

School Committee Questions

School Committee – FY20 Budget Questions

General

1. Budget priorities: p. 2: Focus on Equity and Access:
How will funds be allocated to maintain and grow the efforts to address manifestations of hate in our town/ schools? I understand that the general Professional Development budgets will be used for whatever diversity training is needed, alongside the other needs for curriculum training. I also understand that we are engaging the knowledge and expertise of our staff to train each other. Will there be sufficient funds allocated to successfully follow through on our diversity and equity needs?

Each year, as we develop our District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans, we prioritize areas that we will be focusing on, allowing us to use available resources (time and funding) as effectively and efficiently as possible. One of the areas that we have already begun to focus on and will continue to focus on is equity and diversity. RMHS and our middle schools have been focusing time and training on these important areas for the last two years. On our full day professional development day in March, the theme will be on this important topic.

We will continue to use our available resources to prioritize our needs as aligned with the District and School Improvement Plans and with changes in state requirements.

2. Can you please fill in the following chart with the FTE and cost for Level Service (LS) funding of RPS over the time period presented in the proposed budget book?

	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20
Total Students	4,394 <i>Refer to Table B2 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	4,341 <i>Refer to Table B2 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	4,213 <i>Refer to Table B2 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	4,210 <i>Refer to Table B2 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	4,210 (Estimated)
Total FTE	571.5 <i>Refer to Figure 12 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	567.6 <i>Refer to Figure 12 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	560.7 <i>Refer to Figure 12 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	579.3 <i>Refer to Figure 12 in FY20 Budget Book</i>	584 <i>Refer to Figure 12 in FY20 Budget Book</i>
FTE Reductions	0	4.1	6.9	0	0
FTE for LS	571.5	571.5	571.5	579.3	584
SC Budget	\$38,491,482	\$39,566,032	\$40,216,651	\$44,860,275	N/A
Cost Reductions	(\$242,620)	(\$491,493)	(\$907,000)	N/A	N/A
LS Budget	\$38,976,722	\$40,057,525	\$41,123,651	\$44,860,275	\$46,467,348

Administration

3. What strategies could be employed to reallocate funds from the Administrative cost center to other cost centers such that the total allocation to the Administrative cost center is 2% or less of the FY20 budget, and maintain the total administrative cost at 2% or less of future budgets? (i.e., a reduction of about \$4,400 on the proposed budget).

As described in the Superintendent's message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent's Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions or reallocations from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions or reallocations in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions or reallocations.

4. How would you recommend allocating a redistribution of \$4,400 of non-personnel expenses from the Administrative cost center (e.g., from across Contract Services, Supplies & Materials and Other Expenses) to other cost centers?

As described in the Superintendent's message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent's Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions or reallocations from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions or reallocations in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions or reallocations.

5. You've allocated \$22,720 for Labor Counsel in a year when none of the 5 collective bargaining contracts are up for negotiation. What is the anticipated need for this type of legal services here? When was the last year that RPS did not similarly have any collective bargaining on these contracts, and what were the Labor Counsel costs for that year?

As described on Page 24 of the budget book, the function of labor counsel is to offer counsel and guidance in the area of labor law compliance and collective bargaining. We use our labor counsel when we are addressing any employee issues that may be disciplinary in nature, impact any employee rights that may be violated or could potentially lead to any future litigation if not addressed in an appropriate manner. If we see a potential legal issue that could result in financial risks for the school district or the town, we consult with legal counsel proactively rather than reactively. We also use our labor counsel to provide annual training for our administrators in proper process and procedures regarding conducting employee investigations and supervision/evaluation issues.

The last time the Reading Public Schools were not in a collective bargaining year or engaging in negotiations was during FY17, which the actual expended amount was \$22,959.

6. What expenses are included in the \$138,753 "Other Expenses Total" in Figure 13?

As outlined in Figure 13, "Other Expenses" is comprised of Dues and Memberships for central office staff, employee benefits (contractual Tax-Sheltered Annuity Contributions per the RTA agreement), equipment (copier lease and cost per copy charges per current contract), hiring and

recruiting (employee physicals and general recruiting expenses), postage, professional development and software licensing and support.

Regular Day

7. What is driving the historically high Revolving Fund Support (\$1.1MM in FY20)?

As discussed during the School Committee presentations on January 7th and January 17th, we are recommending an increase in the offset taken related to the full-day kindergarten revolving account. As discussed, the offset is a result of a review of the enrollment for the current year, the projected enrollment for the next school year as well as a review of the estimated costs of teachers, para-professionals, and an allocation of building principal and secretary time. As further mentioned, a review will be performed each year and any adjustments will be made as necessary to reflect changes in enrollment or costs.

8. What would be the impact on elementary school class size if we did not add the 1.2 FTE elementary school teachers at Killam and Wood End (combined)?

If we did not add the net increase 1.2 FTE staff for Kindergarten and Grade 1 at Killam and Wood End, the class sizes in Grade 1 next year at Wood End would be approximately 28 students per class and the class sizes in Kindergarten at Killam would be 26 students per class.

9. Are we comfortable basically flat funding substitutes?

We continue to monitor the substitute funding and have based the budget upon reviewing the prior three years. Over the last three years the average actual expended has exceeded the FY20 budget but the figures vary depending upon number of teachers out on long-term leaves of absence, as well as, fill rates for teachers out on a daily basis. We are comfortable with the budget being below actuals as we are typically able to utilize salary savings from unfilled positions or unpaid leaves of absence to help offset the costs of the substitutes.

10. Thank you for the explanation of how challenging it is to find substitutes available to work and the transparency about the Para-Educators who fill in when necessary. I would like to be reassured that these para-educators are not being taken away from spots where their help is already needed. Are we planning in enough funding for enough para-educators that their substituting will not cause another teacher or children problems? Are the substitute budget allocations or para-educator budget lines adequate to pay for para-educators being called in for extra work shifts to cover when substitutes cannot be found? I wasn't sure of this mechanism when it was explained last night.

The substitute funding is anticipated to cover both daily/long-term substitutes as well as instances in which para professionals are utilized as substitutes. We believe the funding is adequate and we will continue to work to bring on additional substitutes. As discussed, filling substitute roles is correlated to the overall labor market and economy. Reading is one of many districts that struggles to fill substitutes.

11. The cost of Elementary Curriculum and High School Curriculum have both significantly decreased in FY'20 (by about 57% and 46%, respectively) compared to past years. Why?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation provided on January 17, 2019, during the current fiscal year 2019, the focus of the science curriculum funding was primarily at elementary (K-2) and High School. In FY20, we will be shifting funding to begin implementation of the new Social Studies curriculum frameworks beginning with a significant amount being dedicated to the new Grade 8 Civics Course. This is why you see a decrease at elementary and high school districtwide curriculum funding and an increase at middle school.

12. Why is the budget for Middle School Curriculum more than doubled compared to last year (from about \$16k to \$50k)?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation provided on January 17, 2019, during the current fiscal year 2019, the focus of the science curriculum funding was primarily at elementary (K-2) and High School. In FY20, we will be shifting funding to begin implementation of the new Social Studies curriculum frameworks beginning with a significant amount being dedicated to the new Grade 8 Civics Course. This is why you see a decrease in the elementary and high school districtwide curriculum funding line items and an increase at the middle school district wide curriculum funding line item.

13. Page 26 – Figure 15 – There has been significant variability in curriculum supplies and materials over the past several years. The total for elementary, middle, and high school this year is \$150,000. Do we feel that is a reasonable amount to spend going forward, with small adjustments for inflation, or do you see this continuing to be a highly variable cost based on DESE curriculum framework updates?

While we can never predict what will be going on at the state level, we do anticipate that we will need approximately \$150,000-\$200,000 per year to continue to update our curriculum areas based on the changes in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and gaps that we identify during our curriculum renewal process.

14. Explain the significant curriculum reductions in elementary and high school and assume the significant increase in middle school is the new Social Studies and Civics.

As discussed during the School Committee presentation provided on January 17, 2019, during the current fiscal year 2019, the focus of the science curriculum funding was primarily at elementary (K-2) and High School. In FY20, we will be shifting funding to begin implementation of the new Social Studies curriculum frameworks beginning with a significant amount being dedicated to the new Grade 8 Civics Course. This is why you see a decrease in the elementary and high school districtwide curriculum funding line items and an increase at middle school district wide line item.

