

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

#	Name - Initials	Question(s)	Answer(s)
<b>February 4, 2025 - Schools/Athletics</b>			
1.	BF	<p>Is a breakdown available from UHC beyond “we have a high claim rate” to show the reasons we have such a large medical insurance increase? Could you review again the reasons we had such a low increase in our medical insurance rates for this year? Did any of this year's low rate increase only delay the increase until next year?</p>	<p>We joined the partnership plan in 2016. At the time, the Board of Education had tremendous savings by switching to the plan. For many years, increases were lower. During the course of the Partnership plan the 2% Fairfield County adjustments were made. In 2023, we were looking at a 10% increase in insurance costs. This caused us to work with our unions and go out to bid for a HDHP.</p> <p>We were able to save \$2.5M by switching away from the Partnership Plan for two years. In 23-24 we realized more savings than expected which enabled us to keep the 24-25 budget flat.</p> <p>In terms of the “high claim rates”, the simplest explanation for the 33% rate increase is the loss ratio. The ratio of claims to premium is 143% (a dollar difference of \$3.2 million). This is the amount of actual expenses that were absorbed by United Health Care.</p> <p>The actual underwriting is a more complicated formula using trend, fixed costs, large claim adjustments, etc. but the loss ratio speaks for itself.</p>
2.	BF	<p>Of the 13 towns shown in the Part 2 budget presentation showing insurance health cost increases 5 are self-insured with two of those showing only 8% increases. Obviously those 5 towns feel self-insured is</p>	<p>This is an option that could be explored, but it would take time to really look at the full cost. It would not necessarily save money for next year's budget, the question would be a long-term goal. Becoming self-insured could have some risks. Where communities struggle the most is to maintain the appropriate levels of cash reserve.</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		<p>their best option. Should we be doing an in-depth, detailed investigation of whether self-insurance would be a better option for Bethel?</p>	<p>If we were to be self-insured we would need to fund and maintain a cash reserve of at least 25% of total claims, which would be \$2.6M. Admin fee to the insurance carrier is approximately \$300k. We would also need to buy stop-loss insurance, which would be \$1.3M per year. In addition, it would slightly Increase work for the business office.</p> <p>We have requested an estimate on self pay from our insurance broker.</p>
3.	BF	<p>It is my understanding that at BHS we try to work with student-athletes to find substitute ways for them to compete when we do not offer a particular sport. Is there a cost to our operating budget to do so? How much? From what accounts? Do these students pay the pay-to-participate fee?</p>	<p>We participate on joint teams for Hockey (\$5,000) and Boys Swimming (\$10,772) &amp; Girls Swimming (\$6,130), gymnastics (assistant coach \$3592 stipend).</p> <p>Generally speaking, the students pay the participation cost associated with participating on the team. On occasion, the athletic general fund was used to subsidize the fees for gymnastics (uniforms) and skiing (\$200 for tournament registration fees).</p> <p>The funds are from the Coaches and Advisors account, transportation and the General Supplies - Sports and Clubs account.</p>
4.	BF	<p>The last board-approved pay-to-participate fee, Oct. 2022, is \$150 per sport/\$450 per family. Are those amounts being collected this year? next year? If not board approval should be obtained.</p>	<p>The Board of Education did move to the family cap to \$450.00. As we have mentioned we did not move the family cap because we were having so many families providing transportation for their students. Currently, the family cap is \$300. It will be moved to \$450 next year.</p>
5.	SC BF	<p>What is the total cost of the additional school psychologist? Where would this position be housed? What need would this fulfill?</p>	<p>The new psychologist would be a districtwide evaluator and would provide support to all schools.</p> <p>The cost is estimated at \$80,000 plus health benefits.</p>
6.	SC	<p>What roles are fulfilled in the</p>	<p>BMS includes club advisors and athletic coaches. The elementary schools include</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		“coaches and advisors” line at Berry, Rockwell, Johnson, and the Middle School? Are these after-school clubs?	stipends for music performances, Unified Sports. The stipend amounts are listed in the <a href="#">BEA Collective Bargaining Agreement</a> . All coaches and advisors are only afterschool activities, as they are being compensated for work beyond the school day.
7.	JL	Line 5201 BHS other student transportation shows a small increase, what exactly is this for?	I think this question is regarding line 5101. The cost of transportation is increasing 3% per our contract with First Student. There are minor adjustments from the 3% to bring it down to 2.8%. This line is for athletic transportation.
8.	JL	BHS shows only 6 paraeducators for the whole building, does this include out SPED programs that are off-site?	These are the paraeducators that are funded in the operating budget. As you are aware from our presentation, the IDEA grant pays for Para educators also. There are 13 total at BHS.
9.	JL KD	BMS line 6502 Tech supplies & software subscriptions are increased by 5500.00 what is this for?	The increase is funding for the IXL program. The IXL program provides diagnostic assessments, in both literacy and mathematics. It then tailors lessons for the students in specific skills. It also provides progress monitoring.
10.	JL	BMS line 4303 Equipment repair is increased from 0, is that moving things around?	Yes. Overall, purchased property services are flat year to year.
11.	JL	Across all schools I see the number of paraprofessionals is the same as last year, how do we plan for new students who will need support that arrive after the start of the school year, what line does that come out of? I know this has happened almost every year.	We hope to fund additional paras with excess cost funding.
12.	JL	In the substitute teacher line is this for building subs as well as day and long-term subs?	Yes. We moved to a building sub-model since COVID. This provides stability in services to the schools. We do have to employ long-term substitutes for teachers who go on maternity leaves, long-term maternity leaves, etc.

