

BUDGET Q & A

From the November 8, 2010 Board of Education meeting

Q. What assumptions about maintenance and capital improvements are in the budget projections?

A. Only routine maintenance costs are included in the budget projections. No capital improvement funds are included. Following a thorough inventory of our buildings and grounds, our architect will prepare a Facilities Needs Assessment which will prioritize a capital expenditure budget.

Q. What would be the savings for eliminating freshmen sports?

A. Approximately \$165,000.

Q. Why don't we do block scheduling in the high school?

A. Over the past several years, two separate high school committees comprised of veteran faculty members examined the advantages and disadvantages of a block schedule at the high school. Both committees' work ended in unanimous opposition to block scheduling. Some of the points noted in the 2002 study include:

- ETS has repeatedly refused to offer AP exams in January. Students who take an AP course in the first semester of a 4 X 4 block schedule lose much of their momentum by the time they take the AP exam in May. Schools using this block schedule have noted a drop in AP scores.
- The reading and writing load cannot be increased in proportion to the amount of time in class because students cannot absorb that much information.
- Some special needs students have difficulty maintaining focus over long periods of time. They become overwhelmed by the large quantities of information being presented and can shut down. They learn best when information is presented in more manageable time allotments.
- Students who miss a day of school on the block schedule miss more class time than on a traditional day.

Q. In an eight period day at Ridge, what will be the effect of going from five lunches down to four lunches?

A. Not much at all. We have adequate space and time. There will be 20 minutes between lunches in order for the cafeteria staff to prepare food for the incoming students. The fifth lunch

that we currently run was not a result of population or space constrictions, but for scheduling flexibility.

Q. Do the benchmark districts have elementary assistant principals?

A. In general, yes, where enrollment is greater than 500 students. For example, Princeton has four elementary schools with enrollments of 371, 285, 320, and 343. None of these buildings has an assistant principal; likewise in Hopewell Valley, with elementary enrollments of 470, 471, 311, and 448. Chatham's K-3 school with an enrollment of 430 does not have an assistant, but its grades 4-5 school with an enrollment of 609 does. Our elementary school enrollments are 608, 561, 708, and 625.

Q. Why would you recommend moving a guidance counselor from the high school over to the middle school?

A. In comparing our district with the benchmark districts, our student to counselor ratio at the high school is the third lowest, while the ratio at the middle school is the second highest. There are tremendous social/emotional issues in the middle school, and students need a great deal of counseling on bullying issues, personal interactions, and dealing with a student body that now numbers over 1,400. Dealing with seven content area classes, while physically moving through a much larger building than they are used to, can be daunting for middle school students. The middle school guidance units are designed to be delivered to students in concert with individual counseling services. Additional state testing in grades 6-8 as well as the Algebra end-of-course test requires increased management by the counselors. At the high school, the introduction of an additional component of our Naviance student system called E-docs helps add efficiencies to the college application process. The transfer of a high school counselor would add approximately 20-25 students to each counselor's caseload, including about six additional twelfth grade students (the most time-intensive level because of college applications). It brings the high school ratio closer to the mean level of staffing in the comparison high schools. As the middle school bubble of enrollment moves up to the high school, the counselor would be reassigned there.

Q. What is the timeline for administrative reductions?

A. 2011-12: Reduce two positions. Combine the positions of Supervisor of World Languages K-12 and Supervisor of Social Studies K-12 into a new position of Supervisor of World Cultures 6-12. Eliminate two elementary assistant principal positions. Cedar Hill and Oak Street would then share an assistant principal, as would Mount Prospect and Liberty Corner. Create a new position of Supervisor of Elementary Curriculum K-5 to be shared among all four schools for curricular articulation and coordination of some assistant principal duties, such as administering the several committees in each school that are responsible for Intervention and Referral Services, Public Law 504 accommodations, Bullying Prevention, Equity, Affirmative Action, etc.

2012-13: Reduce one position. Combine the positions of Supervisor of Math and Supervisor of Science into a new position of Supervisor of Math and Science.

2013-14: Potentially reduce two positions. If enrollment decreases materialize sooner than projected and the elementary school enrollment drops below 500 students, eliminate the remaining two assistant principal positions. Increase the Supervisor of Elementary Curriculum to a twelve-month position.

Q. What are the pros and cons of eliminating daily substitute teachers at the high school and sending students to a general study hall when their teacher is absent?

A. The positive is the \$50,000 savings realized and the time given to students to work on a class assignment or homework. The negative is that students would be placed in the lecture halls which then could not be used for assemblies and some combined class presentations. Student management could also be an issue with large groups.

