

**Board of Finance
February 8, 2016**

1. World Language Program: Is this program implemented by curriculum? Is the plan to grow the program to K-4? If so, is there any repetitive instruction at RIS? If not, will we need a new curriculum and what is the cost associated with that?

Grade K Spanish is taught using curriculum, as are all courses offered in Newtown Public Schools (NPS). The plan is to expand World Languages across K-6 steadily over subsequent years to meet our goal of building a robust K-12 program of language instruction. This will be a hallmark of high quality educational programming at NPS that prepares children for the increasing globalization of our society. Once the program extends into Reed Intermediate School, it will not be duplicative of existing courses at that level, as World Language currently is not being offered in the school day. New curriculum is needed whenever a course is added in any program. The curriculum for kindergarten Spanish was obtained at zero cost through collaboration with a local district that shared its curriculum. Similarly, future costs for curriculum as the program expands up to grade 6 will result in no funding increase, as all curriculum projects are placed in rotation on a five-year plan for curriculum development. This maintains expenses for such work.

2. Gifted & Talented Program: Is this a program that evolved from a practice of identifying gifted students? If not, what were we doing before for gifted students? If so, please identify the specific resources added and compare to what we were doing before. How do these programs measure up in terms of what other districts in our DRG are doing? Are these effective programs?

Newtown Public Schools presently provides services to gifted students in grades 4-8, who are identified using multiple criteria, including but not limited to test scores. In the proposed 2016-17 budget, there is an increase of \$ 1100.00 in Instructional Supplies for eighth graders from Newtown Middle School to take the PSAT as a pre-high school experience, for grades 4-8 students to participate in the National Word Master Competition, and for supplies used by students in problem-solving activities as part of the curriculum.

Over the past four decades, the continuum of gifted education services in Newtown Public Schools has vacillated, starting as a robust program, later experiencing sharp reductions, and most recently returning to a rebuilding phase to better meet the needs of these students. Presently in 2015-16, the program serves 97 students in grades 4-8 who have been identified as gifted and offers enrichment opportunities to all "typical" students across grades 3-8 in the context of the regularly scheduled school day.

Discovery was the earliest iteration of gifted programming in Newtown Public Schools, later known as Gifted and Talented Educational Services (G.A.T.E.S.). From the program's inception in the early 1970's continuing into the early 1990's, gifted students in grades 4-12 were serviced by 4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) teaching positions: 2 elementary school teachers, 1 middle school teacher, and 1 high school teacher. In the early 1990's through 2002, the program experienced a reduction to 3 FTEs yet continued to serve grades 4-12 with 2 teachers dedicated to elementary schools and 1 teacher dividing responsibility between middle school and high school. From 2003 – 2006, the program experienced its most austere reduction with 0 FTEs allotted, and no services offered in any grades during the school day; rather, students were serviced in before- /after-school programs staffed by 2 teachers without specialized training in gifted education. From 2007 – 2014, 1 FTE was allocated to the program with 1 teacher providing service to gifted students in grades 5-8; services were discontinued for high school

students, and grade 4 gifted students received services in a before-/after-school setting. In 2014, the program was redesigned and launched as Project Challenge, providing 3 FTEs to service grades 4-8 gifted students: 2 full-time teachers in elementary schools, 1 part-time in intermediate school, and 1 part-time in middle school. In addition, to servicing gifted students, for the first time ever and due to the new program's design, Project Challenge teachers are extending enrichment opportunities to reach all students in grades 3-8.

At a recent BOE Meeting on November 4, 2015, teachers presented a review of Project Challenge to explain the steps taken to enhance the program, the selection criteria, the instructional approach and learning opportunities, and the program's adherence to Connecticut Statutes, as well as the standards of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). With regard to the effectiveness of gifted programs, research dispels the myth that gifted students can do well enough on their own without differentiated educational experiences to provide appropriate challenge for these learners. In fact, research indicates that without special services and programs aimed at moving gifted students toward growth, these students will experience a leveling off of their abilities. Additionally, research points to the complex social-emotional needs of gifted students which teachers in such programs are best positioned to meet with greater understanding and an array of strategies. In 2015-16, Project Challenge teachers have developed and launched a parent education workshop series to equip families with research-based strategies, information, and resources for nurturing gifted children to reach their full potential while addressing their social-emotional needs.