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

13.	KD	BHS: Why is there an increase in Prof. Development/Travel/Mileage? (line 5800)	The major increase was in school counselors. They have been doing more college visits. In addition, the federal mileage rate has increased .70 a mile.
14.	KD	BHS: Why is there an increase in General Supplies- Sports and Clubs? What are the general supplies?	This account is used to purchase athletic uniforms per our uniform replacement cycle. The cost of uniforms has increased due to inflation.
15.	KD	JS: What tutor positions have been cut? What population of students does this impact? Is it all students?	Tutoring hours for literacy, math, academic support, and MLL tutors will be reduced. It will be across all areas. It will be in all schools and affect group size and/or the number of students seen.
16.	KD	JS: Why is there an increase in Coaches and Advisors? Same question for Custodians overtime.	Stipend positions increased per the teacher's contract. The negotiated increase was 2% per year. The increase in custodial overtime was to match actual spending. Custodians do overtime for a variety of reasons, including school-sponsored events on weekends, snow removal, building issues, etc.
17.	KD	RS: Please explain the increase in Prof Development/Travel/ Mileage as well as Conference Registration fees. What are the anticipated conferences? What is the anticipated Professional development?	It provides more professional development opportunities for teachers. This is reimbursement for travel expenses.
18.	KD	Overall, what software subscriptions have been cut across the district? Are you referring to platforms such as IXL? Or are those platforms under a different line?	We did not cut any districtwide software. The reductions primarily are in hardware. We did not cut IXL. IXL Math for BMS and Johnson is in the district Technology Budget (Tech Supplies & Subscriptions 6502). The IXL ELA subscription is in the BMS building subscription line.
19.	KD	Why is there a decrease in the cost of copier leases?	Funding was reallocated across schools to better reflect copying needs. Also, there was a slight decrease as we intend to reduce printing
20.	BF	Please explain superintendent	The Superintendent salary line corresponds to the current Superintendent salary,

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		variation of \$13,200 object code 101.1111 and secretary variation of \$7,039 object code 1214.	<p>which was increased after last year's budget was approved.</p> <p>The secretary line also reflects the current secretary wages which were increased after last year's budget was approved.</p>
21.	SC	Account 6502. There is a \$30,396 increase in tech supplies and software. Why the increase?	This reflects the annual increase needed to maintain our current software platforms such as Google Workspace, PowerSchool, filtering software, MFA, and other annual subscriptions for productivity, device/system management, cybersecurity and online safety management. This increase also includes S2 service hitting the operating budget, as a multiyear contract was previously purchased under the renovations. Increased subscription costs and S2 is a 6% change on last year's budget—with a flat Technology budget these costs have been shifted from other lines.
22.	SC	Account 5601. Why the increase in regular ed tuition of \$17,946?	We have more students attending Shepaug. Their tuition also increased.
23.	SC	Account 5100. There is a one-year increase of \$490k. Why?	This account reflects transportation, regular and special education. The First Student contract is a 3% increase. The rest is special education transportation, which include rate increases and additional students in outplacements.
24.	SC	Do we currently pay for any outside consultants for anything?	We paid for an enrollment study this year. We have not brought in any other consultants, even through the grants.
25.	SC	What dues and fees do we pay that amount to \$94k? Is there any room for reduction?	<p>We already reduced this line as much as possible. In addition to professional memberships, this line includes fees associated with student events. The largest memberships include:</p> <p>C.A.B.E. \$24,397</p> <p>PARTNERS FOR EDUCATIONAL \$9,420 - Reduced by approximately 1/2</p> <p>ED ADVANCE \$7,381</p> <p>C.A.S. \$6,475</p> <p>C.A.P.S.S. \$5,922</p> <p>SOUTH-WEST CONFERENCE \$5,300</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