15. What amount is allocated for social studies curriculum updates (and where do these expenses appear in Figure 15)? Will this curriculum update be completed in FY20? (if not, how many years will be required?) Do you anticipate an increase in future costs (e.g., consumables) in future budgets after this curriculum update is completed?

There is \$150,000 allocated for Districtwide Curriculum Initiatives in the FY20 budget. This \$150,000 is allocated in three line items on Figure 15 (Page 26): Curriculum, Elementary (\$42,500); Curriculum, High School (\$57,600); and Curriculum, Middle School (\$49,900). These amounts are fluid and may be shifted between levels based on need. We are currently just beginning the work on the Social Studies Curriculum changes approved by DESE. One of the biggest changes will be at the middle school where we will be replacing the current social studies curriculum in Grade 8 which is focused more on World History, with a civics class. This will create a shift of topics currently being taught in Grade 8 to other middle school and high school grades.

We anticipate that this implementation of curriculum, professional development, assessment/project development and training may take two to three years and various amounts of funding for all three years will be needed. We are currently developing a curriculum renewal cycle for curriculum areas (Mrs. Kelley will be presenting this to the Committee in February) where various amounts of funding will be needed depending on the stage of the cycle the curriculum is being developed based on current RPS needs and thinking. However as mentioned at the 1/17/19 School Committee meeting, we do not always know what new or revised curriculum plans may happen at the state level. To that end, the majority of the \$150,000 will be dedicated to social studies this year, however, some funding will also be used for elementary literacy and mathematics.

16. How will the needs that have previously been funded by grants and donations that cannot be met by our final budget be communicated so that funding can be attained? Programs such as MVP, AWOD, Challenge Day, ADL Teacher Training.

The MVP, Challenge Day, and ADL Training were funded by grants and donations in the past. These are not in the operating budget for FY20. There are stipends in the operating budget to have A World of Difference Club at our middle and high schools. Any teacher training that is necessary will be prioritized as defined in question 27.

We will continue to seek outside resources to fund these areas that were not funded in the operating budget in the past.

17. I understand that Facing History is still a part of our curriculum. Is its funding encompassed under the Social Studies Budgets?

The Facing History Curriculum, which is used in the Middle School Advisory program was purchased as part of the School Climate Transformation Grant, which is expiring in September, 2019. We own the curriculum content so we do not need to provide additional funding for this area at this time.

18. Page 27 – Figure 15 – After a very high PD line item in FY19, I’m glad to see this cost coming down somewhat. It is, however, still very high compared to what was spent in FY18, FY17, and FY16. While ongoing professional development is always going to be important, do you see this line item stabilizing at a certain level in the future?

We will always need a certain amount of funding for staff training for curriculum implementation, instructional methodology, social emotional learning, and equity/diversity. The level of funding requested each year will depend on any trends or changes at the state level and the needs of our district. We will continue to monitor this funding closely to make sure that we are aligning the funds available to the needs of our staff.

19. Professional Development is listed twice in Figure 15 (i.e., \$4,850 and \$235,572). Why? What expenses are included in each PD line? What proportion of funds allocated for Professional Development is expected to result in teacher training that is eligible for these teachers to receive Professional Development Points (PDPs)?

The professional development line item listed under supplies and materials is part of the building based budgets and principals have allocated \$4,850 out of the building based budgets for building based professional development work specific to their school. The larger amount, is the funding allocated to Districtwide Professional Development and training for teachers (\$78,921) and Contractual Tuition Reimbursement for Teachers, Secretaries, Administrators and Paraeducators (\$109,500). The remaining amount is for teacher mentor stipends as required by the state for teacher induction programs.

All of the professional development that is provided by the Reading Public Schools is eligible for Professional Development Points as long as it follows the necessary state guidelines.

20. The Science line item in Figure 15 has grown from about \$11k in FY’16 to about \$100k the past 2 years. Please explain why, and whether we anticipate sustained comparable higher spending levels after FY’20.

The Science line item that you are referring to on Page 27 of the budget book is part of the building based budgets where the costs in that line item are spread out across all 8 schools. Building principals allocate funds in this line item in their building based budgets to fund the ongoing costs of consumable and durable science materials necessary to effectively teach those programs. The increase in cost from FY18 to FY19 and FY20 is primarily due to the ongoing costs of implementing the Know Atom Science Curriculum and the K-2 curriculum (in FY20). If you recall, we shifted in FY18 the per pupil allocation from middle/high school to elementary to provide more building based funding at the elementary level so that they could fund these increased costs. In FY20 we increased the elementary per pupil to \$6.00/student to fund ongoing costs for the K-2 science program.

We anticipate that this line item will now stabilize, and perhaps even decrease slightly as we continue to look at ways to efficiently use the science curriculum materials and supplies.

21. What is included in the \$583,838 of “Other Expenses” in Figure 15?

As outlined in Figure 13, “Other Expenses” reflects the allocation by building principals of their building based budgets as well as some district level expenses. The largest components of “Other Expenses” which are not part of the building based budgets are Tuition Reimbursement (\$109,500 which is a contractual figure); District Wide Technology computer replenishment (\$100,000); district wide professional development (\$78,921); administrative software licenses (\$81,387 which includes annual renewal for Office 365); and language translation services (\$7,500) The amounts allocated from building based budgets include copier leases and associated cost per copy charges as per the contract, dues and memberships, conferences and workshops as well as graduation expenses.

22. The Transportation costs in Figure 15 have increased over 50% since FY16 (\$86k to over \$132k). Please explain what is driving this dramatic increase year over year. What proportion of the increase can be attributed to increases in the contracted rate of providing transportation, compared to degree of student need (e.g., an increase in the number of students requiring transportation services or individual students requiring more transportation)?

As discussed during the Regular Education budget presentation on January 17th the transportation figure reflects the contractual bus rate as per our agreement. The most significant increase is in the daily cost per bus. Next year we will be entering the 4th year of a 5 year contract which each year seeing an increase in the daily bus rate (the rate has increased from \$315 per day per bus to \$360 per bus per day). The regular day transportation reflects two busses, one for mandated transportation (required for students grade k-6 who live more than 2 miles from their school) and one paid bus. The district does subsidize approximately 45 percent of the second bus. In addition, we are experiencing an increase in the number of homeless students we are transporting (historically the cost was between \$7,000 to \$10,000 but we are now exceeding \$30,000 in homeless transportation).

23. The Software costs in Figure 15 have increased over 50% since FY16 (about \$39k to over \$60k). Please explain what is driving this dramatic increase year over year. What proportion of the increase can be attributed to increases in the number of software licenses compared to the increase in the cost per license. Are these increases the result of curriculum updates?

The majority of the expenses within this line item are building based expenses and are allocated out of the set amount each building is allocated on an annual basis. The increase over the 4 year period can be largely attributed to additional expenses allocated by the High School out of their building based budgets. While this line item for the High School has increased it does not reflect an overall increase within the budget as the total amount allocated on a per pupil budget is set at the beginning of the budget process.

24. Why are benefits up 12.4%? I should that percent was adjusted down.

The employee benefits figure within Regular Day Professional salaries includes contractual payments for teacher longevity as well as an estimate for contractual sick-leave buyouts for teacher retirements. The number of teachers retiring who may be eligible is not known at this time and as such an estimate is utilized. The actual figure can vary from year to year depending upon the population of teacher retirements. The figure could be reduced slightly.

25. Page 28 – Figure 16 – What is the instructional coach position?

The instructional Coach position is the Data Coach. Previously this position was funded within the School Climate Transformation Grant and was transitioned to be fully funded within the Operating Budget as part of the fiscal 2019 budget process.

26. Explain Library up 4.3%.

The increase reflects contractual increases (steps and COLA) for individuals in this position. In addition, the figure also reflects a higher COLA adjustment than was included within this specific line item in the FY20 budget as the “salary adjustment” override figure was not spread across every salary line item but actuals will be reflected in the specific line items.

27. Explain Guidance up 5.1%.

The increase reflects contractual increases (steps and COLA) for individuals in this position. In addition, there is currently a guidance counselor on a leave of absence and we have reflected the higher salary of this individual in the FY20 budget (as currently there is a temporary placement filling this position). In addition, the figure also reflects a higher COLA adjustment than was included within this specific line item in the FY20 budget as the “salary adjustment” override figure was not spread across every salary line item but actuals will be reflected in the specific line items.

