

**Questions Received from Board of Education Members and Residents Regarding 2017-2018
Superintendent's Proposed Budget – December 12, 2016**

1. Today at the Parents in Leadership meeting, you referenced 23 teacher positions being cut with this budget. Does this number include non-certified staff, as well, or is this just regarding teachers PLUS there are other positions at risk?

RESPONSE: I have confirmed that this is the total number of positions not funded between this year (reduced to cover this year's budget deficit) and next. If the Board wishes to reduce positions further, the number will become larger.

2. I'm also intrigued by a Tiered approach to the Activities fees. What might that look like?

RESPONSE: If a majority of the Board desires to have such a system, it would take some time to develop. Conceptually, the fees would be limited to certain amounts by activity based on a review of each and the total paid by a parent would be limited in the aggregate similar to how the Pay to Participate fees work.

3. Can someone please direct me to where I would be able to find information/explanation on the 2.5% soft cap and how it impacts the budget?

RESPONSE: The information is available from the Town Finance Office and/or the Town Manager's Office.

General Statutes of Connecticut, *Volume 1, Title 2, General Assembly and Legislative Agencies*, Sec. 2-33a, Available at: https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_016.htm

Pinho, Rute, "Municipal Spending Cap and Motor Vehicle Property Tax Cap", Office of Legislative Research, February 24, 2016, Available at: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2016/rpt/pdf/2016-R-0065.pdf>

Plummer, Bill, State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, Intergovernmental Policy Division

State of Connecticut General Assembly. *Bill No. 502 – An Act Concerning Revenue and Other Items to implement the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017*, 2016, LCO No. 6371, May Special Session, 2016 Available at: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2016/TOB/s/pdf/2016SB-00502-R00-SB.pdf>

4. I believe at the last BOE meeting there was mention of some information from the state that was available? Or someone I could speak with who could explain this to me?

RESPONSE: Please see response to #3 above.

5. Overcrowded classrooms, particularly at PGS. This year my 2nd grader is in a combined classroom with 2 teachers and 31 students. **RESPONSE:** This was the decision made by the building Principal and his Assistant. Please contact him for further details. The administration and teachers have done an excellent job handling the space concerns (although the idea that my daughter is in a windowless room all day doesn't appeal to me). I understand the teacher/student ratio in her current class is actually the best it has been for her (she had 25 pupils with 1 teacher in first grade, and 23 in k). However, these class sizes aren't getting smaller and one of the sections is being cut for next year (her 3rd grade). I think I heard that the contracted max is 25 students to one teacher. If that is correct, is this what we can expect to be the norm going forward?

RESPONSE: The following is the language taken from the contract between The Avon Board of Education and the Avon Education Association with respect to class size.

ARTICLE V – CLASS SIZE

A. The Board and the Association recognize that the pupil-teacher ratio is one of the important aspects of an effective education program; they both further recognize that the optimum class size is a variable

because of the factors such as subject matter, approach and content that affect the pupil-teacher ratio; therefore, both parties agree that the sizes of classes set forth below are the maximum to be achieved in regular academic classes.

- 1. Kindergarten – Certificated personnel to pupil ratio of 1 to 20.*
- 2. Grades 1 through 3 – Certificated personnel to pupil ratio of 1 to 23.*
- 3. Grades 4 through 12 – Certificated personnel to pupil ratio of 1 to 25.*

In grades 9 through 12, the student load set forth are the maximum to be achieved distributed over five (5) classes in the core subject areas of English/language arts, history/social studies, science, mathematics, and world languages. In the event a teacher is assigned to teach more than five (5) classes in these subject areas, the teacher will be compensated at the rate of \$100 for every student in the lowest enrolled class for the full year and \$50 for every student in the lowest enrolled class for the half year.

B. The foregoing limitations shall be subject to modification for such bona fide educational purposes as:

- 1. Specialized classes.*
- 2. Large group instruction.*
- 3. Team teaching.*
- 4. Pilot programs.*
- 5. Open class concept.*

C. Any special groupings under State and Federally funded programs shall be in accordance with State and Federal laws.

D. The Board of Education agrees to exert reasonable effort to provide assistance if the teacher's regular academic class size exceeds the limits specified in Article V, Section A. In the event that no assistance can be arranged, within 45 days, the affected teachers shall receive a cash stipend of \$350 per additional student for that teaching year. Elementary teachers shall receive added stipends if the same additional student occurs in that teacher's classes for multiple units of instructional time. This stipend shall be in the amount of \$100 per unit of instructional time that the same additional student is in said teacher's class.