			<div>N.E.A.S.C.               \$4,470</div> <div>C.A.S.B.O.               \$1,565</div>
26.	SC	Account 3203. Explain the “requirement” for an adult ed program. I know we partner with “WeRace” in Danbury.	Chapter 164 Sections 10-67 to 10-73(d), inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S) require that the adult education services described in this section be provided by local school districts, free of charge, to any adult 17 years of age or older who is not enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school program. <a href="https://www.ct.gov/deep/asp/AdultEducationInstructionalPrograms.aspx">Adult Education Instructional Programs - CT.gov</a> These mandated services include: GED, HS Diploma, Citizenship, and ESL services.
27.	SC	What “equipment and furniture” is needed for \$146k?	This includes the district Technology Equipment—one grade of Chromebooks, UPS’s and UPS batteries (power supply for network/servers), and funding to replace classroom displays and staff devices which are no longer under warranty. This includes instructional equipment at the school level, which may include science, art, music or PE equipment in addition to AV replacements (e.g. cameras, microphones). The equipment and furniture line is down \$26,593 from the 24-25 budget.
28.	SC	Account 6411 & 6412. What library books and reference materials are needed for \$27,200? Is there an itemized list?	This line covers print titles for collection maintenance and development. This also includes book repair and processing materials. Additionally, librarians purchase materials for summer reading, and multi-copy requests for literature circles and independent reading. There are minimal costs associated with magazine and periodicals to support curriculum and departments, and one copy of the News-Times. The libraries have also purchased books to support emotional intelligence and literacy programs across the district.
29.	SC	Account 6110. Can you provide the board with an itemized list of what textbooks and instructional supplies are needed totaling \$409k?	We do not have an itemized list. This looks at year-to-year spending for instructional supplies, including paper, office supplies, pencils, markers, crayons, children's whiteboards, gym equipment, art supplies, as well as Health Supplies, Athletic Supplies, and Testing Materials.
30.	JA	What bargaining group the Athletic Trainer would fall under?	It is a non-union union position or “Other Staff”.

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

31.	JA	<p>Would it be a 10-month or 12-month position?</p> <p>If 10 months, are there per diem options to support summer athletics that take place (weight room, etc)?</p> <p>Would our position be in line with the other trainers in the SWC? Locally.</p>	<p>The position is currently 12 months, and provides support to multiple summer programs including summer conditioning and summer coaching. None of the responsibilities would change. There are some outlier salaries in the SWC. The proposed salary would be in line with most of our area towns.</p>
32.	JA	<p>In the past, our ATC has also served as a Capstone mentor and we have used her to support students in the Healthcare Pathways program. Is this still going to be a part of that position?</p>	<p>The responsibilities will not change.</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

33.	JS	Although the overall biudget for the tutors has not changed, it looks like allocations are changing quite a bit. What is driving the changes?	Budget was moved to reflect where we are currently providing tutoring services.
<b>February 6, 2025 - IT, Curriculum, SPED</b>			
34.	SC	Given the change in circle of friends, is there room for any additional staff reductions beyond what has already been cut? Are there other possibilities to reduce sections?	By changing the Circle of Friends program to a half day model there is no longer time in the schedule to provide specials, which creates capacity in our current staffing model. Further efficiencies could be reached by utilizing lunch monitors to cover teacher preps instead of teachers. We could reduce 4 teacher FTEs if we fully fund lunch monitors. This will result in layoffs. Cost savings is estimated at \$220,844.



