

Frequently Asked Questions about The Supervision District - What is it? Why is it Important?

By Terry G. Stewart
(with updates by administration as needed)

Unique to the education system used in Essex, Chester, and Deep River is an organization called the Supervision District. At first glance, the Supervision District appears to be a faceless and school-less layer of education spending that adds complexity to the overall budget process. Each year there are concerns this growing budget is an example of "taxation without representation". Others see the Supervision District as a key element of improving instruction, learning, and achievement across the Region.

Here is a look at some "Frequently Asked Questions" to help understand the Supervision District.

What is the Supervision District and why should I care?

The Supervision District is chartered through an agreement established in 1964 among the Boards of Education of Chester, Deep River, Essex, and Region 4, and modified in 2000, to fund those programs and services that are best shared across the five schools in our communities. The Supervision District provides our communities the economies of scale of a larger multi-school district yet allows each town the autonomy to manage its own elementary school.

How is the Supervision District different from the Region 4 and Local Boards of Education?

The Supervision District is governed by a permanent committee of three members each from the Chester, Deep River, Essex, and Region 4 Boards of Education. The town Boards of Education govern each town's elementary school. The Region 4 Board governs John Winthrop Middle School and Valley Regional High School. The Supervision District Committee meets every other month in addition to sponsoring committees involved with policy, negotiations, transportation and, when needed, searches for hiring region wide administrators. The Committee chair rotates annually among the chairs of the Boards of Education.

What does the Supervision District do?

The Supervision District Committee manages the budget for the Superintendent's Office which consists of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Pupil Services (Special Education), Supervisor of Pupil Services (Special Education), the Director of Technology, and the Business Manager. Through the Superintendent's Office, the Supervision District provides fiscal management, personnel, and legal support required by the towns and Region 4 Boards of Education.

The Supervision District also provides teachers and staff who work, or must be available to work, in any of the five schools such as special education, gifted and talented student support, summer school, world language at the elementary school level, music, and art teachers. Additionally, the Supervision District operates a state required pre-kindergarten program that provides early intervention support for students from the three towns. Finally, the District is responsible for student transportation for all five schools.

How does the Supervision District improve education quality in the Region?

Key to improving learning and achievement in our communities is increasing the cohesiveness and consistency of our PK-12 system. This means maintaining communication and coordination among the schools in curriculum design and development, professional development, and sharing best practices. The Supervision District also provides World Language instruction at the elementary level and programs that support accelerated students in the region such as the Mock Trial, Debate, Math Counts, and the High School Bowl teams. The Supervision District also sponsors the region's preschool program and summer school program that provides reinforcement instruction for identified students.

How is the Supervision District budget created and approved?

The Supervision District is the first budget approved in the overall education budget process. A draft Supervision District Budget is prepared by the Superintendent. This budget is debated by the Supervision District Committee and approved for a public hearing normally held in February. Following the hearing, a joint meeting of the entire membership of the local and Region 4 Boards of Education (33 members) is called to vote on the Supervision District budget. To be approved, each board must support the budget. If a board objects to a particular aspect of the Supervision Budget, the budget must be renegotiated until that support is obtained. In this way, a board is not forced to absorb spending it opposes. The resulting budget is then allocated to the Region 4 and local Boards' budget based on that board's percentage of students in the total enrollment in the Region. If one school wants a Supervision District program or position not needed or used by the other schools, those costs are passed directly to that board's budget alone and are not shared by the other boards.

Why isn't the Supervision District budget directly accountable to the Town Board of Finance and the voters at the Annual Town Financial Meeting?

Unlike the Local and Region 4 Boards of Education, the Supervision District is not an organization chartered by the state. The Supervision District is an administrative body created by agreement of the boards of education themselves to more efficiently pool the costs of shared programs and staff. Once created, the Supervision District budget is allocated to each board of education's budget. The elementary school budget is then directly reviewed by the Town Board of Finance and approved by the voters at the town financial meeting in May. Region 4 manages its own finances independently from the towns. Voters from the three towns directly approve the Region 4 budget at either a

Region 4 town meeting also held in May or a referendum. Over the past several years, the Region 4 budget has gone to referendum.

Could a Board of Education "hide" increased spending in the Supervision District budget since it is not directly reviewed by the Board of Finance?

This would be very difficult since there are 33 elected board of education members involved in the process, rarely sharing the same agenda. All hearings and meetings are held in public often with selectmen, board of finance members, citizens, and local press in attendance. It is also not in any board of education's interest to "hide" spending since this would jeopardize legitimacy with the public and support for programs over time. Finally, the local and Region 4 budgets, which include their portion of the Supervision District budget, are subject to direct questioning by members of the Board of Finance and the public at hearings and town financial meetings.

Once the Supervision District Budget is approved, are costs allocated to the local Budget "locked in" and not subject to question or even removal prior to the Town budget being approved?

No. Boards of finance can and do question the Supervision District Budget during the review process. While the board of finance cannot direct the board of education where to specifically cut funding, it can reduce the budget it recommends to the public to reflect its opposition to any line item in the budget, including the Supervision District allocation. It would then be up to the Board of Education to decide whether to cut funding from the local budget or seek an adjustment in the Supervision District Budget.

How can I voice my opinion on these and other issues?

- Attend Preliminary Budget Presentations by the Superintendent in December and January and the Supervision District Public Hearing in February.
- Comment and ask questions during the Town and/or Region 4 Budget hearings in April and May.
- Visit www.reg4.k12.ct.us where budget information will be posted.
- Communicate with your local or regional board of education members who all vote on the Supervision Budget.

About the author of the original content: Terry Stewart served as Chairman of the Region 4 Board of Education. He previously served as chair of the Essex Board of Education and has also chaired the Supervision District Committee. Revisions to original content have been made by Administration as necessary for updated accuracy