28. Explain psychologist up 4.5%.

The increase reflects contractual increases (steps and COLA) for individuals in this position. In addition, the figure also reflects a higher COLA adjustment than was included within this specific line item in the FY20 budget as the “salary adjustment” override figure was not spread across every salary line item but actuals will be reflected in the specific line items.

29. Why are stipends up 13.4%? This can't all be associated with middle school?

The increase reflects the contractual increase in stipends based upon the settled RTA contract. As part of the contract negotiations additional stipends were added to the contract which have been reflected within the FY20 budgeted figure. In addition, the figure also reflects a higher COLA adjustment than was included within this specific line item in the FY20 budget as the “salary adjustment” override figure was not spread across every salary line item but actuals will be reflected in the specific line items.

30. I know that stipends for teachers are negotiated in their contract. I also know that RMHS has formed a Diversity or Unity Committee. Is this a volunteer effort? Should we be considering the needs of this committee in our budget deliberations or will they be working out their own funding mechanisms through donations and fundraising?

As part of the Collective Bargaining agreement, teachers can be on Committees for a variety of reasons as aligned with the priorities of the School and District Improvement Plans. Most Committees meeting during available contractual times. At times, if a Committee is meeting outside of the school day and it is a required Committee, teachers will be compensated for their

time at the contractual rate. If they are compensated, the funding would come from building based budgets, grant funding, or Districtwide Professional Development.

The Diversity Committee is a voluntary committee and Principal Boynton is holding the meetings primarily during contractual meeting times, so no additional funding is necessary.

31. Why are contract instructional services going down 60%?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation provided on January 17, 2019, contractual services decreased for two factors: we reduced and reclassified the \$15,000 budget related to translation services from this line item to Other Expenses. The reduction of \$7,500 in the overall budget is reflected within Instructional Services in Other Expenses.

32. Under other expenses Explain: Equipment 32.7%, Instructional Services 2,500% and is the graduation increase back to FY 18 levels a result of class or is it programmatic?

The Equipment budget is part of each building's allocated per pupil allocation and reflects photo copier leases and the associated cost per copy charge associated with the maintenance of the machines and is based upon contractual lease and cost per copy rates. This is not an increase in the overall budget, but rather a reallocation within the per pupil allotment.

As discussed during the School Committee presentation provided on January 17, 2019, the increase in Instructional Services reflects the reclassification of translation services from contract services as described above.

The Graduation Expense is part of the High Schools allocated per pupil budget and was increased from the current year budget based upon a review of the prior 3 years actual expense. Each year budget transfers are completed within the High Schools' per pupil budget to fund this line so the determination was made to fund it based upon a review of historical expenses. This is not an increase in the overall budget, but rather a reallocation within the per pupil allotment.

33. In the future, charts such as Figure 15 are a little hard to unpackage when we don't know what the "other" includes. I understand that is getting way "into the weeds," when the totals are \$523 - \$1600, but when the amounts range around \$46,000, it would be nice to know what is under that heading...

The line item called "other" under supplies and materials is a category that is part of the building budgets. Principals allocate funding out of their budget for general supplies not related to one curriculum area. The amount of \$46,482 is spread out over 8 schools and will vary annually based on what the Principals deem necessary for their schools in this category. We can look to expand the narratives as they relate to "other expenses" within the budget book and presentation slides to further clarify some of the large items within these categories.

34. Where does Arts Fest funding fall? Are these funds secure in this budget?

The costs associated with Arts Fest include paying teachers per contractual rates within the RTA contract and would be absorbed within the Professional Salaries line (utilizing any salary savings due to staff turnover, vacancies, unpaid leaves of absence) as well as within the overall supplies lines in the Regular Day Cost Center. We continue to monitor to ensure that we are utilizing our resources in the most effective manner for all students in the Reading Public Schools.

35. What is included in the Supplies & Materials Total (\$725k+) other than the building based budgets in Figure 17 (totaling about \$691k) or other expenses already listed in Figure 15.

Included within the "Supplies & Materials" are District Wide Expenses including Curriculum Material (\$150,000), miscellaneous supplies related to the curriculum coordinators and teacher induction (\$6,900) and curriculum software (\$23,820).

36. Dues and Memberships increased dramatically from about \$9k two years ago to \$18.2k in FY20. Why? What would be the impact of reducing Dues and Memberships back to about \$10k in FY20 to reallocate about \$9k to other cost centers?

As described in the Superintendent's message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent's Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions.

The most notable increase within Dues and Memberships is related to our NEASC membership which is part of the High Schools building based budget. As we are in the process of going through the NEASC accreditation process we do not feel it would be prudent to not pay the dues.

37. We funded Graduation at \$6k instead of \$8k last year. Why can't we do so again? What would be the impact of a \$1500 reduction to Graduation in FY20, to reallocate these funds to other cost centers?

As described in the Superintendent's message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent's Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions.

The graduation expense is part of the High School's building based budget and as mentioned above we are not recommending cuts to the building based budgets. If cuts are proposed to the building based funding discussions would be held with each principal to determine the most appropriate cuts to be made. Per review of actuals we have spent approximately \$8,000 per year since 2017. In working with the building principal we have allocated an appropriate amount of the FY20 building based budget to this line item as part of the budget process rather

than have to look to reduce spending in other line items during the year and complete budget transfers.

38. Looking at the lines for Teacher Resources and Supplies in Figure 15 on page 27 – I am glad to see the increase in our budget allocation – will this help decrease the amount our teachers have been spending from their pockets in their classrooms on supplies (markers, pencils, folders, etc), germex, Kleenex, etc?

These line items are funded out of the building based budgets allocated to each principal based upon enrollment. The total amount allocated has remained unchanged (except for a slight increase at the elementary schools for science materials). Any shifts are based upon the principal allocation of their building based budgets and is determined by school based needs.

39. Approximately what proportion of the building-based budgets in Figure 17 were spent in the last 30 days of the school year in FY19? Why are you requesting an \$8.9k increase in these budgets in FY20 compared to FY'19?

As we are still in Fiscal 19 the figure that will be spent in the last 30 days of the fiscal year is not yet known. At the beginning of each year we withhold 30% of the building based budgets as a mechanism to control costs to ensure all mandatory obligations are met (salary obligations, mandatory transportation, special education expenses). For Fiscal 2019 the 30% holdback is approximately \$206,450. We look to release the holdbacks in April and May of each year.

The \$8.9k increase in the building based budgets recommended for Fiscal 20 is to allocate additional funding to the elementary schools related to science materials currently being funded out of District Level Funds related to the science curriculum. The figure was obtained through careful consideration and discussion with the curriculum coordinators.

Special Education

40. Page 6 – I understand the decision to not budget potentially large special education costs because the timing and amounts are not known with certainty. I further understand that once these costs are known, we are likely to have to request additional funding from Town Meeting in April or November. Four questions on this:

- a. Do we have a sense for when we should have clarity on these costs?

Because we are monitoring the changing needs of several students, each with their own unique situation, we may know some of the costs prior to April Town Meeting, however, we most likely will not know the majority of cost adjustments until the end of the current school year or this summer.

- b. What is driving this unusually large potential increase in SPED costs?

The special education process is fluid and results in a population whose needs are not static and predictable for any length of time. Education by its very nature must be responsive to the students we serve, and as students all develop at different rates and

require different approaches to ensure they can learn and master the content, our teachers must be flexible and highly responsive to these constantly changing demands. We also are projecting what our students will need for an entire school year about 20 months in advance, which impacts our accuracy in matching resources to what becomes actual student needs, thus school districts find themselves in a position of playing 'catch up' with the finances to align with the evolving needs of students.

Without having a longer history in Reading, it is difficult for me to point to one or two reasons as primary variables impacting cost increases, however, I do know that there were a number of placement changes that occurred, either with or without the district approval, for some students' programs/placements from June to September. These changes have resulted in either a known or potential cost impact this year, which means that FY2019 line items were not fully aligned with the student population needs and thus also have an impact upon FY2020. This contributes to what appears as a disproportionately large percentage increase for FY2020, but in reality, we are comparing finances against what was known based upon the FY2018 population.

There are also students currently receiving service whose special education teams are re-evaluating the effectiveness of the programs for the students and more intensive services and/or programs are being considered. Sometimes this is due to students' needs presenting in different ways as students age/go through the grades and the demands we naturally place upon students as they get older means that not all students' neurology can keep up with adapting and more complex reasoning demands; this translates to different or new services and programs becoming necessary as students progress through the grades. Our teams also review student needs when/if new information becomes available to the team, which can also impact IEPs. Sometimes students require more intense services due to the nature of their disability and the broad scope of impact upon multiple domains of learning and development, which includes the student's ability to transfer taught skills from the school setting across other settings, including their daily living needs. These changing needs sometimes leads to additional out of district placements or a change in placement which will have an additional cost of both tuition and transportation.