**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

35.	SC	What is our current library/media rotation at the elementary level and middle school? Is there room for efficiencies?	<p>If we move the LMS model from a Flex schedule to a rotation model at both schools, there are potential efficiencies in reductions in other special areas. We have discussed that our special model provides curriculum and instruction in the designated areas. It also provides the appropriate coverage to receive the preparation period coverage as designated by the contract. We would have to identify two elective areas to reduce by in this model.</p> <p>Cost savings is estimated at \$142,521.</p>
36.	SC	Can you talk about the role of secondary library/media paras? Is this a possibility for a reduction?	<p>The secondary library paraeducators, as well as the JES library para, provide a variety of functions. They work directly with students as well as perform many clerical tasks to ensure the library runs smoothly. While this is not an exhaustive list, some responsibilities of our library paras include—book checkout, library maintenance (physical space, print and digital collections), curation of resources, firstline Chromebook troubleshooting, device repair ticketing, planning and supporting library initiatives, teacher/office coverage, manage the device loaner pool, manage library scheduling, support testing. Students are coming in and out of the library throughout the day, especially at BHS—having a para in the library is a safety need.</p> <p>Adding the library media specialist into the specials rotation (fixed schedule) at elementary and middle, and eliminating the Flex model, will impact operations and how we serve our students. Eliminating library paras will mean that their responsibilities will fall solely on the LMS in addition to having their fixed schedule. It is more cost efficient for paras to do this work than a higher salary staff member. Additionally, assuming all of the para responsibilities reduces LMS time to authentically work with staff and students outside of their fixed classes.</p> <p>If we are to have a BYOT program in the coming years, it will be essential to have the para staff to support the LMS in ensuring students can access the internet, loaner devices if needed, as well as check-in/check-out of carts/devices for testing purposes.</p>
37.	JL	Can you explain what the cut to	Cuts to the 1:1 program would result in minimal impact to the 2025-2026 school

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		one-to-one on Chromebooks would look like? What grades would be affected and how would bring your own technology work in the district with internet safety?	<p>year. In 2026-2027 we would need to make a decision to fund the purchase of the required devices to sustain the model, or shift to a BYOT and cart model. Please see the <a href="#">attached document</a> that addresses the 1:1 device program in more detail.</p> <p>Internet browsing will be safe for our students as we have policies in place for our district through our internet filtering system. Additionally, Lightspeed could continue to be used to monitor student productivity and on-task online behavior in class. We would not be able to monitor or control any other software they are running beyond the browser. We would not be able to manage personal devices.</p>
38.	JL	With the cut of 2 teachers at Circle of Friends and only offering half-day classes would this increase our class sizes? Has the fact that some students are now staying for a third year affect this?	<p>It is important to note that we expect to make some changes to our preschool model for next year. We will likely have a combination of integrated classroom sections (our current model, which includes 50% students with disabilities and 50% typical peers) and self-contained sections (100% percent students with disabilities) next year. Last time we had half day preK we did have 1 self contained classroom in order to meet student needs and to keep our integrated sections within the target range for class size.</p> <p>We don't know the precise configuration of sections yet. It will depend on the number and needs of students who enter from Birth to Three, as well as how many typical peers enroll or continue in our program next year. We just recently sent out a parent survey to assess interest in the half day program; the results will inform our decision making.</p>
39.	JL	Line 5603 Tuition SPED-Outside CT is zero this year is that from a placement ending?	Tuition requests are based on current and projected placements. In past years we have had one or more students placed out of state, however, we do not anticipate an out of state placement next year.
40.	JL	Line 5604 Tuition SPED-CT Private is the increase in a number of students or tuition rates? How many students do we have outplaced at this time?	We have 22 students outplaced at this time. However, some of these are very high cost students. We have adjusted the amounts on the public, private, and out of state tuition lines to reflect the actual placements anticipated next year. We also estimate 5% increases in tuition and transportation for each student, as these rates aren't set until the summer (but typically go up).

