

Norwich City School District
ThoughtExchange Questions & Answers
May 16, 2022

1. I see a lot of focus on hiring new positions. What are you doing to keep the staff your currently have?

Although these positions are new to this budget, they represent a restoration of positions to bring us back to our 10-year average of student-to-staff ratio, which is one of the many gauges we use to determine hiring decisions. The increase in Foundation Aid allows us to bring these positions back in a sustainable manner as we match a recurring funding source with recurring expenses as opposed to one-time funding with recurring expenses, which should not happen. Additional staffing also helps to reduce the workload to our current staff. In addition, all three collective bargaining agreements were settled in the prior year which included contractual raises for all staff within the district, which is a reflection of the value we place on our people. Also, our NEO contract includes purchasing an extension to the school day which allows our grade level and district teams to meet together four days a week to get clear on what they are teaching and assessing. Further, the District has allocated a significant amount of our Federal Funds to professional learning which is a direct investment in our staff. Finally, the budget continues to support capital work which makes our facilities not only safer but helps to provide a better learning environment for our students and a better environment to work and teach in for our staff.

2. I would like to see more budget allocated to rehire and improve the number of custodians. Wayfare is failing our facilities badly. Students don't feel valued when ants and bugs run rampant and rooms are filthy. We need OUR custodians.

The budget maintains and actually includes additional placeholders for custodians. The District has, and will continue to advertise for custodial positions. Unfortunately, the labor shortage that is impacting not only the state of New York, but the United States as a whole has also impacted Norwich CSD and we have not been successful to this point in our ability to recruit many candidates to the custodial team. Wayfare has been a partner throughout this labor shortage, and without them, the District would not be able to open our facilities with the limited custodial staffing we have in-District.

3. What is being done to broaden my child's future we must meet students where they are at and find new ways to challenge students. Not all kids learn the same way.

The District has recently adopted the Workshop Model. This is an approach to learning where teachers teach a mini lesson and students spend the majority of the time engaging and having their own individual needs met while teachers engage with small groups and confer with students. The workshop closes with a purposeful share.. For example, during writer's workshop, students may be immersed in opinion writing and their teacher will teach an elaboration technique, which students will then apply to their own opinion piece based on their topic. Also, the District is investing in a STEAM curriculum, which includes a cyclical science lab and coding experience for all UPK - 5th graders. Both of these models encourage students to reach their maximum potential with their teacher facilitating the work.

4. **I feel like we are getting too admin heavy again, but with no real reason.** We need more classroom staff, aides, etc to work directly with the students. More admins telling teachers how to teach is unnecessary.

The District uses many metrics to determine appropriate staffing at all levels, including the student-to-staff ratio. This budget maintains the number of administrators that were in-District in the prior year and historically, the FTE of those that fall into the administrative category is down in comparison to previous years. Further, the amount of state and federal compliance along with the changing landscape of public education has evolved over time. The demands placed on department leaders, building leaders and district leaders is more significant than it has ever been. The District will always look at the ratio of staffing each budget cycle and is confident that the current staffing plan is both necessary, appropriate and sustainable to ensure a District of our size is efficiently led and continues to focus on improving experience and academic achievement for our students, staff and community.

5. **District wide communication needs improvement.** Finding out about events last minute is hard for families. Plan ahead and communicate early.

The District listened to our community during our mission and vision development process and responded through the upgrade of our website and the addition of a companion app, called NCSD. It is located in the Google Play or App Store. This app is all things NCSD - whether it's the lunch menu, the sports score, the classroom connection that you are seeking or the schedule, you will find what you are looking for on the app. We are in the process of expanding the power of the app to include a messaging feature between teachers, parents and students, that will help to improve communication. Also, we are working on the design of a print calendar for the 22-23 school year. We know that the app works on the go, and we also know that families like the static calendar to return to.

6. **Staffing** How are students social emotional needs being supported? Are there enough resources to reach ALL students

During the 21-22 school year the District has implemented a systematic and robust response to supporting our students with special needs. We began by researching and purchasing a universal screener, called the BIMAS. This screener allows our teachers and students to assess where they are at in terms of social emotional behavior - social interactions, relationship skills, responsible-decision making, and other skills that permeate beyond academics. Once the screener was in place, we knew we needed a curriculum to support the needs in the classroom. Across UPK-5th grade, we are utilizing the curriculum, Purposefull People. More information can be found on this on our website at www.norwichcsd.org under the Teaching and Learning page. Purposefull People has a secondary component called Character Strong, which we will fully implement in the 22-23 school year. Beyond that we have added a full-time social worker to the staff at Perry Browne. We continue to strive to implement the workshop model to provide opportunities for our students to exert agency and voice in the classroom, which also helps them to hone their SEL skills.

7. **This budget proposal reflects what our students need.** I appreciate the transparency and effort to effectively engage all community members.