- c. Will these expenses likely be one-time, or on-going so therefore need to be included in the FY21 operating budget and beyond?

Because these costs could potentially lead to additional in district staffing/resource needs or out of district placements or change in placements, the costs would be ongoing.

- d. To the extent possible, can we communicate to Town Meeting and the broader public the magnitude of these anticipated costs – are we looking at tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or over a million dollars?

The potential increases in SPED OOD Accommodated Costs could be hundreds of thousands of dollars. It should be noted that we have been working very closely with the Town Manager, School Committee Leadership, and Finance Committee Leadership

on this issue to see if some shifts can occur between Town and School Accommodated costs.

41. We have seen significant increases in the SPED cost center over the past several years. What is happening in Reading specifically that is driving SPED costs so much higher? Is this a trend we are seeing in peer districts? What can be done to mitigate these costs?

Being so new to Reading (35 days through December when budget was prepared), it is difficult to ascertain exactly what factors are unique to Reading, if any, that are contributing to special education cost center increases. I can affirm that concerns about the high costs of special education is a common concern across the commonwealth. Anecdotal reports from colleagues and from my work with superintendents as a consultant, attempts to both understand the complexities of what contributes to this cost center, as well as how to control the increases is a shared challenge. What we are experiencing is happening in several suburban school districts in Massachusetts. The accommodated cost model that we have here in Reading is unique and is an innovative approach for a town to adopt to address the financial demands that increasing special education costs place upon the school district budget. In addition, we need to continue to support building strong in-district programs which are financially prudent, but most importantly, are in the best interest of all students.

42. For the in-district SPED Programs listed in Figure 19, please provide an estimate of
- a. the proportion of the 180.1 SPED FTE (Figure 21) dedicated to supporting these programs; and

All of the staff listed in Figure 21 support in-district special education students. It is fair to say that the majority of their time goes to supporting in-district students, however, all roles listed in figure 21 may also be required to support out of district students as well. For example, any student placed in an out of district program has to be attended to and monitored to ensure the student makes progress; these students have the same requirement as all special education students to be re-evaluated at least once every three years, so the 'evaluation team' typically consists of a combination of both our district staff and the private or collaborative program staff. Our in-district staff are called upon to evaluate and observe out of district students, but this may not be the case for every role every year. All our team chairpersons and the assistant director also conduct the monitoring for a caseload of out of district students; this require time every month, and for some students, depending on a variety of factors, there are weekly time demands. It is difficult to quantify or proportion the time each role spends on in versus out of district students as it varies week to week and year to year. It should be noted that the 'related service provider' staff listed in Figure 21 support a combination of students across all in-district programs, including learning centers, and some staff support students that are not special education eligible at this time, but may be receiving tiered interventions and/or are in the evaluation process, or may also receive accommodations and supports through section 504 plans. The only staff that do not support programs would be teachers and paraprofessionals that are dedicated only to service students who are in the learning center.

- b. the proportion of students on IEP (about 752 in Figure 18) who are enrolled in at least one of the following: Crossroads, Compass, Connections, TSP and Bridge.

PROGRAM NAME	# of STUDENTS whose primary services are aligned with PROGRAM*
Bridge	30
Compass	22
Connections	66
Crossroads	28
Therapeutic Support Program	41
Learning Center	432
R.I.S.E. Preschool	57

***NOTE:** The student enrollment # as of 1/7/2019 and any student who receives IEP services in more than one program is counted once and assigned to the program where s/he receives the majority of services. (Figure 18 in budget narrative is the headcount as of 12/28/18)

43. In Figure 19, a majority (34 of 62) of our out of district SPED placements are in grades 11, 12 or post graduate (PG). What options have been considered to support these students in district? For how many of the past 5 years have more than 50% of our OOD placements occurred in students in grades 11 or older?

We work with our special education team chairpersons and principals to ensure that our in-district program options can educate as many students as possible. There are some students whose needs present in more intensive ways as they progress through the grades due to a number of factors. There are also some students whose disability impact is on the lower end of the spectrum when they are younger, but because of the types of reasoning, independence and social demands we require of students as they get older and in particular during their high school years, some students' ability to effectively engage in the learning process becomes seriously compromised. These students may then require different and much more intensive types of services and supports, as well as staffing types/roles and setting/space configurations that are not easily created in a public high school setting. It will be my recommendation to the incoming director to examine the needs of the middle school and younger high school student population next year to identify those students 'at risk' for requiring more intensive services and to ascertain how/if these might be provided within the context of existing programs and/or to enhance existing programs to maintain the students in district. However, it should be understood that there are students whose needs sometimes change rapidly and the district is forced to consider placement into existing out of district programs to address the immediacy of a need and the district does not have the capacity to respond quickly enough to support students experiencing an acute mental health crisis. (Mental health needs can present in severe and rapidly fluctuating ways during adolescence.)

It would take some time to research and see if there is reliable data available in order to examine and conduct an analysis of the out of district program/placement history for the past five years, as in order to fully answer your question, one would have to know the types of disabilities these students had, how their programs had looked over time, where/why/when the

students were placed out of district, and whether any of the programs in place at the high school now were developed in response to out of district placements. Examining headcounts alone will not truly answer the question regarding whether we can keep more high school students in our in-district programs and/or create new programs to address their needs.

44. Who is involved in the negotiation of the OSD contract? Do we have a seat at the table?

As presented at the School Committee Meeting on January 17, 2019, tuition rates for approved private day and residential programs are regulated by the Operational Services Division (OSD) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The annual tuition and services increase, which averages 2%, may be renegotiated every six years by each approved private school program. As part of this approval process, private day and residential programs may request DESE approval for 'program reconstruction' once every 6 years; should DESE approve their request for program reconstruction (to meet changing student needs), this then allows the private school program to have rate increases beyond a cost of living increase. These program reconstruction increases are significant and vary widely from 7% to as high as 44%.

When a school is requesting a program reconstruction increase, letters are sent to school districts who currently have students at that school inviting them to a hearing at DESE regarding the request. School districts are encouraged to attend these hearings and ask questions and provide data if they believe a requested staff position, FTE, or other expense the program notes as 'necessary' for their reconstruction. The final determination is made by DESE (for programmatic and staffing needs) and OSD (for the financial impact of the programmatic and staffing aspects of the reconstruction rates). Public schools are not part of any direct negotiation. But by asking questions, the private schools are obligated to answer every question asked, and DESE considers all the questions and answers in their determination and decision regarding the reconstruction request. DESE recognizes that public school staff may have different perspectives and ask questions they have not thought to examine. DESE and OSD may approve some of the reconstruction, but not all, which means that the private school then does not get the 'full ask.'

45. I would like advice on how to advocate best for changing the circuit breaker equation from the role of a SC member. Many thanks to Sharon for scribing a letter for us to review and endorse to send to our legislators!

Our State Legislators and your representatives from the Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) are two possible groups to have conversations with to address this important issue. In addition, we are also advocating through our professional associations (MASS, ASE, MASBO) as well. MASS and ASE plan to send a letter to be signed by each Superintendent and Special Education Director advocating for fully funding the program (at the 75% level). Advocating for a review of the program to include a lower threshold (3x foundation rather than 4x) for districts to request reimbursement for in-district programs could make a difference for Reading.

46. Page 17 – Historical Budget versus actual spending – should we add a sentence in this text to explain that this year we see a potential change in the historic ability of the School Department to not require or request additional funds for school department operations due to future unknown SPED costs?

We can expand the narrative to include additional information to reflect what we have been discussing during the FY20 budget meetings with the School Committee. Specifically, the narrative can address the uncertainty around out-of-district tuition and the associated transportation costs and that expectation that we may require additional funding outside of the normal budget process and time frame.

47. Page 30 – Should the entire Behavioral Health Coach salary be under the Special Education cost center? It seems many of the responsibilities cover the entire student population.

We are currently reviewing to determine if a change in classification would be deemed appropriate per review of the SIMS, EPIMS and DESE end of year reporting classification requirements. Any such reclassification would be reflected for future years only.

48. What is the cost split between the portion of .6 Behavioral Health Coach grant v. budget? I ask this because it states that the grant runs through September 2019.