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

41.	JL	The addition of the new district Psychologist is for evaluations, what is the average amount of evaluations the district performs each year? New students and re-evals?	We shared some of this data in <a href="#">December</a> . Our 4 school psychologists are conducting significantly more evaluations now (around 325 per year) than they were 5 years ago (around 215 per year). This is a result of more initial referrals per year and an increase in the size of our special education population, which results in more reevaluations per year.
42.	JL	With the increase in SPED identified students, what are the caseloads for speech/language staff?	We were fortunate to add a speech and language pathologist two years ago, as caseloads were too large and we were using contracted speech and language services in order to meet student needs. At this time our SLPs are very busy but we currently have adequate staffing for our population. Specific caseload sizes vary based on student age and need.
43.	PR	What is the total of our Federal Grants funding for 2025 - 2026?	\$1,435,742.93
44.	BF	Why are we planning on 10 sections in the 5th grade? Based on projected enrollment for 5th grade 9 sections would generate an average class size of 23.7. This is within our strived for average class size of 24 or below for 5th grade.	Savings associated with reducing a grade 5 teacher is \$60,793.
45.	KD	1110 Is there a possibility of curriculum writing to occur during the school day? Would that be an option to supplant summer curriculum writing, the writing was to occur during the summer? What would be the cost to the district if curriculum writing was to occur during the school day- assuming the cost of subs would need to be	<p>Yes, we could complete curriculum writing during the school day, but that still has a cost with substitute coverage which is \$130/day (building sub) or \$120/day (daily sub). Teachers also lose instructional time with this model.</p> <p>We would prioritize curricular writing to any new courses that need curriculum and/or any courses/grades that need major revisions to their work.</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		covered? If there is a schedule of curriculum writing/revision, would the cut put the district behind schedule therefore, impacting courses and other programing?	
46.	KD	If we make cuts elsewhere, would there be any possibility of reinstating tutors for students in need of additional support and ML services? I am concerned about larger groups and students not being seen.	We could but that would be an additional budgetary expense if we increased hours.
47.	KD	Should FTE positions be cut, would there be bumping? What would that look like? Any impact on student programming?	<p>Collective bargaining agreements determine “Reduction in Force” In the case of teachers, the current language is as follows.</p> <p><i>5.7 Reduction in Force</i></p> <p><i>Whenever the Board decides it is necessary to reduce teaching staff positions as a result of decreases in student enrollment, changes in curriculum, severe financial conditions or other circumstances as determined by the Board, reduction shall be made in inverse order of seniority, provided that the remaining teachers possess the individual ability, certifications or durational shortage area permits, and experience required by the Board and further provided that no tenured or non-tenured teacher shall be released before teachers holding durational shortage area permits.</i></p> <p>There could be an impact on student programming, depending on the positions cut. Each decision would have a different impact.</p>
48.	KD	6140 What textbooks have been cut? What is the impact on teaching and learning? Have you considered other	We would not be able to purchase a new AP Psychology Book. We have a textbook that we can use, but College Board redesigned the course and a new book would be aligned to the new outline which puts a greater emphasis on

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		options to maintain a high level of teaching and learning without textbooks?	<p>science and biology aspects of the course .</p> <p>We do use Open Educational Resources (OER) that are digital in nature, but there is also a cost to these, as materials, at times, need to be printed.</p>
<b>February 11, 2025 - Facilities/Budget Deliberations</b>			
49.	SC	This has probably been asked before. Since 2018 we've spent more than \$425K on landscaping. With an additional request next year of \$87,173, is it unreasonable to pursue transferring this responsibility to the	<p>The budget includes service charges for lawn mowing, weeding and trimming for the areas not covered by Parks and Recreation (\$57,173) as well as materials charges for playground mulch (\$30,000).</p> <p>We can look into whether or not Parks and Rec could provide the landscaping services at a lower cost.</p>

**BOE Members 2024-2025 BUDGET Q & A**  
**February 4, 6, 11, 13, 2025**

		town?	
50.	SC	There is a \$50k (91%) increase in licensed EMS/HVAC repair proposed for next year. Please share the scope of the work that needs to be performed.	<p>The HVAC repair budget has been raised to correspond with historical spending. Here are examples of typical HVAC repairs.</p> <p>Replace broken bearings.  Replace failed control boards on fan coil units.  Replace failed Jace, which is a key component of the building management system.  Repair broken control wiring on the chiller.  Repair broken combustion induction fan.  Repair failed damper actuators.  Repair split heating coil.  Rebuild heating pumps in order to stop leaks.  Replace failing compressors.  Repair refrigerant systems leaks.</p>
51.	SC	Given the percentage of an increase due to healthcare along with not knowing what the town budget proposal will be, do we know if any of the bargaining units would be willing to offer concessions?	We have not had any direct conversations about concessions with the bargaining unit. We can if the Board would like us to. To be clear, typically those concessions occur in year 1 and it does have an impact on subsequent budgets.