E. Efforts shall be made so that teachers of regular academic classes at the middle school or high school will not be required to teach more than three different subjects or grade equivalents. Any individual class may, however, include students from more than three grades.

The projected class sizes reflected in the 2017-2018 Superintendent's Proposed Budget are more in alignment with historical averages excluding the 2015-2016 school year. This historical class size data is available under the Board of Education tab – then Budget on the school district website.

- 6. Eliminating teachers-I would like to say that I hope newest/youngest teachers are not automatically let go. My daughter's Kindergarten teacher-Megan McCarthy was fabulous and it was her first year out of school! I would hate to see the energy and fresh approach that newer teachers bring to the classroom eliminated.*

RESPONSE: *The contract between The Avon Board of Education and the Avon Education Association with respect to reduction in force is based on seniority. The following is the applicable language.*

ARTICLE XII – STAFF REDUCTION AND RECALL

It is recognized that the Board of Education has the sole and exclusive prerogative to eliminate professional staff positions consistent with the provisions of the General Statutes. Elimination of professional staff positions may result from decreases in student enrollment, changes in curriculum, financial restraints, or other circumstances as determined by the Board of Education.

A. Reductions

- 1. The Board of Education may, in the first instance, exercise its right and power to reduce the number of professional staff positions without determining which staff members, if any, will be dismissed or what other staffing changes will be made to effectuate the purpose of position elimination. It is expressly understood and agreed to by the parties that the decision to eliminate any professional staff position and to dismiss any teacher as a result will not be subject to the grievance procedure set forth in Article III of the Agreement.*
- 2. Reductions in staff will be accomplished through attrition, to the extent feasible.*
- 3. Should it become necessary to dismiss professional staff because of the elimination of positions, the following will apply:*
 - a. tenured staff member may be dismissed because of elimination of position only if there is no other position for which the tenured staff member is qualified. In order to be qualified to displace a non-tenured staff member or to be transferred to an open position, a tenured staff member must be certified to hold such a position and must have taught in the area of certification applicable to such a position during the five-year period preceding the school year in which the staff reduction occurs, or must be certified and be able to show evidence of qualification for such position as determined by the Superintendent of Schools. A specialist working with students at any level is considered a classroom teacher at that level for the purposes of seniority and recall assuming they hold appropriate certification for the position.*
 - b. Within the separate categories of tenured staff and non-tenured staff, dismissal because of elimination of position will be based upon seniority as determined by the total number of years of contractual service as a certified teacher in the Avon School System, provided, however, that, in order to displace another staff member on the basis of seniority, a staff member be both certified to hold the position (of the staff member to be displaced) and has taught in the area of certification applicable to that position during the five-year period preceding the school year in which the staff reduction occurs, or must be certified and be able to show evidence of qualification for such as determined by the Superintendent of Schools. A specialist working with students at any level is considered a classroom teacher at that level for the purposes of seniority and recall assuming they hold appropriate certification for the position.*
 - c. When it becomes necessary to choose between or among several staff members of equal seniority as defined in 3-b above, the following criteria shall apply in the following order:*
 - (1) Length of total experience as a certified teacher in Connecticut under a professional or provisional teaching certificate or under a certificate in any other jurisdiction which participates with Connecticut in the I.C.C. (Interstate Certification Compact);*
 - (2) Number of credits beyond the bachelor's degree*
- 4. Prior to recommending to the Board of Education the dismissal of any staff member because of elimination of position, the Superintendent of Schools shall offer the Avon Education Association an opportunity for input in order to insure compliance with the criteria outlined above.*