We have included the full salary within the FY20 budget for the Behavioral Coach. This position is not a year round position. There will be a one month overlap in which the salary can be reflected within the Grant, (September 2019).

49. I appreciate that under SPED, we have funded .6 FTE Behavioral Health Coach who focuses on ensuring that children have access to Multiple Tiers of Support, and that data collection and observing and advising are part of this Behavioral Health Coaches' role. Is .6 enough FTE for this position to do a lasting and good job? Will the coach be satisfied with this amount of FTE to stick with us so that we are not faced with a revolving door of coaches coming in and out. It seems to me that this position will benefit from longevity...

The Behavioral Health Coach is a 1.0 FTE within the FY20 Operating Budget – prior to FY20 the position was split between grant funding and operating budget funding but has always been a 1.0 FTE.

50. Looking at the professional development included in the Figure 15 and knowing that the Behavioral Health Coach is only .6, I am wondering from where the training for Restorative Justice that is mentioned in the RPS future goals is going to be funded? This is a link to a pilot school training program now underway with C4RJ 4. Schools

The Behavioral Coach position is a 1.0 position within the FY20 Budget.

51. Please confirm the number of additional para educators added in '19 and '20. Looks like we are adding 1.58 in '20 and I want to reference that to what was just added in '19.

The total increase in para educators within Special Education is 2.95 from the FY19 Budget – increase of 1.37 from the FY19 budget and 1.58 increase within the FY20 budget. These additional hours are tied directly to known individual student needs including what is projected as the students move between grades and schools.

52. As previously asked what is the additional para educator FTE?

The total increase in para educators within Special Education is 2.95 from the FY19 Budget – increase of 1.37 from the FY19 budget and 1.58 increase within the FY20 budget. This is calculated based upon known student movement between programs/schools.

53. Please confirm the amount for 0.6 RISE Music position that is not being contemplated

The estimated cost of adding a 0.6 RISE Music FTE within Special Education is \$40,950. We have not allocated funds in the FY20 budget for an additional position for music at RISE. Mrs. Bostwick has worked closely with the PTN and her staff to integrate music as much as possible in the program. Unfortunately, with all of the competing needs and priorities in our district, we are unable to fund a position in next year's budget.

54. Explain Psychologist up 16%.

The budget includes the addition of the 0.6 behavioral coach.

55. Page 32 – Figure 18 – if we have 7 fewer students in out of district placements, why are we seeing an 8.7% increase in OOD tuition?

As discussed in our School Committee presentation on January 17th, the 8.7% increase in out of district tuition is being driven by a few factors including students who are changing out of district placements to a more restrictive placement resulting in a higher cost, some private programs/schools who are petitioning with the Operational Services Division for higher tuition increase (through the reconstruction process), and some students whose teams are recommending a move from an in-district to an out of district placement.

56. What is estimate for SPED enrollment in '20? Referring to Figure 18.

Because the Special Education referral process is such a fluid process and is based on the individual needs of students, it is difficult to accurately estimate Special Education enrollment for the 2019-2020 school year and beyond. As stated at the 1/17 SC meeting, there are 99 students currently under individual program review (as required by law to be done at least once annually), another 58 currently in the process of evaluation, 35 of whom are being evaluated for initial eligibility. Historically, we have been slightly above or slightly below the state average annually for percent of students who are on individualized education plans. However, while

headcount is important to track over time, it should be noted that the services required for each student is individualized and as each IEP is reviewed annually, there are changes to those IEPs made, and when those changes require either a change in the types/quantities of services, or in the intensity/frequency/duration of any given service, these types of changes have a greater impact on resource allocation than straight headcount and percent of students entitled to special education.

In planning our staffing for FY 2020 we have worked closely with the principals and team chairpersons to project the program enrollment changes as students move through the grades and between buildings. For example, we considered that there are 53 students in grade 8 moving onto grade 9 at the high school and there are 39 students in grade 9, so there would need to be some reallocation / redeployment of staff at the high school to accommodate those incoming 9th graders, and we have 52 students exiting grade 12, so from a numbers perspective the incoming class replaces the outgoing class. (figure 19)

57. What are historical numbers in the POST program?

2016-2017	3
2017-2018	2
2019-2020	1 (with one more recommended)

58. Figure 19. Can we get a breakdown of students who are only using the Learning Center?

The Learning Center program at each of our schools is quite complex as this program serves students with all types of disabilities, all types of specialized service needs, and a wide range of curricula and strategy driven instructional techniques. The learning center staff must be both specialists in a variety of subjects and disability types, as well as generalists to support the needs of many. The numbers of students enrolled in an LC program will not in and of itself 'tell the story' of what those students require in order to make effective progress commensurate with each student's unique learner profile. There are students in the LC programs receiving highly specialized reading and literacy instruction, detailed and comprehensive emotional-social-behavior support plans, paraeducator support to facilitate active engagement in learning, etc. With that brief overview, on 1/7/2019, there are 432 students whose IEPs align with our LC programs.

59. Please denote the cost associated with a review of all programs. We need to determine that we are doing the best for students in all programs as opposed to sending some associated with a particular program out of district. When I joined the committee, I believe we only had one program called DLC at the time. I am all for inclusion, but we need to determine we are doing and have the skills to do what is best. Inclusion can't be at all costs – quantitative and qualitative.

Program review is part of any director's work. The next director will likely engage in an 'entry plan process', which typically includes a review of data from a variety of sources, as well as interviews with key people within the district. In many ways, for a special education director,

this is also a program review. Much can be gleaned from a fresh perspective that can help identify areas for enhancement, as well as areas of strength, across all aspects of special education.

The DESE will also be onsite next year examining practices and protocols established in the district and will form a report that often contains areas identified for improvement, so is a built-in form of program review from an outside agency.

Given the DESE review and the new director's entry plan, I would frankly advise against contracting with an outside program evaluator during the FY 2020 school year. My suggestion is to wait until the director formulates goals and an action plan based upon his/her internal review, coupled with the DESE review, prior to adding in another layer of review to consider. Should the committee want to understand the costs associated with program reviews for future planning, the costs are typically between \$5,000-\$10,000, depending upon the number of staff/buildings/students' to be reviewed, and how the program review is to be structured. For example, if the review is to include district data analysis across multiple data points relevant to the student population, staff interviews, direct observations, review of all curricula, review of select parts of target student records, review of assessment tools, and surveys of staff and parents, then the higher rate should be planned for.

In terms of inclusionary practices in Reading, it is my impression that inclusion is not the only or even the primary goal for students. By having various program options within the district, this enables Reading to meet its obligation to have a continuum of program options, each serving different population needs, and each providing an array of both inclusion and pull out services. However, it is important the general education classroom is considered as the first place to provide special education, as that is our regulatory obligation. In fact, special education teams are required to justify, in writing on the IEP document for every student, the rationale for any pull-out services and have to document that the benefit gained from pull out far exceeds the benefit of providing the special education services in the inclusion setting. The conversations I have with principals and team chairpersons indicate thoughtful decision making is embedded within the process for individual students.

60. I understand that the SPED programs have many students who have "hybrid" programs, but I would like to know the enrollment/ participation over time in each of these programs. Are the numbers in specific programs going up? How do they compare with one another? I am concerned about the increased numbers of students needing IEP and would like to understand if there are any patterns or trends in some of the needs that we should be noticing...

As we discussed at the School Committee Presentation on January 17th, it is difficult to accurately identify the enrollment of each individual special education program because some students may be in more than one program at a school. What we are seeing, based on our staffing and space needs, is there is an increase in students who are eligible for services in our Connections programs (students who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder), Compass programs (students with significant cognitive and learning challenges), and Therapeutic Support Program (students who require additional social and emotional support). See Question # 42b

for program enrollment, where we have counted any 'hybrid program' student only once and in the program where he/she has the majority of services aligned.

61. Last night it was reported that we have more children coming into RISE with more needs. And historically our RISE population has grown. We are adding 1.2 FTE of Kindergarten teachers for 2020 – when these children will be heading into Kindergarten. Have we allocated sufficient funds for para-educators for these classes as well, given the diverse needs that will be potentially integrated into each kindergarten class / program and the number of IEP meetings that the teachers will need to attend?

As part of our FY20 Staffing Discussions with building principals and the RISE Preschool Director, we assessed the needs of the RISE Preschool students entering Kindergarten next year and if additional staffing is required. The known additional staffing requests are in the FY20 Recommended Budget.

