

Fiscal Year 2019 Budget

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The following information from the Barrington Public Schools and the Barrington School Committee provides members of the community with additional detail about issues related to the school district's proposed budget for the 2018-2019 school year.

1. What is the proposed operating budget for the 2018-19 school year (fiscal year 2019) for the Barrington Public Schools?

Based on an initial proposal submitted by Superintendent Michael B. Messori III and the Barrington School Committee, the Committee on Appropriations voted on April 11, 2018 to recommend for Financial Town Meeting a proposed operating budget of \$50,628,214 for the 2018-2019 school year. The budget reflects the district's commitment to providing the resources needed to empower all students to excel.

The proposed budget represents an increase of approximately \$1.46 million over the current school year (FY18) budget, approximately 2.97 percent.

2. What factors contribute to the proposed budget increase?

The proposed FY19 budget covers the costs associated with maintaining all existing programs and services, with no funding for new initiatives or programs. The costs of several major budget items are expected to increase significantly, while funding from the State is expected to increase by only 2.7 percent. Therefore the remaining increase in expenses – approximately \$1.31 million – must be covered by the town and its taxpayers.

Staff salaries and benefits represent the largest portion of the budget (approximately 85 percent of the total). Under existing collective bargaining agreements and current staffing levels, the cost of compensation will increase next year by nearly \$1.17 million – approximately \$766,645 for salaries and \$404,189 for benefits, such as health insurance. These contractual increases in staff compensation represent the largest portion of the proposed \$1.46 million increase in the total budget.

Several other significant increases are associated with inadequate funding to support the rising cost of special education programs for students with disabilities. These costs include professional and technical services, such as behavioral therapy and physical therapy, and tuitions for out-of-district placements, totaling nearly \$300,000 in increased expenses. State funding for educating students with disabilities continues to fall short of actual costs. In FY19, expenses associated with High Cost Special Education needs are estimated at \$1.6 million, yet State funding for these programs through Categorical Aid is anticipated to be only \$90,740. In fact, Barrington's per-pupil average spending for students in special education is \$86,131, which far exceeds the State per-pupil expenditure threshold of \$52,312 for students with disabilities.

3. How is this proposal different from the budget the School Committee originally submitted to the Committee on Appropriations?

The School Committee originally approved a proposed budget of approximately \$50.83 million. Since then, the Administration worked with the Committee on Appropriations to pursue opportunities to mitigate the sharp increases in employee health insurance costs. After soliciting new quotations, the Administration secured a revised estimate of approximately \$404,189 for health insurance, compared to original estimates of \$612,176. This strategy reduced the requested budget increase by nearly \$210,000, bringing the proposed budget increase below 3 percent.

4. Will employees have to change health insurance plans?

No. The lower increases were negotiated by moving to a different purchasing collaborative, but Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island will remain the provider of health insurance plans for Barrington Public Schools employees. The change will be fairly seamless for employees. However, under the new program, employees will have a separate insurance card for prescription coverage, which will be managed separately by CVS. Additional information about these changes will be provided to employees later in the budget process.

5. Have there been any proposals to approve a lower budget allocation for the schools?

During the COA deliberation process, a resident submitted an amendment for consideration at Financial Town Meeting to reduce the proposed Barrington Public Schools budget by \$500,000.

6. What would be the impact if this \$500,000 reduction were approved?

The School Committee and the Administration are exploring various scenarios for reducing the budget by \$500,000. Such a significant decrease would require elimination of staff – potentially five or more positions – and therefore would result in reduction or elimination of particular academic, enrichment, and/or athletic programs. The School Committee and the Administration have stated that these cuts would have a negative impact on schools and students and have advised against any budget allocation lower than the funding level recommended by the COA.

7. What assumptions does this budget proposal make about enrollment levels?

The proposed budget was calculated using enrollment projections, based on the current number of enrolled students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, plus some anticipation of changes in enrollment resulting from students entering or leaving the system during the summer.

In recent years, the district has taken additional steps to improve the accuracy of enrollment projections, particularly to estimate the capacity needed at the new Barrington Middle School. In 2016, the district engaged the services of the demography firm Cropper GIS to conduct a ten-year enrollment forecast. Jerome McKibben, Ph.D., of McKibben Demographic Research concluded, based on research and analysis of data, that Barrington has a higher than average rate of families with children moving into town and enrolling in the public schools.

8. Does the proposed budget include funding to implement new school start times?

No. Analyses of various scenarios have indicated that in order to establish a later start time at the

high school, the district would have to adjust schedules at almost every school, resulting in significant cost increases associated with a new school bus schedule. The district is currently performing an efficiency study of transportation services, with an expectation that many initiatives that are impacted by transportation will be reviewed as part of this study. All new initiatives, including start times, will be reviewed within the context of the strategic plan.

9. What other priorities are NOT funded in this budget proposal, and how will they be addressed?

With rising costs outpacing increases in revenue, the school district is not in a position to propose major new programmatic investments or expansions. The strategic planning process has begun to identify several priority areas of work – including social-emotional learning and academic support – that will require additional staffing in the future. The Administration and School Committee are looking beyond the FY19 budget, at long-range, strategic goals, to explore these needs further and to devise strategies to fund them. The district is also committed to working closely with State officials to address the inadequacy of State funding, particularly with respect to funding for English Language Learners, High Cost Special Education, and unfunded mandates.

10. Does the new Barrington Middle School currently under construction have any impact on the proposed operating budget?

No. The construction project is financed through municipal bonds, approved by voters in a referendum vote in November 2016 and at a Special Financial Town Meeting in March 2017. The capital investment is separate from the school district's operating budget and has no impact on this proposal.

11. What are next steps in the FY19 budget review and approval process?

The Financial Town Meeting will be held at Barrington High School on Wednesday, May 23, at 7:00 p.m., where residents will vote on the budgets recommended by the COA for both the Town of Barrington and the Barrington Public Schools.

12. Is it true that BPS ends every fiscal year with a budget surplus?

The Barrington Public Schools budget is a balanced budget, with some expenses varying and therefore not as easily estimated in advance, such as support services for special education and out-of-district tuitions. During the year, the Administration is responsible for monitoring all costs and making adjustments as needed. After completion of the annual audit, if the undesignated unassigned fund balance exceeds 1 percent of the prior year's operating budget, the excess funds are assigned for capital projects. One-time, capital improvement projects are eligible for 35 percent State Housing Aid reimbursement. The strategic use of these funds for facility repairs and improvements has allowed our community to avoid issuing bonds for capital projects.

For the latest news and updates on the Barrington Public Schools FY19 Budget, visit <http://www.barringtonschools.org/fy19-budget.html>.