

Regional School District No. 4
2023-2024 Budget Workshop Frequently Asked Questions

Regarding the request for Daily Building Subs at both Region 4 schools

Q: Please share more information on the proposed long-term daily building subs for Region 4

A: Key information on this proposed position is below:

- Ensure fewer disruptions to building due to lack of available daily substitutes
- Each school would receive 1.0 FTE (proposed in 2023-24 budgets for all towns)
- \$45,000 estimated annual salary per person; benchmarked on Teacher's contract
- 35 hours / week (in line with the school day), paid on per diem basis
- No benefits; Unaffiliated
- Fewer instances of Paraprofessionals providing substitute coverage in lieu of their primary responsibilities

Q: Are the Daily Building sub positions being added to the school in a period of declining enrollment?

A: While student enrollment has stabilized, and we do not anticipate any significant declines, we are not anticipating significant increases either. These staffing positions currently exist in each building, and have been funded through federal COVID relief funds for the last 3 years. Our plan would be to retain the people who are already in the building to help manage the continued sub shortage.

Q: Is the Administration digging into absenteeism?

A: Yes, please see the data provided in the budget workshop presentations on the Region 4 website.

Q: Were any staff members teaching or working from home during the pandemic?

A: When the District returned to in-person learning in September/October 2020 at the mandate of the State of CT, all staff were required to return to the buildings as well.

Q: Would the building sub become a long term substitute in a classroom?

A: No, if there was a long-term need in a specific classroom, we would look to fill that with an individual with the appropriate certification. The subs could help cover through a transition, but not on a long term basis.

Regarding Special Education and the request for a Region 4 owned Special Education vehicle

Q: Would this be an outright purchase?

A: Yes, by using a Special Education grant.

Q: Would this serve special education students at both John Winthrop and Valley Regional?

A: Predominantly Valley students and the Transition Academy program, but could be used for John Winthrop if needed. There may be opportunities to utilize this vehicle for non-R4 special education needs as well.

Q: How many students are in the Transition Academy program currently?

A: 13

Q: Would the drivers be Region 4 staff? What do you anticipate being the impact on staffing and their overall responsibilities?

A: Yes, and Region 4 would offer necessary training. Ideally we would want two individuals trained and licensed.

Q: Would adding a District-owned vehicle result in financial savings, and / or is the benefit more reliable transportation service?

A: This would result in benefits to both reliability and cost. This vehicle would provide a flexible transportation option for our students and programs in addition to the transportation services provided to the District through its contracts with First Student and Curtin Transportation, and utilization of 9-Town Transit.

Q: Can you break out the first year costs of the van vs. ongoing costs?

A: The 2023-2024 budget includes an estimated cost of \$17,800

- First year / non-recurring costs = \$5,000
 - Registration, Training, Licenses, Lettering
- Annual operating / recurring costs = \$12,800
 - Fuel, Maintenance, Insurance, Supplies
 - Vehicle used daily, driven mostly within our three towns and neighboring shoreline communities
 - Insurance estimate received from our agent is an incremental cost of \$1,200 to add another vehicle to our current auto policy (currently have two maintenance trucks)

Q: Is there a cost efficiency in keeping special education students in the District vs outplacing them?

A: The school district is legally obligated to meet the education needs of all of its students. It is the priority of the school district to meet students' needs in-District whenever possible. To this end, the District has invested in in-District specialized programs, which have met individual student needs while realizing cost efficiencies. These programs include the Therapeutic program, Early Childhood Intensive program, Unified program, Transition Academy, and Life Skills program.

Q: Has the state changed the amount of money distributed to schools for excess cost?

A: Yes, but only minimally. The State has historically funded the Special Education Excess Costs Grant with \$140 million. In 2022-23, this increased to \$156 million, and it's expected that this will be the funding for 2023-24 as well. It's estimated that the actual amount needed to fully fund the Excess Costs of all school districts in Connecticut is over \$175 million, and therefore, it's expected that Region 4 would only be reimbursed for a portion of its actual special education excess cost amount.

Regarding changes in Debt Service

Q: What will the proposed Debt Service consist of for 2023-2024?

A: There are two financial items in Debt Service for 2023-2024.

1. The first is the final payment of our existing Region 4 Bonds, totaling \$764,400 (\$735,000 in Principal, \$29,400 in Interest).
2. The second is proposed debt service on a loan to fund the John Winthrop Middle School Security Project, which is anticipated for next year, totaling \$145,200 (\$95,200 in Principal, \$50,000 in Interest). This borrowing will not take place until we have gone through all approvals for the project and we receive project bids from general contractors.