62. What is the restoration of PD \$18K?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on December 20, 2018 and on January 17, 2019, the FY19 budget for professional development was eliminated to fund additional staffing needs that emerged after the close of last school year, primarily due to student movement between programs and schools. In addition, the Special Education Program Improvement Grant which historically was utilized to set the costs of professional development for staff and this is no longer available. As a result, we are proposing to add back some funds for professional development. Professional development in special education is important to enhance staff skills in specific curricula/instructional programs, assessment practices, collaboration and consultation skills, unique student population needs' training, etc. This will also be an ongoing need in future budgets.

63. C4RJ is currently running a school training pilot. We are responding to requests for training from schools in C4RJ member communities and can also help connect non-member communities with a training team. For inquiries, please email info@c4rj.org. A C4RJ guide to restorative practices ... <https://www.c4rj.org/images/c4rj-schools-toolkit-revised-2017.pdf>

I don't know how much this pilot training costs, but would like to know if this is anticipated in this budget or from alternative funding sources yet...

We do have a few schools this year using funding from the School Climate Transformation Grant to provide training in Restorative Justice Programs such as Collaborative Problem Solving. However, at this point, we do not have plans to move forward with a district wide effort on restorative justice program. Therefore, we have not budgeted funding in FY20 for this area.

64. Why are we just arbitrarily increasing the legal budget back to '17 and '18 levels? Wouldn't it be better to see what happens? Is there a known coming down the line?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 17, 2019, the FY20 Budget for Legal Services is being recommended to be increased after careful consideration and review of historical activity, potential increases due to staffing changes (i.e.: when a district replaces a

special education director, it is not uncommon for the new director to seek counsel’s advice during their first 2 years at a higher rate than one would do so in subsequent years.). We have also conducted a thorough review of potential situations currently known and estimated the number of legal hours estimated to help resolve these matters. As also discussed this line item has been underfunded over the last several years resulting in transfers from regular day or within special education budget to support the actual spending trends. Based upon this fact pattern, we determined it was prudent to propose an increase within legal services. The Director of Student Services and Chief Financial Officer carefully review the invoices and associated expenditures to ensure it is being monitored and tracked throughout the year. Our apologies if this increase came across as arbitrary, as there was nothing arbitrary about how we arrived at the proposed figure.

65. As previously mentioned legal up 60.5%. Is this necessary?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 17, 2019, the FY20 Budget for Legal Services is being recommended to be increased after careful consideration and review of historical activity, potential increases due to staffing changes (i.e. replacement of special education director) as well as a review of potential items which are currently known. As also discussed this line item has been underfunded over the last several years resulting in transfers from regular day or within special education budget to support the actual spending trends. Based upon this fact pattern, we determined it was prudent to propose an increase within legal services. The Director of Student Services and Chief Financial Officer carefully review the invoices and associated expenditures to ensure it is being monitored and tracked throughout the year. (Also see question #63.)

66. How did you arrive at the \$130k amount listed for Legal Services? Did Legal Services estimate include anticipated legal services to represent RPS in the 3 OCR complaints listed on the US DOE website against RPS?

State	Institution	Institution Type	Type of Discrimination	Open Investigation Date
MA	READING	ESE	Disability - FAPE	9/26/2017
MA	READING	ESE	Disability - FAPE	11/3/2017
MA	READING	ESE	Disability - Retaliation	9/26/2017

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/investigations/open-investigations/dis2.html>

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 17, 2019, the FY20 Budget for Legal Services is being recommended to be increased after careful consideration and review of historical activity, potential increases due to staffing changes (i.e. replacement of special education director) as well as a review of potential items which are currently known. As also discussed this line item has been underfunded over the last several years resulting in transfers from regular day or within special education budget to support the actual spending trends. Based upon this fact pattern, we determined it was prudent to propose an increase within legal

services. The Director of Student Services and Chief Financial Officer carefully review the invoices and associated spent to ensure it is being monitored and tracked throughout the year. Questions #63 & 64 also provide information regarding how this figure was determined.

In reference to the OCR complaints listed on their website, we have submitted the necessary information that OCR required in the Fall of 2017. Since then, we have had no correspondence from OCR about these cases. It should not be assumed that all OCR investigations will require extensive legal counsel advice.

67. Explain Psychological Services up 31.3%.

The budget for Psychological Services was increased \$2,025 from the FY19 budget based upon a review of known and anticipated expenditures. This line was reduced in FY 19 to partially fund unanticipated staff costs needed for FY 19. The FY 20 amount is still far below actuals for FY 17 and FY 18.

68. Explain Therapeutic Services up 5%.

Therapeutic Services is comprised of Consultation Services which increased 3% (\$6,600) over the FY19 budget, Hearing Services which was kept flat with the FY19 budget and Vision Services which increased 40% (\$6,000). Consultation Services includes the POST Program, as well as various BCBA services, SLP services, ABA services, home services, and transition services that are contracted out based upon individual student needs. The increase reflects a review of prior year activity as well as reviewing current student needs and requirements. Based upon a review, the last three years have required budget transfers to appropriately fund this line item and as a result we are suggesting an increase in order to more accurately reflect actuals and align with the projected expenses.

69. Explain Special Education supply line up 17.1%.

The increase of \$2,500 in the Special Education supply line reflects adding back budget amounts that were removed in the current year to fund additional staffing requests. Special education instructional supplies are part of the annual operating costs for the department; this enables us to purchase new curriculum materials, as required, to meet the instructional demands associated with IEPs.

70. Testing up 1,395.3%?

The increase in Testing reflects adding back budget amounts that were removed in the current year to fund additional staffing requests. This is an artificially high percentage increase due to dramatic cuts in this line item in FY 2019 in order to support the adds to staff. Testing is required as part of the evaluation process for students to be considered for special education eligibility, as well as re-evaluation of eligibility at least once every three years. We must replenish the testing battery's individual student protocols, as well as update testing materials,

annually. We are not allowed to photocopy testing/examination booklets, therefore, this is an expense that is necessary every year.

71. Why are dues and memberships up 59.8%?

The increase of \$1,366 (59.8%) in the Dues and Membership line reflects adding back a membership to Mass Administrators for Special Education. This line was cut in FY 19, so this percentage increase is artificially high this year. It is expected that the new director will be part of the MA ASE, the statewide professional organization for people in this role.

72. Explain Software and Licensing up 14.9%.

The increase of \$3,575 (14.9%) in Software and Licensing reflects new software added in the current year based upon student needs as well as anticipated increases in our ESPED software based upon the most recent renewal contract. It is not unusual for students with disabilities to require assistive technology devices and/or specialized software to access curriculum. Some of our youngest and/or more disabled students also require software and devices to communicate, which is deemed as educationally necessary and therefore is part of an IEP, thus is an expense assumed by the school district.

73. Explain adaptive equipment up 20%.

The increase of \$2,000 (20%) in adaptive equipment reflects a review of historical spend based upon student needs – the budget is still below prior historical actuals. (see explanation in question # 40; identified students' needs impact adaptive equipment.)

74. Figure 32 discloses Circuit Breaker funding by year. Can you confirm these funds are expended the year after they are actually received? For the types of costs that Circuit Breaker funds are intended to cover, approximately what % of actual costs in FY'18 did these funds actually cover? (a rough estimate with stated assumptions is fine if the exact figure is difficult to calculate)

The following link provides a primer of financial aspects of special education including the Circuit Breaker Program – below is an excerpt from the link:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/circuitbreaker/finance.html>

“The state special education reimbursement program, commonly known as the circuit breaker program, was started in FY04 to provide additional state funding to districts for high-cost special education students. In FY08 approximately \$200 million was paid to districts under this program.

*The threshold for eligibility is tied to four times the state average foundation budget per pupil as calculated under the chapter 70 program, with the state paying 75 percent of the costs above that threshold. In FY08, the state average foundation budget per pupil was \$8852, so if a special education student cost a district \$50,000, the district's eligible reimbursement for that student would be $(\$50,000 - (4 * \$8852)) * .75 = \$10,944$.*

For children placed in a school district outside their home town by the Department of Transitional Assistance or the Department of Children and Families, and for children who have no parents or guardians in the commonwealth, the reimbursement is 100 percent above the threshold rather than 75 percent. (The Department of Children and Families is the new name for the Department of Social Services.)

