



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Superintendent of Schools

May 5, 2020

Dear Families and Faculty,

The sun is out, and signs of spring are all around us. In the spirit of celebration, I have linked a short video of our students staying motivated during eLearning, you can watch it [here](#). Enjoy!

This morning's communication is intended to provide a Budget update. It is likely that I will send another communication this evening or tomorrow as we have a scheduled conference call with the Commissioner of Education on additional educational matters. As for this communication, it will focus on the District Budget for FY 2020-21. The Board of Selectmen meeting is scheduled to meet this Wednesday evening where a recommendation for the BoE Budget will be made to the Board of Finance. The discussion at the Board of Selectmen last week focused on a recommendation to the Board of Finance on the Board of Education's Budget of 1.5% or lower. A reduction to a 1.5% increase would result in reducing the Board of Education approved budget by more than \$2,400,000. The community budget process is different this year as a result of the Governor's directive. Therefore, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance will be making the final budget decision regarding the FY20-21 budgets.

I share this communication to keep everyone informed. We have a Board of Education Meeting scheduled for Monday, May 11.

Thank you for all you are doing at home and at 'school.' Stay safe and be well.

Warmly,

Susie

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FY 2020-21 Budget Update

The administration has been spending a significant amount of time on the Budget. As shared at the Board of Education meeting on April 27, we are studying each line

in our 2020-21 Operating Budget to see where we may make potential cuts should they be expected of us. As of the date of this letter, we have met with each cost center (several times) and have identified priorities and potential cuts within their Budget and the District. As shared in my last parent communication, budget cuts will not be easy.

There are a number of topics being discussed at public meetings and/or within the community. Here are just a few points to consider:

- ***Decline in Enrollment at RHS:*** This is true; the District has seen a decline in enrollment. Over the years, RHS has increased class-size, thus reducing Full Time Employee (FTE). It is important to note that the decline is not limited to one grade-level. The decline in enrollment is across all four grades, 9-12. What this means is that we would need to have enough of a decline in any one particular grade or course to allow us to continue to reduce FTE. In light of any enrollment, all high schools are still required to meet all state and graduation requirements. We could reduce FTE further if we reduce student choice and/or offerings. An example of this: 2nd year of a particular course with 14 students. This section would be cancelled, and students who began a 3-year sequence would now be forced to select a new course in their 2nd or 3rd year. Of course, this would not apply for courses with very low enrollment (with the exception of a small few).
- ***Transportation:*** In an effort to review the District's bus inventory, routing, and ridership for efficiency, we contracted with our routing software vendor Edulog to do a System Assessment and Efficiency Analysis. The study consists of three parts: Operational Assessment- to look at our current routing processes and the most efficient use of the Edulog software; a Data Assessment- to look at the current state for route feasibility and bell times; and an Efficiency Assessment- to analyze the current routing scheme, with the goal to make recommendations to improve efficiency and route feasibility with run pairings. Edulog has completed the first of the three parts and will be releasing a draft of their findings shortly. Once the study is completed, the results of the study will be presented to the Board.
- ***Curriculum and Professional Learning:*** There has been much discussion about curriculum and/or professional learning. The conversations trend around a particular approach or approaches. Professional learning or curriculum changes should not be done mid-stream. Our educators need tools which include curriculum and professional learning. It is important not to delete without having a plan

for change and implementation. This includes the associated materials and/or student resources. There is a misconception that cuts in this area “stay away from the classroom and students.” This is simply not true, the “what and how” we teach absolutely impacts students and the classroom. Additionally, schools are learning organizations. In the absence of professional and technology learning, we lose creativity and innovation. Not to mention teachers enthusiasm and excitement dwindles. The most common question from teachers during interviews is, “*what kind of professional learning do you offer your teachers?*”