Agreed! We plan on utilizing the communication tool Thought Exchange going forward in an attempt to better communicate with and solicit feedback from our community.

8. **Technology** How is technology being used in the classroom, is there a fair balance? Children often spend too much time on electronics

We couldn't agree more that there needs to be a balance. We continue to respond to the balance of requirements for our students post-graduation and engagement in the classroom. Our technology vision explains that students should be engaged with technology to create or communicate. The District has invested in 2 instructional technology specialists who support teachers and expand our teachers' abilities to utilize technology in an effective and impactful way. You can learn more about our District's vision for technology by going to <https://www.norwichcsd.org/page/technology-vision-and-team>

9. **I am concerned about the reduction of BOCES options for kids, our community needs qualified trades.** Students who do not want to pursue higher education need viable options to be productive members in our community that will earn them more than min.\$

To date, there has been no reduction of BOCES options for kids and we agree, qualified tradespeople remains a significant need in our workforce. Our goal would never be to reduce opportunity for kids but rather expand. As we bring back more staff since the

reduction in 2020, our goal is to increase the amount of electives NHS is able to offer. These electives will provide 21st century skill building and a new opportunity for students to maintain full day attendance at NHS rather than having to leave the building for half a day to attend BOCES to receive this programming. Our goal is not to recreate or replace BOCES offerings, it remains to expand and diversify the offerings our students have when building a schedule for their junior and senior year experience.

10. Has there been talk of leadership and character building training for both staff and students? Strong people make easy times.....

Much of our professional learning experiences are geared around supporting professional practice and empowering leadership. We have worked with the unions to increase the amount of staff collaboration time and additionally, have built in 5- ½ day sessions in next year's calendar that will focus on empowering all staff. Our character education programs, including Purposefull People and Character Strong also reflect systematic experiences for our students to grow these skills, and in turn, our staff too.

11. How much will go toward adding Teachers and Support Staff?

There are 26 positions allocated for teachers or other classroom support and support staff including custodians, bus drivers and bus aides that are restored in this budget. Again, the student-to-staff ratio is a major factor in determining need and was used to align this budget back to the ratio that aligns with the 10-year average.

12. HS students need more options... For classes (honors level, remedial level) and for entertainment (school hosted dances, etc).

We couldn't agree more! Our approach to building the culture at the high school includes several facets. We are working on revising our honors criteria through an equity lens. Next year we have added new electives to engage our freshmen class, as well as more AP and dual-credit offerings. We implemented universal screeners this year for academics and social emotional learning so that we have a clear idea of where our students stand and so that we can respond more strategically. Our new High School Principal, Mr. Graham, is working on revitalizing a student-led team who will be able to collaborate with existing groups to plan a series of events to grow the positive culture at the high school.

13. Appropriate Facilities Appropriate facilities are essential for reaching innovative learning styles. How will this budget allocate funds specific to classroom upgrades now?

There is approximately \$1,000,000 set aside in this budget in one-time funding to directly invest in upgrading classrooms with new, flexible furniture that enhances the ability to

collaborate and prepares our students to be future-ready. Much of the current classroom furniture is significantly outdated and in very poor condition. Some of the furniture we are exploring includes desks that can come together or pull apart which allows for individual or group work, includes writable surfaces and of course comes in purple, white and gray.

In addition, there is \$335,000 set aside as a transfer to our Capital Fund to continue upgrading our classrooms and common areas with security upgrades to help enhance the safety of our facilities for all.

The budget also includes allocations to continue upgrading our technology and one-to-one devices that are used in the classroom such as Chromebook, promethean boards, STEAM resources and other great updates that will again help to prepare students for the future.

14. **Looks great!!** It's important because this is the money that will build our children!

Agreed!

15. **It's apparent that a lot of thought has gone into the budget.** Our school and its infrastructure are the cornerstone of the youth in our community.

Agreed!

16. **2060 RESEARCH, Planning & Grants, are there any allocated funds to research in our district?** A data-informed school district can best equip students, educators, and improve accountability to education as a system, and the community as a whole.

One of the pieces of software that we acquired this year is called Forecast Five. This tool allows our District leadership to be able to examine data through multiple lenses, including student achievement, finance and enrollment, among many others. This helps us to analyze the return on investment in various categories. We are committed to utilizing this tool to inform our decision making around budget, staffing and program.

17. **We need more art teachers**

We agree that art is an important component of our total program, and we are constantly reassessing our continuum of offerings. This year's budget does not include the addition of another art teacher; however, we will continue to look at the data, enrollment, skills, and overall program as we move into next year.