Q. Why is the middle school team model so important?

A. The team model in middle school is designed as a ‘school within a school’ to ease the transition between childhood and adolescence, as well as to assist with the structural change of going from a smaller elementary setting to a much larger building. Students are assigned to a team of teachers who are provided a daily team planning time in order to collaboratively develop lesson plans, plan units of instruction which integrate all subject areas, and discuss the individual needs of students within the team. The middle school program fosters maximum development of students’ intellectual, physical, social, and emotional abilities by addressing the unique developmental characteristics and individual needs of young adolescents in preparation for the challenges and opportunities presented during the high school years. It recognizes the trials of this developmental stage and strikes a balance between the need for independence and the need for guidance. The team model differs from a junior high school model where students move from class to class during the day with different students and teachers without the continuity or oversight of a designated team of teachers. The junior high approach is much more departmentalized and less student-centered. It is also less costly because of the staffing breakage realized when the schedule is not constrained by having to team the same students for all classes throughout the day.

Q. What is the mentor project referenced as part of the Option II program?

A. A student who develops a topic to study in depth within an independent study framework finds a mentor who may or may not be a staff member who will oversee the project. In some cases, this person can be a member of a company who agrees to manage an internship for a student, a college professor, or a research scientist, for example.

Q. How will the curriculum be impacted in Grades 1 and 2?

A. The impact on the second grade would be limited since the adjustments to the part time program would be made in first grade. The first grade Language Arts curriculum would have to incorporate literature circles and Words Their Way concepts covered in the current kindergarten curriculum. Math revisions would be limited.

Q. There are two shortfall figures referenced. What is the difference?

A. If we compare a budget that has been brought down to within the newly mandated 2% cap, our shortfall is projected to be about \$845,000. If we compare the budget that has been developed for next year before any reductions are made, the shortfall is over \$1.4 million. An easy way to calculate the shortfall is the effect of the drop from a 4% tax cap levy to a 2% tax cap levy that will be in effect for next year. In the last few years under the 4% tax levy cap, we have averaged a tax levy increase of roughly \$3 million. That amount will now have to be halved to about \$1.5 million, leaving a shortfall of approximately \$1.5 million.

Q. What is the zero-based budget model we used?

A. The development of the 2011-12 budget began in August 2010. Administrators were directed to build department and school budgets using a zero-base rather than the flat increase/decrease model used in the past. While the initiation of this model can produce savings, it can just as often result in increased funding requests. Understanding that the District budget has been reduced in some cases to 2004-05 spending levels despite the increased enrollment growth of over 400 students, when the budgets were finalized, several resulted in net increases in department and school budget drafts. In changing the model to zero-based, the intent was to be able to review itemized rather than summary budgets, so that the actual items that would be lost in the event more reductions are necessary would be clearly designated. At this time, the budget

needs to be reduced by about \$1.4 million to get to the 2% cap figure.

Q. The report recommends the first \$845,000 of reductions. What is the plan to reduce the budget beyond that to the \$1.4 million necessary?

A. This is very early in the budgeting process. Over the next several months, the administration and Board will work together to prioritize curricular, capital, and operational expenses to make the necessary additional reductions in time to submit the budget to the voters in April. Given that this budget is only in its first draft, figures are likely to change dramatically. However, we know for certain that due to the cap reduction from 4% to 2%, significant cuts will be necessary, somewhere in the range of one and half million dollars.

Q. If the number of elementary assistant principals is reduced, how will the buildings run when the principal is out of the building?

A. It will be difficult. A 'head teacher' will have to be designated. The head teacher model however presents its own difficulties. When the principal is out of the building, and administrative presence is required for a disciplinary problem or emergency issue, the head teacher's class is interrupted so that the head teacher may address the situation. A substitute teacher then may have to be temporarily assigned to take over the class. The K-5 curriculum supervisor would be the primary person to cover buildings when meetings or other circumstances require the absence of both the principal and assistant principal.

Q. If the 50 minute periods at the high school will now enable students to fulfill the state's physical education requirement of 150 minutes per week, will students be able to take a two day a week elective?

A. No, it would be too difficult to design an elective that would only meet two days a week. Students will however be able to attend classes with unlimited enrollments such as chorus, etc. two days a week.

Q. Why is there such a small savings by reducing kindergarten to part time?

A. When reductions occur, generally they are among the lower salaried teachers, but not necessarily. When the District hires teachers, it considers the best, not the least expensive, so not

every new hire begins on the first step of the salary guide. Sometimes teachers come to the District with several years experience in another district, and begin higher on the salary guide, even though they are low on the seniority list. Salaries on the current teachers' salary guide range from \$44,232 to \$96,340. Health benefits range from \$6,192 for single coverage to \$16,884 for family coverage. Unemployment benefits are currently 60% of a weekly salary to a maximum of \$600 per week, and benefits are being paid for a maximum of 99 weeks. When calculating salary and benefits costs, an average is estimated and then unemployment is deducted from that. The average savings associated with a full time teaching position for the first year is \$30,000. (\$50,000 salary, \$10,000 benefits, minus \$30,000 unemployment) Savings increase in the second and third year based on the lapse of unemployment benefits.

