

Revised School Budget: Reasons Why

The School Committee has submitted a revised budget for discussion and vote at a Special Town Meeting in Sandisfield on Monday, July 15, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. Here is some key information about this new budget:

- The overall budget has been reduced and Sandisfield's contribution reduced by \$11,404. This is due to reduced cost for health insurance through MIIA (Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association), which was communicated to the school after the Town Meeting on May 18.
- The main reason the budget has increased over last year is that Sandisfield's enrollment has increased. More children are living in Sandisfield and this is good thing. It is the sign of a vibrant, growing community.
- Another reason the budget has increased is that the State has cut funding for our Preschool Program. The CPC (Community Partnerships for Children) Grant ends in FY2020.
- At the School Committee Meeting on June 3, we discussed other budget items that could be cut or reduced, including the School Lunch Program. Another district in Easthampton employs only one cafeteria worker. However, that district has all meals pre-made at a central facility. This is not feasible for Farmington River and the Committee agreed that we need two cafeteria employees and this labor is the main cost of the program. The total cost of the Cafeteria Subsidy is \$40,000, which is split between Otis and Sandisfield according to the formula.
- Another budget item that we discussed was transportation. To reduce costs, we talked about eliminating some bus stops. However, there was concern for the safety of students walking to new bus stops because our roads lack sidewalks. We also discussed eliminating some routes. This idea drew concerns that young children would be on a bus for long periods of time, such as over an hour. Additionally, the school already owns and operates vans, which serve as efficient "feeder routes" to the main bus lines. All bus routes have been optimized for efficiency within the last three years, with a bus reduced this year. The three-year busing contract ends next year, at which point we have the opportunity to renegotiate costs.
- We are committed to continuing to explore other ways to reduce school costs. The Committee is also committed to an ongoing dialogue with the Sandisfield Select Board concerning the 2020-2021 school budget.