3. Technology: State Dept. of Ed Comm announce a \$10.9 m grant of which Newtown will receive \$103,700 - how will that money be applied? Did the budget request presume the grant money or not?

In October of 2015, when the budget was originally compiled, the award of the grant was an unknown.

This grant was originally applied for in February of 2015 with the anticipated grant period of April 2015 – June 2016. The grant was not awarded based on the initial filings but instead the State requested all applications be re-written to meet additional requirements. The rewrite was submitted in July of 2015 and the new anticipated grant period was from August 2015-June 2016 however, the State Bond Commission did not consider this action until their January 2016 meeting.

Several equipment items included in the 2015-2016 budget for replacement were deferred when the grant was not originally received in August. We are in the process of obtaining quotes for the purchase of these items. It is anticipated that \$50,000 of the grant funds will be available to offset next year's equipment request. The budget book pages were updated on February 5th to reflect this offset.

3a. Technology: How are we leveraging technology to operate more efficiently? How will the budget reflect these actions?

If you look at staffing in the District in areas other than those that provide direct services to students, you will find that over the years, there has been very little change. At the same time, the responsibilities and requirements for these positions has continued to grow.

We have experienced small changes in staffing with large changes in demands for collection, evaluation and, dissemination of data. Additionally, the demand for facilities maintenance and security has grown.

The budget book is an example of how we have become more efficient through the use of technologies. We have been able to leverage the features of the Phoenix accounting software allowing for budget information for the individual cost centers to be entered directly into the Phoenix software. This not only saves the duplicity of action that had occurred in the past where the building staff compiled their needs and sent information to the Central Office where it then had to be entered into the system but, also allows for real time updates to be available at the building or cost center level as the budget is discussed and refined. The data is then further linked to the Excel forms that feed the PowerPoint which generates the budget book pages. Without these efficiencies, a budget book with this much detail could not be generated within the timeline constraints.

Some of the other efficiencies across the District can be seen in the areas of:

- Business operations –
 - Requisitioning – eliminating a form having to be completed by the cost center and then re-entered by the Business Department
 - New employees application process - streamlining the process for submission and review and, providing an ease of access to historical data on openings and applicants
 - State required filings completion – adding ease of accessing and compiling needed data
- Communications
 - Parent communications – facilitating more timely communications as well as eliminated the cost for mailings
 - Communication between schools and to staff - facilitating more timely communications both via voice and email
- Teaching and learning
 - PD offerings – allowing the District to extend its offerings to staff through the inclusion of online offerings and eliminating some of the costs incurred for travel
 - Curriculum documentation – providing easy access to up-to-date curriculum documents and District created sample lesson plans
 - Information access – allowing easy access to the vast amount of up-to-date information for incorporation into lesson plans
- Building and Grounds Maintenance
 - Work order tracking – facilitates building requests submission and allows for more efficient scheduling
 - Monitor heating systems – allowing for easier remote access and adjustments and, providing an awareness of issues
- Security
 - Monitoring building - allowing a small security staff to have eyes throughout the building
 - Controlling access – allowing doors to be locked and have record of entries during the school day
 - Track building visitors – providing record of who is in the building at all times
- Technology
 - System software repairs – using an imaging software so operating systems and software do not have to be re-installed from scratch

- Work orders – facilitates the preparedness of technicians when they are dispatched for a repair as well as allows for more efficient scheduling
- Account creation – automated the creation of student network and Gmail accounts

We continue to look for ways to improve efficiencies. Areas that we are currently evaluating are:

- the submission of employee timesheets in digital format
- the printing needs in the district and controlling costs through the use of monitoring software
- the submission of the required annual forms by parents through the parent portal
- the creations of accounts for staff in applications, network and Gmail

Even with increasing demands placed on technology, the technology department staffing has remain constant. The only addition made was for a database support position and this was not due to demand but instead due to the need for redundancy in skills to ensure operations in the case of staff turnover. The absence of a need to increase technology staffing in and of itself speaks to the efficiencies of the department.

