

# Barstow budget makes no major programming or staffing changes

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MENDON — Although the Barstow Memorial School's budget is up a little over 10%, some taxpayers will see a drop in their rates, should voters approve it come March.

Superintendent Jeanne Collins said Wednesday the budget is at \$5,797,333, a 10.62% increase over last year. That said, spending per equalized pupil is up by 9%, mainly due to a dip in the number of students in the K-8 grades and increase in high school tuition. She said the school is losing five equalized pupils in the K-8 grades and sending 12 new equalized students to high school.

She said the unified district tax rate is actually down about 4.5%, or seven cents.

"Barstow's enrollment is remaining pretty predictable, pretty level," said Collins. "The high school costs, however, have significantly increased this year and will again next year."

The proposed budget makes no significant staffing or program changes.

"We have one teacher retiring, and we are not replacing the position," said Collins. "It does not change class sizes because for the past couple of years we've had kind of a nebulous, extra teacher because of class sizes, so that teacher would push into a grade level for additional reading support, so it was like a floating teacher."

The cost to educate high school students from the district has increased, she said.

"We have had a significant increase partially due to the addition of religious education to school choice, so you can see Mount St. Joseph's Academy is jumping from zero to six students projected for next year," said Collins. "Rutland High School is up a little bit, you can see other places were up a little bit, but we're jumping from 88 students to 100 students and that's a tremendous amount. We're only up \$566,000, but those 12 students are a huge piece of it."

School Business Manager Brenda Fleming said the average high school tuition is about \$17,964.

Fleming said the budget assumes the \$90 million surplus in the state education fund won't be put towards the annual tax yield. She said the tax commissioner made two announcements, one assuming the surplus will impact the yield, another one that doesn't.

“So we decided to be conservative and use the lowest announced tax yield which is \$12,937,” Fleming said. “That’s without any of the \$90 million included into the calculation. So that just tells you how much spending per equalized pupil you have for a dollar. And so for every equalized pupil you spend \$12,937 with a \$1 tax rate, and as you spend above that \$12,937 which obviously most everyone does, if not everyone, then it is proportionate to it. So you spend 10% above it then you would have \$1.10 and you would spend 10% over the \$12,937.”

She said the Barstow district is looking at an increase of \$1,620 in spending per equalized pupil.

“Again, this is an unprecedented increase. We usually see the increases only going up by about \$300 per equalized student, so \$1,600 is almost a five-year jump. We’ve not seen that since this formula has existed, but it is directly linked to rising inflation,” she said.

She said that with an \$18,690 in spending per equalized pupil, that amounts to a \$1.45 district tax rate, a seven-cent decrease over last year.

What a taxpayer’s rate ends up being depends on the town they live in and its common level of appraisal, a percentage figure calculated by looking at the past three years of property sales and comparing it to what the grand list is valued at.

Fleming said people in Mendon should understand that their town just underwent a reappraisal, putting its common level of appraisal at 114%. This will lead to a 30-cent decrease from last year’s rate. When a town does a reappraisal, its common level of appraisal only looks at the past year of sales. Fleming believes that next year, the common level of appraisal will drop to 105%, “so that will be felt a little bit because that will look like an increase,” she said.

Collins said there will be a virtual informational meeting at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 22, during which people can ask questions about the budget and annual report.