By reducing the number of kindergarten positions from 16 to eight, the first year's salaries/benefits savings is \$240,000. Those savings carry over into the second and third years, along with the additional savings of \$120,000 each year. In the third and all subsequent years, the savings would be \$480,000 in 2010 dollars. The cost of midday transportation has to be calculated as well. A very broad estimate of one bus per school each day to bring the AM students home and bring the PM students in to school is \$125,000. After registration for kindergarten and the wrap-around enrichment program is completed, we may find that the busing costs are as low as \$20,000, depending on the number of buses and routes that are necessary. The additional transportation costs are imbedded in the 2011-12 budget, and carry over into subsequent years. The same is true for the savings calculation. For budget comparison purposes, the kindergarten program savings in the third and all subsequent years can be summarized as \$480,000 minus transportation costs. If the kindergarten students who are eligible for free busing all stay for the full day, there will be no additional midday transportation costs.

Transportation for students who are not eligible, but who choose to pay for subscription busing will not result in any additional costs to the District. The transportation will be totally parent paid.

Q. Did you consider paying a stipend to a teacher to do administrative work after school in the event that you eliminate elementary assistant principals?

A. The work load of the assistant principals will be reviewed at the end of the first year, and we would make a recommendation at that time.

Q. How will the mainstreaming of special education students for science and social studies in grades 6-8 work?

A. Federal and state law mandates that classified students be educated in the least restrictive environment, meaning that they should be included as much as possible with their non-disabled peers. Keeping students in their general education science and social studies classes, as opposed to sending them out into a special resource room, is the least restrictive environment. They would then receive support in the general classroom from both the general education teacher and a special education teacher. This model is called 'in-class support'. Most of these students are having difficulty in the reading component of science and social studies, not in the subjects themselves.

Q. How will class size in the middle school be affected by changing from the resource room model for some students to an in-class support model for science and social studies?

A. Class size could be increased by one student. Instead of leaving a team science or social studies class to go to a small group setting, those classified students would simply remain in their team class.

Q. Can parents pay for the other part of the kindergarten day, and retain a full day kindergarten program?

A. We have been advised by the Executive County Superintendent that if a district reduces their kindergarten program from full time to part time, parents cannot be charged to reinstate it to, or maintain it as, full time. The Board Attorney has also advised us that we cannot charge for a full day program.

Q. Can you explore wrap-around kindergarten programs that would be more academic than the proposed YMCA program?

A. In comparing the YMCA program to our current kindergarten schedule, it is very similar. The Y has proposed utilizing the Bernards Township kindergarten curriculum as the basis for the development of its program, and will employ New Jersey certified teachers. The current kindergarten schedule and the Y's estimated schedule follow:

Current Kindergarten Schedule

45 minutes	Whole group - morning message, shared reading, interactive writing
15 minutes	Snack
60 minutes	Language Arts/ – shared reading (incorporating: social studies, science, or character education), word work, writing workshop
50 minutes	Lunch & recess
25 minutes	Small group work/centers
50 minutes	Physical Education
45 minutes	Math
10 minutes	Read aloud/closure

Sample AM Kindergarten Schedule

- 30 minutes Whole group - morning message, shared reading, interactive writing
- 50 minutes Language Arts/ – shared reading (incorporating: social studies, science, or character education), word work, writing workshop
- 30 minutes Specials (art, music, library, etc.)
- 30 minutes Math & science
- 10 minutes Read aloud
- Dismiss if going home, lunch/recess for students attending enrichment program

Sample PM YMCA Enrichment Program Schedule

- 15 minutes Afternoon message
- 30 minutes Reading and writing activities
- 30 minutes Enrichment activity (e.g. fine art, computers, dance)
- 60 minutes Themes related to Bernards Township's curriculum
- 15 minutes Prepare for dismissal
- Children dismissed to bus, car line or after care

Q. Could students who are interested in taking music and art courses satisfy their practical arts graduation requirement through an online course?

A. Yes, students could realistically take a practical arts course online on their own time to free up a period to take a fine arts course.

Q. If the current unemployment benefits maximum of 99 weeks is changed, does that help our situation in paying for unemployment claims?

A. Yes.

Q. If we use Educere as the provider of online courses next year, does that mean the VHS provider that we use this year will be eliminated?

A. No, VHS will not be eliminated. Educere is a large clearing house for many online providers, including VHS. Students would enroll for any course by using the Educere portal and the class would be at their own expense.