18. Excited for new hires Offering new programming

We echo your excitement. Our new programming is in response to teaching and assessing the skills we know that our students should exhibit proficiency in when they exit our experience. We also know that students are contributor now, so how do we teach skills that students can immediately transfer? Some new examples include Social Media Marketing and Video Production. We know that social media engages our students, and we want to embrace this interest and have students engage with tools appropriately. Another example is Drone Aviation. We know that drones are useful in many fields, from real estate to agriculture, and we want our students to have that license and be able to utilize their skills right away. For our younger students we are investing in our programming by moving two elementary teachers into the science lab classroom. All students in UPK - 5th grade will receive a guaranteed and viable curriculum in science and coding.

19. Will there be budget presentations at each building?

This is a fantastic idea and is something we were already planning to implement for the 2023-24 budget building process. In addition, we will be planning to collaborate with community partners in order to provide presentations outside of our four walls and directly to our community in an effort to provide more insight into the budget-building process as well as the common misconceptions around the rules that school districts must adhere to when it comes to school finance.

20. Athletic budget needs restructure. Commonly used materials need to be funded by school, not boosters. Many Team jerseys need updating, NOT football.

NYS state is very clear about what can and cannot be purchased with public funds and thus the need for booster support, in all school districts. We maintain a uniform replacement schedule in-district and I would encourage any and all to reach out to our Director of PE, Athletics, Health, Aquatics and Wellness to discuss this topic. I think what you will find is that the restructuring has been done.

21. I think there should be more money for the safety of children in all schools like a monitor in each school most of day not just couple hours.

The safety of our children is at the core of our mission. We have recently upgraded security and surveillance in all of our buildings to the tune of \$2.1 million in technological upgrades. In addition, there is \$335,000 set aside as a transfer to our capital fund to continue upgrading our classrooms and common areas with security upgrades to help enhance the safety of our facilities for all. Lastly, we have secured an agreement with the City to employ a School Resource Officer for 150 days per school year. The SRO will serve all four buildings in-district. Lastly, the 22-23 budget supports the hiring of a School Safety Officer that will primarily focus on grades 6-12. These duties will range from supporting school attendance to monitoring video surveillance and emergency response.

22. Are there conversations happening on how to improve HS attendance process? Too much time is wasted by staff/parents trying to weed through a child's attendance issues that are mostly caused by teacher/secretary error.

Efficiency is our goal - we are shoring up systems so that teachers are taking attendance in the first 15 minutes of class - and we have a staff member who is responding to teachers and ensuring the reporting is accurate. This system has significantly improved our attendance accuracy. We continue to refine the workflow.

23. An upgrade to our athletic facilities like turf, practice fields, grass fields, etc. Many of our students participate in athletic programs with monumental community support so any way we can make their experiences better we should

Typically, school districts will utilize capital projects to conduct major upgrades to athletic fields or complexes. The District is in the early stages of planning some of these upgrades such as to the turf field as it is nearing the end of its expected life. The annual budget includes funds to maintain our facilities and fields. Further, funds have been set aside to upgrade equipment in the area of Grounds, which will directly enhance our ability to care for and maintain the many athletic fields within the District.

24. Will there be more opportunities for students to access typing curriculum to prepare for state tests?

Yes! The District has purchased a curriculum called Keyboarding Without Tears. Our goal is that students at the elementary level will engage with this program 3 times a week for 10 minutes. This little bit of practice will go a long way toward typing fluency.

25. With 3.2M in additional money, why the need for a 1.48% tax increase? Keep taxes low.... The district is spending around 26k per student. This is outrageous!

The tax levy for NYS public schools is a formula that is mandated by NYS. When the variables for NCSD are plugged into the formula, the result is a 1.48% increase in the tax levy for the 2022-23 school year. This does not necessarily equate to an increase in actual tax rates as tax rates are also determined by assessed values (town assessors) and equalization rates (New York State). For example, many of the townships in our school district had decreasing tax rates in the prior year even though the tax levy went up. The budget is increasing 7.65% because our state aid is going up so drastically. Another way of saying this is that our state aid is the largest increase in revenues (at 7.6%) which is funding the majority of the increase in our expenditure budget. The tax levy is increasing 1.48% which is a very small portion of the increase and as mentioned previously, is dictated by the tax cap formula. The District continues to focus our efforts on ensuring there are no major swings in the tax levy from year-to-year. To put this in context, the 5-year average increase in the tax levy for NCSD is 2.2% and the average increase for schools in our region is just over 3% whereas our proposed levy for 2022-23 is 1.48%.

Finally, the increase in state aid provides a great opportunity for our region as this equates to new staff members living and working in our area, partnerships with local vendors and suppliers and provides other opportunities to reinvest these funds locally within our community.

Thank you all for participating in this ThoughtExchange! Your input and feedback are appreciated and will guide the budget-building process going forward.

For further budget-related information, we have included the link to our budget landing page below and as always, please reach out to the District Office if you have any questions.

<https://www.norwichcsd.org/page/school-budget>