Q: What financing options has the District considered for the John Winthrop security project?

A: Region 4 was advised by our Municipal Advisor to solicit a simple short-term commercial loan for this project. There is no way of funding this project directly through the Capital Fund based on the current fund balance. Additionally, the total cost of this project would result in too significant of a budgetary impact in a single fiscal year. Therefore, it is impractical to budget for this in a single year's budget. Furthermore, bonding was not advisable since the issuance costs are much higher than a commercial bank loan.

Q: What opportunities exist at the State level for school security grants in connection with the John Winthrop Middle School security project?

A: School security grants awarded to Districts by the State of CT are subject to a local matching requirement, based on the District's reimbursement rate. Since we have already been approved for reimbursement on the John Winthrop Security project at our full reimbursement rate through the Office of School Construction Grants & Review (OSCG&R), our best case scenario if we applied for a security grant would result in the same financial outcome as we are currently in today.

Regarding the addition of a Facilities Director to the Supervision District budget

Q: What is the administrative function for this individual? (Facilities Director)

A: This individual would be employed by the Supervision District with a 4-way allocation to each Board of Education, including Region 4. They would oversee facility & maintenance operations for the entire District. They would coordinate with building based facilities staff, Principals, and Central Office, and would assist Building Administrators in the oversight of custodial staff at each building, including head custodians. They would be directly responsible for overseeing compliance with Federal, State, & local reporting requirements (Air Quality, radon, All-Hazards, water, asbestos, etc.). We expect them to oversee and manage facility & operational Vendor & Supplier relationships, including facility RFP needs for all schools, consolidating service & maintenance contracts, and creating purchasing efficiencies. This individual would also support and coordinate District security initiatives, such as security audits, facility hardening, and building management systems.

Q: How will this person engage with the towns, boards of selectmen, and boards of finance in relation to the elementary schools since the towns own the buildings?

A: They would be a liaison with town maintenance departments and various facility committees. They would also handle the myriad elementary facility responsibilities that are currently divided between the Superintendent and Finance Director. The Superintendent would continue to be the primary contact between the District and the town.

General Budget Questions

Q: Is there a capital plan for the Region 4 School District?

A: Yes, as part of our work over the past few years, the Administration has been reporting out Capital Project Needs during the annual budget process, and reporting on the Capital Fund balance at least annually. Capital projects are subject to the RFP process and are reviewed and approved by the Board before being executed.

Furthermore, the Administration will be working with the Region 4 Buildings & Grounds Maintenance & Oversight Committee this spring and summer to develop a long range capital plan for the District which will be presented to the Board once completed. This will provide an outline of each capital project, the estimated cost, the year when the work will be executed, and the funding / saving methodology for the project, which will justify the balance held in the reserve and the spending plan.

Q: Please discuss the PE/Health teacher scheduling, and need for increased FTE?

A: With the complexities of COVID 19 still impacting student mental and physical health, John Winthrop is prioritizing health and wellness and requested an additional 1.0 FTE for Physical Education and Health. Additionally, state statute requires a minimum number of Health Education hours per school year, so the addition of a Wellness Teacher will satisfy that requirement while simultaneously promoting healthy living for our students.

Q: Reduction in Talented and Gifted?

A: The 1.0 FTE reduction in Talented & Gifted does not impact programming or student access to enrichment. This is in response to programmatic needs during the course of the school day. The District continues to provide a multitude of afterschool activities which offer enrichment and after school enhancement for students of all abilities.

Q: Please explain the need for a carpet cleaner?

A: Requesting a ride-on carpet cleaner for Valley Regional High School. Region 4 currently owns one ride-on cleaner which is used frequently on the John Winthrop campus. Valley borrows this machine once or twice a year for deep cleaning, and the process for moving it between buildings is difficult and can cause damage to the equipment. Valley has to outsource deep cleaning needs and this will eliminate the need to move the current cleaner or outsource this service.

Q: Did we budget enough for Athletic trainer services?

A: We have been assured by our current service provider that they will be able to reimplement Athletic Trainer services for 2023-2024 at a similar cost.

Q: Have we done anything to bring in more revenue for our Co-Op programs?

A: We have committed to analyzing all Co-Ops with the new Athletic Director, and this is currently in process.