is not on the org chart. Where does it belong? (VE)

Revenue Sources

63. **Phil** -- Is there risk to the 1.3 MM? (VE)

COVID-19

64. **Phil** -- P. 74 where is covid grant ? (HK)
65. **Phil** -- Are there any "COVID" savings this year we can use to prepay equipment and/or materials for next year to further reduce the 2021/22 operating budget?
66. **Phil** -- Current Services column represents current year expenditure. There are several that seem high, especially given COVID and when compared to historicals – Athletic transportation, travel and conference. (VE)

Other

67. **Phil** -- Pg 184 Contracted services increased from 28k in 2018 to 186 for this cycle. Please explain the trend. (VE)

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68. **Phil** -- Pg 61 of the Public presentation shows Open Choice as an identified reduction by the Administration. How can this be a reduction if it's a grant that is being used? (VE)
69. **Phil** -- Pg 32 – can you add actuals to the historical table? (VE)
70. **Phil/Bill** -- If possible this year, and if not feasible then for next year, I would appreciate seeing a line item for sustainability initiatives. If we can create 5-year budget projections, then it would be nice to track sustainability investments and associated savings. (MW)
71. **Phil** -- On page 136, what is turnover savings? (MW)
72. **Phil** -- Has the copier center transition been cost effective? Looking at page 196, outside printing costs seem minimal and predictable. Do you expect that to continue post-covid? (MW)
73. **Phil** -- P. 26 Equipment increase. Please explain. (HK)

END