



# Herricks Public Schools Board of Education

999B Herricks Road  
New Hyde Park, NY 11040  
<https://www.herricks.org/HUFSD>

## Budget Hearing ~ Minutes ~

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Thursday, May 28, 2020

7:30 PM

Via Teleconference

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### I Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by President Juleigh Chin

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Juleigh Chin	President	Present	
Henry Zanetti	Vice President	Present	
Nancy Feinstein	Trustee	Present	
James Gounaris	Trustee	Present	
Brian Hassan	Trustee	Present	

### II Hearing Convened

The 2020-2021 Budget Hearing was convened at 7:32pm and was held via teleconference due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Mrs. Chin started the meeting by welcoming the Public to tonight's 2020-2021 Budget Hearing.

### III Pledge of Allegiance

### IV Budget Hearing Presentation

After the Pledge of Allegiance, Mrs. Chin thanked everyone again for joining this evening. She then reminded the Public that if they have any questions, to please make sure you are emailing them in.

Mrs. Chin then turned the Hearing over to Dr. Celano and Ms. Rutkoske.

Dr. Celano started the meeting by thanking Mrs. Chin and welcoming the Public. He then stated how nice it is to have many people attending tonight's Budget Hearing.

Dr. Celano stated that tonight he, along with Ms. Rutkoske, will be presenting the 2020-2021 budget. He added that, after the presentation, the Public will have the opportunity to ask questions or if they have any comments. He added that as Mrs. Chin stated, questions and comments should be directed to the Board of Education via email. We are not going to be using the chat box feature.

Dr. Celano started the presentation by stating that this is the fifth time the Board and Central Administration are presenting the budget. He added that they presented it twice before the pandemic, and we have four budget presentations online. Dr. Celano stated that if anyone would like to view the Budget presentations, feel free to go to the Board of Education page and within that page, click on Board of Education presentations. You will also find tonight's PowerPoint presentation.

Dr. Celano stated that tonight he and Ms. Rutkoske are going to review the adopted budget for the 2020-21 school year. He started by saying that everything we do revolves around our mission statement and Herricks has a wonderful mission statement that we are proud of. After reading the Herricks Mission Statement, Dr. Celano and Ms. Rutkoske reviewed the budget process as follows:

- Budget Development Process
- Budget Design Priorities
- Proposed 2020-2021 Budget
- Budget Breakdown
- Major Budget Drivers
- State Aid Outlook: State provides only 10 % of district revenue. In January, the State Aid increase looked fairly positive but right after the pandemic struck, the governor stated that there will be a reduction in state aid. Herricks had a reduction of just under \$250,000. School Districts are hoping for Federal Funding to offset current reductions in State Aid, as well as possible future reductions of up to 20%.
- Herricks Schools at a Glance
- Per-Pupil Expenditure Comparison
- Budget Proposal Highlights
- Budget Voting Information

Dr. Celano summed up the presentation by stating that the 2020-21 proposed school district budget is within the tax levy cap, which means that it will require a simple majority vote and not a supermajority vote to approve. Finding the right balance is a budget challenge but this proposed budget, preserves and supports all academic programs for our students. It provides funding for extracurricular programs, resources for necessary technology upgrades, and maintains class size guidelines, all while being respectful to tax paying homeowners. A copy of tonight's presentation can be found on the Herricks website at: <https://www.herricks.org/Domain/53>.

Dr. Celano then commended the Board for their hard work and for preparing the District for this rainy day when there may be some additional State Aid cuts.

Ms. Rutkoske reminded the Public that the ballots need to be back and received by the District Clerk by 5:00 PM on the day of the vote, June 9. Ms. Rutkoske asked the Public to please, when you receive the ballot, make sure you complete it and make every effort to exercise your right to vote and get it back in a timely manner.

Mrs. Chin then thanked Dr. Celano and Ms. Rutkoske for tonight's presentation.

## **V Questions Emailed to the Board from the Public**

Mrs. Chin stated that she would like to take this time and ask the Board if they have any questions or comments regarding the budget presentation tonight. Among the items raised were the following:

Mr. Zanetti asked if central administration can give the Board a figure for how much of the \$3,000,000 is for contractual obligations, such as raises for employees and teachers, mandates such as increases in health insurance, and overtime. He added that the reason he asked this question is, should this budget not pass, he believes we would have to revert to last year's funding levels, which would mean that we have to absorb those increases at last year's budget. Mr. Zanetti added that he would like the Public to have some sense of what that would mean. Dr. Celano answered, obviously \$3,000,000 is a tremendous amount of money and would be the very difficult to manage without impacting programs or class sizes because 80 – 85% of what the district spends is on salaries and benefits, and this is true of every school district. It is very difficult to avoid cuts that wouldn't impact personnel, so it would be a very extreme challenge to remove \$3,000,000 from the budget and still have the same programs that we currently have.

