

**Chester Elementary School Board of Education  
2023-2024 Budget Workshop Frequently Asked Questions**

***General Budget Questions***

**Q: The budget document shows student enrollment in Chester Elementary School increasing slightly over the past few years. Is enrollment information based on reports from the State?**

A: No, enrollment data is based on the actual October 1 student enrollment in the school, as measured by the administration, and reported to the State. The enrollment currently in the school (as of the budget workshop dates in the winter) is very similar to the October 1 enrollment. Because actual enrollment may vary over the course of the school year, the administration monitors these numbers carefully. If at any point during the budgeting process there is a need to rethink budgeted staffing in the upcoming school year, the Administration would advise the Board accordingly.

**Q: How do we forecast Kindergarten enrollment projections?**

A: The initial figure is provided to us by the consulting firm NESDEC (New England School Development Council). We used this group a few years ago to do an in depth demographic study and enrollment study of all three of our towns, and annually, we receive updated future enrollment projections based on actual student counts. The school also works with the town to identify families moving into the area, places ads in the papers, and contacts local preschools and daycare centers to identify families who will be entering Kindergarten in the upcoming year, and begin the student enrollment process.

**Q: The initial proposed budget shows an increase of 7.8%. Is this a typical increase for the school, and was it this high last year?**

A: The budget change last year was 5.66%. In addition to the costs that are specific to the Chester Elementary School, the CES budget also includes its cost share from the Supervision District budget. The main driver for the higher year-over-year changes in Chester over the past 2 years has been a change in its contribution level to the Supervision District Budget, which has increased in each of the past two years.

**Q: What is the cost share this year of the Supervision District Budget?**

A: 3 Way Allocation

- Chester: 32.31% (+ 1.68%)
- Deep River: 28.69% (- 1.52%)
- Essex: 39.00% (- 0.16%)

4 Way Allocation

- Chester 15.77% (+ 1.54%)

- Deep River 14.00% (- 0.04%)
- Essex 19.04% (+ 0.85%)
- Region 4: 51.19% (- 2.35%)

**Q: Given the % increase is as high as it is for Chester, is this the year to be implementing the expansion of the Pre-K program? Or is this something we should wait for since there isn't a state mandate requiring it.**

A: The Administration recommended the expansion of the Pre-K program in 2023-24 based on the academic and social & emotional needs of students. Additionally, the proposal for this year was based on a significant amount of community feedback and input. The Supervision District Committee must ultimately decide whether or not to support this recommendation based on the needs of our schools and our towns.

**Q: How does the capital request compare to last year**

A: The Capital Request this year is \$75,000, compared to \$67,000 last year. The funds requested for the Generator have stayed flat at \$20,000, which is a multi-year annual contribution to save up for a whole building generator. Building Rehabilitation and Paving & Sidewalks both increased slightly, while the allocation to replace the Project Adventure course was removed from the request as this is fully funded.

**Q: How many paraprofessionals are in the building?**

A: There were 11.5 FTE budgeted for 2022-2023. We've proposed an increase of 0.5 FTE to meet known student needs.

**Q: How are Paraprofessionals assigned at Chester Elementary School?**

A: We have 1.0 FTE generally deployed for Kindergarten classes, 1.5 FTE who do general Reading supports, and 1.0 FTE who does general Math supports. The remaining assist with students with special needs.

**Q: With rising healthcare costs, why do we see a decline in health insurance in line 5210?**

A: The main drivers for the decrease are staff turnover, with fewer current employees electing to utilize our insurance, and responsible budgeting for healthcare costs over the past few years which has allowed us to mitigate some of the rising costs of insurance in the marketplace.

**Q: With Eversource increasing its electricity supply rates in recent months, have we seen cost increases in our electricity budget request?**

A: Our electricity rates were locked in during June 2020, and will remain in effect through November 2024 (including all of next school year).

**Q: Where do we budget for the cost of oil used by the school for heating?**

A: This is account 5624 under Supplies. There is an increase of 29.31%, as our oil rates increased from \$2.3462 / gallon to \$3.1896 / gallon.

***Regarding Changes in the Substitute Salary Line and the Request for Daily Building Sub***

**Q: Please explain the reallocation of Substitute Pay from Supervision District to the Chester budget for 23-24?**

A: The funds that were in the Supervision District budget, for use by the Elementary schools, are being removed from Supervision and placed directly in each local board's budget. The net impact on the bottom line in the current year is \$0. This practice will ensure more accurate budgeting based on usage for each elementary school moving forward in subsequent years.

**Q: What happens to the Supervision budget when a sub is called for a Supervision staff member?**

A: Previously, this charge would go against the sub teacher line in the Supervision District budget, but depending on how often subs chose one school over another, different schools would benefit from these funds at a rate higher than what was allocated through the cost share for the year. By moving the funds to the local budgets, if a sub is required to cover for a Supervision staff member, that school will be able to select the sub directly and will also have the funds available to cover the day's wages.

**Q: What is the daily rate for a daily sub?**

A: We are evaluating substitute pay rates for each employee group throughout the spring. In regards to our Teaching Subs, we are currently proposing an increase in the daily rate from \$100 / \$125\* per day to \$125 / \$150\* per day to ensure we are above minimum wage and competitive with our neighboring school districts.

\* Higher pay rate for substitutes with Teacher Certification

**Q: Please share more information on the proposed long-term daily building sub for Chester**

A: Key information on this proposed position is below:

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

**Q: Was the current building sub funded through COVID money?**

A: Yes, we have been using ESSER grants since 2020 for this resource in all schools

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

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

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

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

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

***Regarding the proposed addition in the Supervision District Budget related to the expansion of the current Prekindergarten program***

**Q: Can we make the Pre-K program budget neutral?**

A: Not all children are tuition students, so the revenue would only be charged to a percentage (approximately half) of the families. If we were to change the costs of tuition, it would be done by Board policy through work with the Joint BOE Tuition Committee to set a tuition rate.

**Q: Why do we need two teachers if the Pre-K program were to expand to full day, but keep the same current student enrollment in year 1?**

A: By expanding the program to full day, each of the current cohorts, morning and afternoon run by the same teachers, would run simultaneously. Therefore, we would need additional staff to cover the second section.

**Q: Why would an expansion of the PreK program require an additional preschool bus?**

A: We currently budget for 4 bus runs to service PreK, with 1 morning, 2 midday, and 1 afternoon run. If we expanded PreK to a full day program, then all 4 year-olds would be riding the bus at the same time in the morning and afternoon. Therefore, we would need 2 buses in the morning, 1 at midday for the half day program, and 2 in the afternoon.

**Q: Where is the tuition revenue for the PreSchool Program?**

A: It is accounted for in the Supervision District budget, with a line for anticipated annual revenues.