In order to continue to take advantage of these and other efficiencies, it is important that technology equipment works consistently and well. It is also important that software and contracted services that we use to maintain and support applications are funded.

4. Class sizes: In RIS, w/ regard to reducing class sizes from 24-25 to 22-23, if we maintain class sizes, is there a cost savings? If so, what are the measurable benefits of a class w/ 22 students as opposed to 24?

Maintaining the current staffing of 14 teachers (7 clusters) in fifth grade will allow for class sizes of 21-22 for the group of students most highly impacted by 12/14. A reduction of a cluster at this grade level would increase class size to 25+. More students means less time to direct toward students' and families' needs. Moving to such a large class size in 5th grade would be a significant shift in the class size that has been maintained for this group of students, particularly those from SHS, during the past three years.

Currently in fifth grade there are 341 students set to be received by 16 sixth grade teachers (8 clusters). A reduction of one cluster would mean class sizes of 24-25. The concern here is around the number of students we typically enroll between the end of fifth grade and the beginning of sixth due, in part, to several area schools that are K-5. Last year, we had 342 fifth graders on our June enrollment report. One the first day of school, that number had grown to 357. This is not atypical. Should we gain 15-20 new sixth graders while reducing the number of teachers from 16 to 14, class sizes would exceed 25 students. Given the social/emotional/behavior needs of the current fifth grade class, this would not be recommended. My recommendation would be to hold off on the reduction of clusters until the following year, which will keep class sizes in fifth and sixth grades balanced and more manageable.

5. NHS: Why is there an additional nurse?

The additional 0.5 nursing position at NHS for 2016-17 brings the NHS nursing staff to 2.25 for an estimated enrollment of 1663 students. National (NASN) guidelines recommend a minimum of one school nurse per 750 students (for regular ed students). The NHS nursing office sees between 70 - 90 students on an average day, including a significant number of students with complex medical needs.

The 0.5 nursing position represents half of the nursing position which is currently assigned to the STARR program. STARR will be closing it's doors at the end of this school year due to declining numbers. I have

asked that the STARR nursing position be reassigned to NHS to bring staffing there in line with the other district nursing offices.

6. Special Ed: Do we have an understanding as to the driving force behind the 10% increase?

- Outplacements
- More students with special education needs-we have had about a 6% increase each year on average over the past three years, using October numbers from the past 3 years that Sally has provided. This has resulted in a need for more special education teachers, supervisors of special education, etc.
- Students’ needs have changed- even despite the increase of students identified, there have been obvious shifts (changes/increases) in services students are requiring (i.e. 1:1 support, tutoring, direct teaching of reading programs, consultants, outside assessments).
- Families moving into district with significant special education needs.
- Litigation/Legal fees

6a. Is there anything we can do as a district to bring some services back to the district for cost savings? How does our district's increase for spec. ed compare w/ other districts?

- Self-contained programming for students with specific behavioral needs
- Newtown Public Schools are consistent with trending in CT.

7. Transportation: Why is ridership up when enrollment is down? Do we have specific breakdowns of ridership by bus/route and how those figures have changed over the course of the contract? Do we audit All Star and, if so, have there been any inconsistencies recognized?

The table below represents the percentage of riders to enrollment and how those figures have changed over the past year. When comparing this year to last year, you can see that enrollment has declined yet ridership has increased. The first count for 2015-16 was done in September and then second was received this past Friday.

		First Tier			Second tier				Third Tier			
		Enrollment	Riders		Enrollment	Riders			Enrollment	Riders		
	2014-15	2581	1177	46%	2014-15	964	668	69%	2014-15	1385	1049	76%
1st	2015-16	2496	1348	54%	2015-16	935	726	78%	2015-16	1323	1037	78%
2nd	2015-16	2496	1202	48%	2015-16	935	655	70%	2015-16	1323	1001	76%

There are many factors that influence ridership, such as weather, sports, work, high school drivers, etc., therefore making it very difficult to explain exactly why the ridership has gone up.

