

Why Is this Budget Year Different?



Over the past decade, the entire budget increase for Samuel Staples Elementary School and Helen Keller Middle School has averaged less than 2%. So why is the 2020-21 percentage 4.24?

What is particularly interesting about the last 10 years is our contractual obligations to teachers, para-professionals, administrators and central office alone is more than double 2% in any given year. So, how has the Board of Education been able to operate with such small increases?

Student population, with the exception of 2017-18, has been dropping each year from its high water mark in 2007-08 of 1,137. The projected number next year is 885, an increase of 4 students. So, over the years and using class size as our guide, we reduced the number of teachers, thereby offsetting a portion of our total expense.

Over this same period of time, the BOE also reduced the number of administrative assistants, custodians and kindergarten para-professionals.

While unfunded state mandates caused us to increase the number of para-professionals in the area of special education, math and literacy; the net effect was our teachers and administrators successfully operated our K-8 schools with less than cost of living increases.

So, Why Is this Year Different?

Student population is no longer declining, so there are no staff cuts without negatively impacting our children's education. Our contractual obligation is 318K or 1.93% and health care cost is rising by \$226K or 1.35%. This brings the total to \$544K or 3.26% increase before any other considerations.

Special Education is expensive. It now reflects 25% of our entire school budget. One high cost area is the outplacement of children to special schools. By introducing the Junior Bridges Program in 2020-21, we can positively impact that expense. The program gives us more tools to meet student needs, thereby allowing us to keep them in district. From a dollar perspective, this falls under the category of spending \$50K today to save hundreds of thousands in the future.

In any business, there are fixed and variable costs. Over the last 10 years, the BOE has made all the variable cost reductions possible without undermining the educational opportunity that our children deserve. Keeping our schools strong will benefit both our children and our town.