Q. What salary and benefit amounts are included in the budget assumption?

A. A 10% increase in health benefits is projected. As the Board is currently in negotiations with the Bernards Township Teachers Association (BTEA), it would not be prudent to discuss salary projections at this time. However, as in all budgeting issues the Board is mindful of the new 2% tax levy cap.

Q. Are there any secretarial reductions being considered?

With more efficient scheduling of the workload and use of related technologies, it is recommended that one secretarial position be considered for elimination in the high school administrative offices.

Q. Have you considered transition problems for kindergarten students moving from one class to another?

A. The recommendation to provide the YMCA program within the building rather than at the YMCA location on Mount Airy Road is to decrease the number of transitions for students. Students who enroll in the supplemental program would arrive at school at approximately 8:45 am and be dismissed at approximately 3:00 pm. Students would eat lunch in the cafeteria as they

do now. The only transition would be from their kindergarten classroom to their enrichment classroom or the reverse at mid-day.

Q. Will there be specials (art, PE, music, etc.) in part time kindergarten?

A. The schedule has not been developed yet, but at this time it is anticipated that there will be specials offered.

Q. How is charging for kindergarten different than pay-to-play in middle or high school sports?

A. Extracurricular activities are considered a privilege and not mandated by statute. Even though kindergarten is not mandated, the Executive County Superintendent has advised us that if a district reduces a kindergarten program, the district may not charge for it to be retained as a full time program.

Q. What are the proposed changes to the Japanese and French programs grades 6-12?

A. The District had announced that it planned on phasing out the Japanese program two years ago. It began by removing the 6th grade and high school Novice I level this year. The goal is to eliminate the program beginning with the class of 2015. Current 8th grade students who are taking Novice I this year will still be able to take a Japanese class at the high school (or choose a new language) but it will have to be Intermediate 1st year since Novice II will not be offered in 2011-12. Therefore a current 8th grade student could take the following as they move through the high school Japanese program:

9th grade Intermediate 1st year or Honors

10th grade Intermediate 2nd year or Honors

11th grade Pre-advanced or Honors

12th grade AP Japanese

As they are now and have been for a few years, these will be combined classes with a possibility of three to four levels in one class due to the low numbers of students enrolled.

Current 7th graders would still be able to take Japanese as 8th graders, but their schedule in 9th grade will be dictated by the number of students still in the program at that time. Students will also be given the chance to choose a new language at the high school. If current 7th graders elect to take a Japanese class at the high school, it will most likely be a combined class which would begin with Intermediate 2nd year. The goal is to continue to offer a cohesive and comprehensive world language program which is sustaining. The decision to eliminate Japanese primarily is based on enrollments that have continued to decline over the past five years. German was eliminated several years ago in much the same design, also as a result of a pattern of declining enrollment.

At this time, enrollments in French will be monitored and as long as they remain constant or growing, the program can be maintained.

Q. What is the impact of offering five science periods instead of six in CP/Honors Biology/Chemistry/Physics? And how will colleges view this change?

A. There will be 250 minutes of instructional time in the new model; there are 252 minutes in the current model. Students will meet five times a week instead of six, but one of the days will be a designated lab period. The amount of time provided for instruction is practically the same. The advantage is that teachers will now place a lab in the unit sequence where it logically should

go, rather than forcing it around a pre-scheduled lab day, which may or may not coincide with the matching lecture. In other words, if a lab should be introduced on a Monday for a Tuesday lecture, the teacher will be able to do so for all classes. In the current system, the lab may not be completed as much as a few days later or a week prior to the lecture. This schedule also does not require the teacher to set up and break down a lab four days per week. All honors offerings in Science will now be weighted the same as all other honors courses in our high school program.

There is no negative impact on a student's transcript by reducing the number of credits assigned to a particular course. The determination of the amount of credits each course is worth is determined by the individual school; there is no consistency nationwide. In fact, many schools throughout the country assign five credits and colleges pay very little attention to the "credit worth" of a course. The most important component of any transcript is the rigor a student has undertaken based on the offerings of the school not how many credits the school assigns to a course. Even in schools where they do not have a strong program like ours, colleges only assess a student based on what the student's high school offers.

The impact on a student's GPA is the difference in computing 7 vs. 6 weighted credits in an AP course, and 6 vs. 5 weighted credits for an honors class. Of course, this difference carries through for all students in AP or honors sections, and levels the playing field for all content areas. Science will no longer be more advantageous than other subjects in computing a GPA.

Q. Why will there be no tutorials offered in the eight period schedule?

A. There are currently nine 42 minute periods in the day. In order to incorporate an additional 40 minutes of instructional time into the day (by adding eight minutes to each 42 minute period) the tutorial period had to be eliminated. By contract, a teacher may teach a maximum of 250

minutes per day. Currently teachers are scheduled to teach 210 minutes. By changing to the eight 50 minute period schedule, we are maximizing the instructional time permitted in the contract.