- ***Athletics:*** Athletics is a fundamentally important part of the Ridgefield High School experience for the majority of students. More than half of all the students at the high school participate in one or more of the 36 different sports offered by the Athletics Department. The athletic programs are funded through five different revenue streams: funds from the general budget process; pay-to-participate receipts; gate receipts; rental revenue; and use of the athletic fund balance. It is the inclusion of these different revenue sources, predominantly the pay-to-participate, which are recorded in a unique fund to pay for all of the expenses incurred to run the athletic programs. At the end of a fiscal year, all revenue received into the Athletic Fund less all expenses incurred will result in either a positive balance or a negative balance for the Athletic Fund. While it is anticipated there could be a larger than normal positive balance in the athletic fund at the end of this year, due to the lack of a spring sports season, that balance will, by nature of the accounting structure, need to remain in the Athletic Fund. In the event that the Athletic Fund is forecasted to be positive year end, we are considering reducing the BOE general budget contribution to athletics.
- ***Administrators:*** In addition to their primary role of supervising and evaluating teachers, District administrators oversee PPTs, 504 plans, parent meetings, Team meetings, the School Climate Committee, discipline matters, the MTSS process, and all grade-level activities. Their work with students, teachers, and families ultimately keeps District costs down. They do this by ensuring students' needs are met and stay connected to families. On the curriculum side, the District is understaffed. Consider the curriculum areas taught in any school district: *Arts, Music, Health, Physical Education, English, Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, etc.*. The District has one (1) Humanities and one (1) STEM Supervisor outside of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Those individual responsibilities span K-12. There are teacher leaders at RHS; however, there are many content areas (in particular at the K-8 level) with no

content leadership.

- **Technology:** The District has not had a Director of Technology since February. As a result of this absence, the District has hired a consultant to oversee the Technology Department. This is in addition to other individuals who have needed to put their current responsibilities on the back burner and tend to the priorities of the District (teachers and students in the eLearning experience). There are opportunities in the future to add clarity to the Budget Book and/or process with respect to the roles and responsibilities within the Technology Department cost center as some of the roles may be misrepresented. An example- the District has two (2) Technology Integrators. In fact, the District does not. The District has 1.5 FTE of Technology Integration and the other .5 is dedicated to Assistive Technology for students who have IEPs or 504 plans. This is an important distinction as it means that currently RHS is served by a .5 Technology Integrator. The two (2) middle schools are served by 1.0 FTE. This 1.5 position is currently covering all 9 schools.

A Few Considerations for the Reopening of Schools:

The District budget did not anticipate COVID-19, and all of the consequences of the Pandemic on our children. It is our fiduciary and educational obligation to consider the short and long-term impacts, and there are a number of scenarios may apply:

- Will students be required to be in smaller class sizes? If so, what does this mean for a students daily schedule? Will students be expected to come to school on a staggered schedule?
- Will social distancing be applied to school buses? What are the implications for the number of school buses and associated costs?
- Will students and staff be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment ? What are the costs and needs associated with this requirement? What additional costs will be needed to ready schools for reentry and also maintain the new protocols for disinfecting and Personal Protective Equipment?
- How will our most vulnerable students be impacted by the loss of direct instruction since March 13? What are the required staffing and material needs associated with supporting these students?
- What are the legal costs and implications that we will be facing in the fall?
- What processes and protocols will we put in our schools to ensure they are safe for students and what State and Health Department requirements will be associated with those processes?
- How will teacher absenteeism be impacted if they themselves have to return to work if their own children are on a staggered schedule?

- What considerations/plans are needed for re-entry be: June, summer, late August, or the potential of returning and being dismissed due to a second wave of the virus.

What will the impact be on the School District if RPS receives less than its BOE approved Budget?

The administration believes that the approved BOE budget was fiscally responsible and educationally sound. Moreover, the administration continues to believe that the Budget will be impacted further by unanticipated costs associated with COVID-19.

As shared at the BOE meeting on Monday, April 27, 2020, should the budget be decreased to 2.96%, the District may recommend the following:

- Elimination of Social Worker, Security Director, and Math Coaches
- All cost center budgets would be required to remain FLAT (*with the exception of special education and transportation and contractual obligations*). This means that despite increases in costs, we will need to assume prior years budget allocations.

Also, RPS has an incredibly lean budget across all of its cost centers. RPS does not offer unique or special programs outside ‘typical’ programming (*in and out of DRG A*). Further decreases in the budget from 2.96% will directly or indirectly impact students. I have included areas that may be recommended to be cut and/or changed should the Budget be decreased lower than 2.96%.