Circuit breaker reimbursements are for the district's prior year's expenses. Each summer, districts submit claim forms to DESE listing the types and amounts of special education instructional services provided to each student during the previous fiscal year. Administrative and overhead costs are not reimbursable. Standard rates for each type of service are established annually by DESE based on statewide surveys and are used to calculate the reimbursable cost for each student; this simplifies the claim process and minimizes the documentation which needs to be submitted. For students attending private 766 schools, the eligible cost for reimbursement is based on the approved tuition rate set by the state's Operational Services Division.

Payments are made to districts on a quarterly basis. Because the program is subject to appropriation, the first quarter's payments are usually calculated using an interim reimbursement rate of less than 75 percent. After all the claim forms have been received and reviewed, and DESE verifies that there are sufficient appropriations to pay all claims, the reimbursements are recalculated.

In addition to the regular circuit breaker reimbursements, the "extraordinary relief" program provides up to \$5 million to help districts experiencing a significant increase in their special education costs. Under this program, districts may file an additional claim form in February for the current year's estimated expenses. If the expenses have increased by 25 percent or more over the prior fiscal year, then the district will be eligible for an additional extraordinary relief payment to help fund the increase."

The district currently utilizes the prior year circuit breaker funds received in the current fiscal year (for example the FY18 Circuit Breaker amount is being utilized in FY19) to pay for out of district tuition costs. By using the received reimbursement funds, a district can rely upon those reimbursements to fund the known expenses and should the legislature change its reimbursement rate (lower) mid-year, as it did in 2009, the district is not caught short as it has planned for funds already received as its circuit breaker offset, which allows for relative budget certainty in any given fiscal year. In FY18, circuit breaker covered approximately 30% of our out of district tuition.

75. What would be the % growth of a level service expenses for the SPED cost center if Circuit Breaker funds increased at 7% per year over the time period provided in Figure 20? (again, an estimate with stated assumptions is acceptable if an exact figure is labor intensive to provide)

The Special Education Circuit Breaker account was put into effect in 2004 so that the Commonwealth would help defray the expense to local school districts for providing legally mandated special education supports and services to children with severe disabilities.

Special education is paid for from four major sources — the general funds of the town, federal special education grants (IDEA grants), Chapter 70 funds, and the state circuit-breaker grant. The

state's Special Education Circuit Breaker program reimburses local school districts for a portion of their costs above a certain threshold for educating high-needs special education students. The threshold for eligibility is tied to four times the state average foundation budget per pupil as calculated under the Chapter 70 education funding law. The state is authorized to pay up to 75 percent of the approved costs above that threshold, only after the expenditure, however, in the current fiscal year, the reimbursement rate is under 72%.

Therefore, circuit breaker funds cannot increase at 7% per year because it is based on the number of claims and verified expenses related to each claim, that we have each year based on the number of students that reach the 4x the foundation budget threshold in costs. Circuit breaker could only be applied to offset the out of district tuition line item and for a small number of students

District Wide

76. The school physician line item is exactly \$8k for 5 consecutive years. Is this the actual amount of money spent or just an estimate that has been retained? What was the actual cost for school physician services in FY'18? I realize we don't have the final expense numbers for FY'19 yet, but we should know the actual numbers from earlier years.

The actual amount of the services provided has remained consistent at \$8,000 per year and we anticipate the figure to remain consistent in the current fiscal year.

77. Why did postage go from \$0 in FY'18 to \$300 for each of FY'19 and FY'20? The last charge for postage was about half this amount in FY'16 (\$147). Would \$150 be a more realistic estimate for postage in FY'20?

The \$300 in postage is a nominal figure allocated annually as part of the budget. Any unspent funds can be reallocated within the District Wide Cost Center or returned as part of free cash as the end of the year.

78. Please provide a summary of the Athletic and Extracurricular user fees and the family cap applicable to each.

Below are the RMHS User Fees for the 2018-19 School Year. We are not recommending any increase in FY20.

ACTIVITY	FEE	TIME COVERED
Athletics	\$325.00 per athlete per sport \$750.00 cap per athlete per year \$950.00 cap per family per year	Three seasons: Fall, winter and spring
Band: Fall Marching Band, Stage Band, Color Guard, Band: Jazz Band, Winter Percussion, Winter Guard	\$200.00 per activity \$475.00 cap per student per year \$750.00 cap per family per year	Two seasons: Fall & Winter
Drama	\$150.00 per student per season \$75.00 per student for crew per season \$375.00 cap per student per year \$550.00 cap per family per year	Three seasons: Fall, Winter and Spring

79. If Turf 2 goes out of commission –we will be putting an ‘extra’ \$20,000 into the revolving account to ensure we have extended use of Parker’s field, which includes temporary lights. Will the Recreation dept be sharing this cost with us given that they share the fields?

The \$20,000 added to the Athletics Cost Center in expenses as well as the increase in the Offset are to cover the additional busses and potential lighting as it relates to Reading Athletics. Based upon a review of the revolving account, we feel comfortable that this increase in the offset is attainable. The expenses reflected are those related to the Reading High School Athletics and we will continue to work with other Town Departments including Recreation to ensure that all expenses are shared to the extent possible.

80. The athletics budget has increased over 65% since FY’16 (from about \$405k to \$671k in FY’20). Why? What would be the least disruptive way to reallocate the following amounts from the athletics budget in the FY’20 budget (e.g., to other cost centers)?

- a. 5% reallocation (to \$638,129, or \$11,208 more than FY’19)

As described in the Superintendent’s message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent’s Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions.

- b. 10% reallocation (to \$604,543, or \$68,686 more than FY’18)

As described in the Superintendent’s message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent’s Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions.

81. The extracurricular budget is about 5% less than FY’17 and FY’18, but about 18% more than last year. Why? Is this the result of changes in the offset taken each year?

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 7, 2019 we are recommending a decrease in the offset of \$20,000.

82. Please provide a table showing the numbers of students participating in extracurricular activities by year in the same format as Figure 26 (Athletics).

SCHOOL YEAR	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
**FALL DRAMA CAST/HEAD TECH	89	100	78	79
FALL DRAMA CREW	47	41	48	49
WINTER DRAMA CAST/HEAD TECH	58	83	47	49
WINTER DRAMA CREW	55	45	59	73
SPRING DRAMA CAST/HEAD TECH	81	46	55	*
SPRING DRAMA CREW	46	48	34	*
MARCHING BAND	35	42	38	56
JAZZ BAND	18	17	19	18
STAGE BAND	14	11	17	25
FALL GUARD	15	19	12	7
WINTER GUARD	12	17	13	13
TOTAL	470	469	420	

Notes

****2016-17 through 2018-19 Fall Drama Cast/Head Tech includes Non-Drama Improv Students**
 -2017-18 Fall Drama Cast/Head Tech *Pippin* had less Cast & Head Tech positions available than
 -2016-17 Fall Drama Cast/Head Tech *The Wedding Singer*. Also 2017-18 had less
 Non Drama Improv students than 2016-17.
 -Winter Drama has 2 plays. Some Crew members participate in both plays but only charged
 1x Winter user fee and counted 1x in Winter participation numbers above.

83. **p. 12 in Jan 4th presentation/ p. 37 of details** –I appreciate the efforts to understand the drama program and would like to know what the ramifications of decreasing this cost center by \$20,000 will be? The ability to meet the needs of the individuals and the group in the drama program is one way that our schools address the diversity of needs, as well as skills that are no longer taught in school. I would hate to decrease their funding and in so doing pressure them into just producing high profit shows or interfere with their efforts to engage and inspire a broader group of students.

It is important to note that we are not decreasing this area of the cost center by \$20,000. There are no reductions being recommended in the FY20 budget in this area. The FY20 budget as presented includes a recommendation to reduce the amount of the offset taken from the RMHS Extra-Curricular Revolving Account due to the decrease in user fees and ticket sales. The overall expense within this cost center, as a result, would be to increase the operating budget by this amount.

84. What would be the savings (if any) of moving from a three year to a four or five year renewal cycle for software programs and maintenance programs? (page 36)

In accordance with Massachusetts General Law we are prohibited from moving to a four or five year renewal cycle for software programs and maintenance programs. Any contract exceeding three years would require Town Meeting approval.

85. Please explain the following two line items from Figure 28: reduction of “Software Licensing & Support” from \$94k+ to \$63k+, and increase of “Software” (under “Other Expenses”) from \$32k to \$82k. This amounts to a combined total increase of about \$18k. Why?