B. Recall

1. *The name of any teacher whose contract of employment has been terminated because of the elimination of a position or because of a reduction in professional staff shall be placed upon a reappointment list and shall remain on such list for a period of two (2) years from the effective date of contract termination, provided such teacher has not refused an offer of re-employment or has not failed to respond to an offer of re-employment. A teacher who is terminated from a full-time position does not waive his right to remain on the reappointment list for two years by a refusal to accept an offer of part-time re-employment.*
 2. *Any teacher offered re-employment under the provisions of this article shall accept or reject the offer in writing within ten (10) days of receipt of such offer. If a teacher accepts an offer of such re-employment, he shall receive a written contract at least fifteen (15) days prior to the effective date of re-employment, where possible.*
 3. *Offers of re-employment to teachers whose names appear upon a reappointment list shall be in the inverse order of termination provided, however, that no teacher on the reappointment list be offered re-employment in a teaching position unless he has taught within the area of certification applicable to such position during the five-year period preceding the year of contract termination, provided, however, the Superintendent may waive the foregoing certification criteria of said five-year period.*
 4. *No new teacher shall be employed until all teachers on the reappointment list have been offered re-employment, provided, however, that no teacher on the reappointment list will be offered re-employment in a teaching position unless the teacher has taught within the area of certification applicable to such position during the five-year period preceding the year of contract termination, provided, however, the Superintendent may waive the foregoing certification criteria of said five-year period.*
 5. *Any teacher who accepts an offer of re-employment under the provisions of this article shall be placed upon the salary step next succeeding that which the teacher occupied at the time of termination.*
 6. *Any teacher who accepts an offer of re-employment under the provision of this article shall begin such re-employment with all unused sick days accrued at the time of termination.*
7. Social worker position at high school-I am incredibly concerned in this day and age that at the high school the social worker positions seem to be so easily done away with. The work they do is so different from school psychologists and they are absolutely vital for some students.

RESPONSE: This is currently under review by the Director of Pupil Services and Supervisor of Special Education.

8. In reading over the budget and proposed reductions I would like to offer a few suggestions for consideration. The large cuts to certified teaching staff, in addition to cuts to supplies such as textbooks and class materials is concerning given that we should be striving to remain competitive in light of the prestigious placement of AHS at the top of the state (I am sure that is already a motivating factor but I am reiterating the importance of remaining competitive).
Can we look into reductions for transportation to and from school? For example my middle schoolers only take the bus in the morning and walk or get picked up-- how about having a form at the end of the school year where the parents indicate whether they plan to be a full or part time designated drop off/pick up of their student. I do think so few students utilize the paid for transportation that if we knew in advance X amount of families will not use transport at all, or only half the time (am or pm) we can save some money and fuel!

RESPONSE: School Districts in CT are required to run a transportation system as if all students are riding buses to and from school each day.

9. I also believe our community is full of skilled and talented individuals who would consider offering their tradesman skills at a reduced rate to the schools (hvac or landscaping, snow removal etc) and many other families who could potentially offer their time on a voluntary basis to answer phones and provide administrative support, lunch room monitoring, study hall monitors, etc. Can't we save money by opening up these expenses to be provided at lower cost or volunteer basis from our own families who want funds to go directly to education?

RESPONSE: We have organized labor associations whose membership perform the functions noted. If the district were to replace unionized workers with volunteers and/or contractors, the district may be subject to what is referred to as "an unfair labor claim." The labor association representing the district's custodial maintenance employees does have a provision whereby the district may subcontract identified work. We have done so in the past and it actually increased our immediate costs. We are continuing discussion with Town leadership to further develop a shared services model to contain operating costs in this area.

10. 3. I see that the advisory roles vary in their pay, with some groups at AHS having several thousand dollars allotted for advisor(s). Can we scrape some savings out of that?

RESPONSE: We have reduced stipends to reflect only those that have actual student activities associated with them. We have also compressed activities to maximize staff stipends.

11. Can we get some parents to volunteer as advisor?

RESPONSE: The contract between the Avon Board of Education and The Avon Association requires that we offer positions to current staff first. If a staff person does not step forward, then the district can use outside individuals to occupy activity positions either by receiving a stipend or they may volunteer if they desire to do so. Failure to comply with this system for filling activity positions, would lead to The Avon Education Association would likely file an unfair labor claim against the Board of Education.

12. Athletic transportation I see many teams have to be bussed to their daily practices which does add up. Can we better utilize the grounds at AHS, to limit these costs?

RESPONSE: The AHS complex is utilized as much as possible. The district also purchased two buses three years ago to offset the cost of paying the transportation vendor to complete the in-town trips and some trips out of town. This has resulted in considerable savings.

13. Upcoming athletic field conversion to encapsulated artificial turf... when such deep cuts are necessary for salaries of teachers and educational material can we push that out a year or a few years and earmark the millions back into our budget? Forgive my ignorance as we are relatively new to town and that may be a separate fund.

RESPONSE: Currently, no funds have been appropriated for the artificial turf field project being advanced by the Town. This is likely to be a subject of a referendum in the future. If funds are requested via a referendum and approved by a majority of Avon residents, they would be "capital funds" which could not be used to offset operating budget expenses.