- ‘Full-time’ essential (Art, Music, PE, Library Media) teachers at the elementary level
- Class size at the elementary level and RHS
- Clerical/Instructional paraprofessionals, to include the extension of extended program (before/after school)
- Extra-curricular programs at the middle-school level
- Leadership positions
- Components of Professional Learning
- Curriculum writing projects
- New textbooks
- Facility Projects and Staff
- Technology support
- Digital resources

Our Approach

Our goal is to maintain the programming that students and families have come to expect from the Ridgefield Public Schools. The deeper the reduction, the more

challenging it is to achieve this goal. We are leaving no stone unturned while thinking creatively, pruning and searching for efficiencies, using a scalpel and potentially a hammer as we look at small reductions as well as big ones. We will do everything we can to minimize the impact on students; however, it is important that we remind ourselves of the 'Budget Drivers' and what truly remains for the District to work with.

The Mission, RPS Vision of a Successful Graduate and District Priorities

The Board of Education's Mission, RPS Vision of a Successful Graduate, and District Priorities are outlined below. I include this to serve as an important reminder of how our District's Mission, Vision, and Priorities are the foundation to our decision-making process. As you read this communication, I ask that you consider how the anticipated Budget cuts will support our ability to accomplish what has been identified as the Districts values.

Our Mission

Ridgefield Public Schools provides engaging, relevant, and personalized learning experiences so all students can pursue their interests and prepare for life, learning, and work as global citizens. To accomplish this mission, our community including educators, students, and parents will partner to:

- Foster academic, social, and emotional growth for all students
- Promote wellness of body and mind
- Build an inclusive climate of trust, safety, and respect
- Value diversity by cultivating global competencies
- Attract, support, and retain talented educators who embrace continuous learning.

RPS Vision of a Successful Graduate

Collaborative

Graduates who are collaborative contribute cooperatively and responsibly to a team when they are looking for solutions to rigorous and complex problems.

Innovative

Graduates who are innovative find creative solutions to authentic problems. They think flexibly and critically while gathering information to synthesize and apply what they have learned.

Mindful

Graduates who are mindful embrace empathy and advocate respect for themselves and others. Through self reflection and awareness, they understand diverse cultures and perspectives. They model the conviction that ethics, leadership, and service to others are critical elements of responsible citizenship.

Communicative

Graduates who are communicative strategically navigate, construct, and articulate specific messages. They utilize their communication skills in an effective, clear and precise manner across multiple forms of media literacy.

Knowledgeable

Graduates who are knowledgeable are independent learners who draw upon a wide range of skills for different purposes. They seek, gather and critique information from a variety of sources.

Resilient

Graduates who are resilient are adaptable and persistent in their journey toward growth on rigorous and complex problems. They embrace failure and are intellectual risk-takers. They are self-motivated, thoughtful and independent decision-makers who value lifelong learning.

Behind Our District Priorities

Behind the District Priorities are the assumptions that the District will:

- Adhere to class size practices
- Address imminent health and safety concerns
- Regularly review, revise, and assess curriculum
- Comply with federal and state mandates, including teacher certification,

educator evaluations, and IDEA

- Continuously examine and implement cost efficiencies
- Honor all collective bargaining agreements.

Our District Priorities

Our District Priorities are:

- Continued improvement of student academic skills through increased curricular rigor and instructional emphasis on higher order thinking, conceptual understanding, effective oral and written communication skills, abstract reasoning, perseverance, and problem-solving ability

- Enhanced student preparation to meet future global citizenship and career demands through improved skills in global awareness, scientific literacy, world language, analyzing information, collaboration, strategic thinking, problem solving, innovation, and technology applications
- Continued emphasis on students' physical, social, and emotional wellness through character education, nutrition and health education, safe and personalized school climate, substance abuse education, and positive behavioral supports
- Address challenge of continuous educational improvement amongst uncertain enrollment and economic constraints
- Complete labor negotiations in an atmosphere of mutual respect reflective of responsible fiscal planning and the best interests of our students and the district
- Strengthen district infrastructure to support effective district and school leadership, strategic planning; data analysis and reporting; high quality staff recruiting, supervision, and evaluation; efficient communication, personnel, and budgeting functions; efficient bus transportation; and high standards for security, safety, and maintenance.
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