As discussed with School Committee during the Fiscal 19 budget meetings held in January 2018, the “Software Licensing & Support figure include an amount for renewing our Anti-Virus Software. As we secured a three-year renewal it is not included within the proposed FY 2020 budget.

As discussed with the School Committee on January 7, 2019 the increase in the FY20 budget reflects the upcoming renewal of two software maintenance agreements that were previously covered as part of the initial capital project.

86. Please explain the reason for the “Information Management” fee that started at about \$5k in FY’18 and increased to about \$6k in FY’19 and FY’20 budgets. What do we get with this money?

The \$6,000 included within Supplies and Materials is to cover all miscellaneous items such as keyboards, mice, laptop batteries, etc to restock hardware inventory. The figure was budgeted at \$6,000 in FY18 but actual expenses came in slightly less than budgeted.

87. The Consulting Services line item more than doubled in FY’20 (\$10.2k to \$25.2k). Why? What would be the least disruptive effect of reducing this line item to about \$15k, to reallocate these funds elsewhere in the budget? (in line with FY’16)

As described in the Superintendent’s message on Pages 3-6 in the Superintendent’s Recommended FY20 Budget, we are not recommending any reductions from a level service budget in FY20. If we need to make recommended reductions in future fiscal years, we would need to review all of the needs of the district from all cost centers and have discussions with district administrators and building principals to prioritize those reductions.

As discussed with the School Committee during the presentation on January 7, 2019, the District Wide Technology budget reflects additional funds required to maintain the districts bell, intercoms and paging systems that should be reflected within this Cost Center. The increase of \$15,000 can be 100% attributed to this item.

88. Why is the \$11.7k cost for Networking & Telecom from FY’19 copied in FY’20? This line item appears unfunded in FY’17 and FY’18. What was the consequence of doing without these funds in those years?

The Networking & Telecom Figure for FY19 and FY20 is for a consulting arrangement we have in place related to on-call support for our phone system. Upon closer review the actual expenditures have not been reflected in this line item but are reflected within Software licensing and Support. We will update to ensure that the actual and budgeted figures are properly reflected.

89. What is being counted as an Inventory item in Figure 29? Is this the number of laptop and desk top computers? I note that about half (56%) of the inventory has a ship year of 2016 or later, and about 8% was shipped in 2013 or earlier.

Figure 29 includes all laptop and desktop computers. As mentioned during last year's process our goal has been to get our technology replacement on a five year replacement cycle. The override funding provided last year helped significantly to achieve that goal.

90. Figure 28. Please explain Consulting Services increase of 147.1%.

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 7, 2019, the FY20 Budget includes the addition of \$15,000 for the District Wide Technology Cost Center assuming responsibility for the maintenance of the clocks, paging and intercom systems across the district. These costs had previously been included within the Town Core budget.

91. Figure 28. Please Software increase of 156.3%.

As discussed during the School Committee presentation on January 7, 2019, the FY20 Budget placeholders for two systems (KACE and Barracuda) maintenance renewals related to capital projects completed three years ago in which the initial maintenance was included within the capital funding.

Facilities

92. We significantly increased the budgeted overtime in FY'19 compared to past years. How close are we tracking to this estimate (pro rata to date)? What is our basis to believe this increased overtime rate will be sustained in FY'20?

The overtime line item was increased by \$4,140 from the current fiscal year budget. As discussed with the School Committee during the presentation on January 7, 2019, we are recommending increasing this line item to reflect the increase in the hourly rate for the custodians per the executed contract, increased vacation times as seniority within the department increases, coverage for custodians out on leave, coverage for snow storms which require additional shifts and hours to be filled. We work very closely and collaboratively with the Facilities department to balance back-filling positions while being budget conscious. As an example, often times shifts are not filled one for one when a custodian is out. But, as the long weekend illustrated we often have to call in the custodians on Sundays and Holidays to clean up after a storm to ensure that scheduled activities can occur and that the buildings are ready for students. Over the MLK weekend custodians were called in all day Sunday and Monday to ensure all buildings were cleaned and that there were no heating issues due to the extreme cold.

93. There is a 15% increase in cleaning services projected for FY'20. Is this related to a contract rate increase? Please explain.

As discussed with the School Committee during the presentation on January 7, 2019, we are in the final year of our three-year cleaning contract. As we prepare to go out to competitive bid we are anticipating an overall increase due to preliminary discussions with vendors.

94. Facilities slide on water sewer usage. Coolidge and Wood End have irrigation systems, leading to significantly higher water/sewer costs compared to our other schools. Is there anything DPW can do/is doing to mitigate the high costs associated with these irrigation systems?

DPW has the irrigation system on timing clocks to limit the watering during the growing/mowing season. To further ensure cost mitigation (limiting water evaporation) watering is scheduled Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings and there are also rain sensors in place.

Special Revenue – Revolving Funds and Grants

95. Moving forward, I'd like us to consider a description of what fund balance we strive to maintain in each revolving fund. The School Lunch Program revolving fund by law can only carry forward three months of operating expenses. It would be helpful to articulate a guideline range we strive to maintain in each revolving fund in terms of percent of operating expenses.

We can look to expand this section in future budgets to include a description as well as an explanation as to how we assess the ending balances within each revolving account.

96. Revolving Fund offsets change yearly and are applied to various expense lines in the budget. This creates a real challenge for a reader who wants to see the true costs of these line items over time. I'd like to see us figure out a way to improve transparency in this area. One idea is merely an asterisk with the revolving fund offset used every year, so a reader can remove it and see how true expenses associated with these line items change annually.

We can look to improve the way in which the offsets are described and reflected within the budget book.

97. I believe during the presentation it was stated that non-mandated busing and extended day costs are NOT fully funded by parents. If I heard this correctly, what percent of these costs are being covered in the operating budget?

The Extended Day program is self-sustained within its Revolving Account and no costs are absorbed within the Schools Operating Budget. We currently offer a paid bus route for students who do not qualify for the mandated transportation (grades k-6 who live more than 2 miles from their school). Parent reimbursement funds approximately 57% of the total cost of the additional bus with the remainder being reflected in the Operating Budget.

98. When did we last evaluate the user fees associated with our Revolving Accounts, and determine that these fees are appropriate given the services provided and the offset taken for associated activities in the FY'20 budget? Please share a summary of this analysis for each revolving account.

We are constantly reviewing our user fees to see if we need to adjust them based on the services being provided to our students. For example, in FY18, we decreased the Extended Day tuitions by 10% because revenues were outpacing expenses. In FY18, we increased the Athletic User Fees by \$75 (\$325/sport) and the Individual Cap by \$150 (\$750/sport) while keeping the family cap flat. We also increased RISE tuition in FY18 by 5% and Extra-curricular Band and Drama at the High School by \$25 to \$200 and \$150, respectively. In FY18, we also increased Kindergarten Tuition to \$4450, an increase of \$250.

99. Can you provide links to websites where readers can learn more about the origin and purpose of the grants in Figure 32?

All of the grant descriptions for our state and federal entitlement grants are located on the following DESE websites:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/awards.html>

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/grants/>

The School Climate Transformation Grant is located at the following Federal DOE Website

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/schoolclimatelea/index.html>

100. Please describe the impact of the termination of the MTSS School Transformation grant (provided about \$111k-\$461k/year from FY'15-FY'19).

- a. What are the results of this grant that will remain at RPS in FY'20 and beyond.

As discussed during the budget presentations to School Committee on January 7th and January 17th the 0.6 Behavioral Coach is being funded as a Town Priority within the Accommodated Costs for the upcoming fiscal year. In addition, there are some on-going training (Open Circle) and Software costs that will remain at RPS in FY20 and beyond.

- b. How many positions (FTE) (if any) are being transferred from the MTSS grant to the operating budget starting in FY'20?

As discussed during the budget presentations to School Committee on January 7th and January 17th the 0.6 Behavioral Coach is being funded as a Town Priority within the Accommodated Costs for the upcoming fiscal year.

Community – FY20 Budget Questions

Special Education

101. I had forgot to ask last night if there's money being put back in the budget to reinstate the RISE music teacher? The music teacher is a really important position at RISE because a lot of students who come to rise or nonverbal in music helps learn children to speak. Music is such a huge part of learning language.

We have not allocated funds in the FY20 budget for an additional position for music at RISE. I understand your concerns regarding the need for music at the preschool level and Mrs. Bostwick has worked very closely with the PTN and her staff to integrate music as much as possible in the program. Unfortunately, with all of the competing needs and priorities in our district, we are unable to fund a position in next year's budget.