Ms. Rutkoske stated that with regards to the 3 million dollars, 1.8 million is from salary increases and contractual obligations, so it is a large level of our commitment. Generally speaking, 80% of our budget is related to support our students. Another large element of the increase is the installation of the wide area network, which is included in a transfer to the capital line, so those are two of the main elements that you're seeing in the increase for next year. Ms. Rutkoske added that should there be a reduction. There are other one-time element spendings that we would manage through either reserves or through a reduction of some of the elements that Dr. Celano shared with you in the previous slides.

Dr. Celano asked Ms. Rutkoske if the wide area network replacement is approximately \$1,000,000. Ms. Rutkoske stated that the \$1,000,000 that's on the transfer to capital line. \$890,000 is for the wide area network, and the balance was for some site work as well as a few years ago, when we updated the fire system but the bulk is for the wide area network. She added that if anyone would like to see more details of the budget, it is on our website.

Mrs. Hassan stated that he thinks the presentation and the amount of effort in time and work that was put into this budget is unlike any other budgets. He added that it was well done and was well thought out. Mr. Hassan stated that it is unfortunate under these circumstances, and in this time we are in. Usually, these budgets are pretty much set, and there are no unknowns. However, that is not the case this year. Mr. Hassan added that Central Administration has done a very good job, not only putting together a fiscally responsible budget, but also identifying any possible future cuts. If the government does cut off future funding, we have a plan in place, and we can cut some one time expenditures and still maintain a lot of the things.

He again complimented Dr. Celano, Ms. Rutkoske, Central Administration and the District on providing a responsible budget under these circumstances. Mr. Hassan added that he hopes the financial output in the district or the outlook for the district, as well as New York State, is better than what we are all anticipating and that we don't see any further reductions or cuts. The public has to understand that what we are providing here and what we are proposing. We usually don't have to deal with these issues and we will

deal with them as they arise. This is a solid plan and it is a good plan in place, even if there are future cuts. I think we all recognize that there are some unknowns which we are going to have to deal with as they come up, but we have done a good job of planning for as much of the unknowns as we can, so congratulations to everybody.

Mr. Gounaris stated that it is also important to make sure that people understand that if we have to make those decisions, we are going to make those decisions with whatever is in the best interest of the students. He added that our first goal will always be to have the students feel the least impact as possible. If we have to make changes elsewhere, we are going to make changes elsewhere. Mr. Gounaris cited the bleachers as an example. If we have to go another year without those repairs, we will figure out a way to do it because the kids are more important.

Dr. Celano stated absolutely! The students have always been our priority and we take the lead from the Board of Education. The Board of Education sets the tone, and the tone is, always put the kids first. He added that there is a plan in this budget in the event there are cuts to state aid. Our main goal is to protect the programs, class size, and extracurricular activities for our students. As I said, the Board sets the tone and sets the parameters. Dr. Celano then stated that he appreciates all of the Boards' hard work in helping to put this budget together with the administration. He then thanked the Board of Education.

Mrs. Feinstein stated that her concern, just like everyone else, is that there are going to be State Aid cuts leading to extra expenses. She added that she does know that we put the students first and right now we have a solid budget. We have one time expenditures that we can cut. Mrs. Feinstein expressed her uncertainty is just like everyone else. She does not have questions about this budget; she has questions that just cannot be answered until we know if and when these state aid cuts will be.

Dr. Celano stated that we all share the fear and anxiety about the unknown because we have this possibility looming out there, but we do not know if or when it is going to happen. The governor said that the state aid cuts could come at various points. He added that he believes that there are three different points throughout the school year, so that is why we have to be prepared for this. We are in a very good position.

Dr. Celano then stated that looking at the budget as a big picture, it ensures fiscal health in the long term, and that is what the Board has always done. As a result, we are in very good shape in terms of having healthy reserves. It does not mean that we could spend it all down, but if we do have significant state aid cuts, we will be able to pull from those reserves that is what it is there for. Just as in your own life and your own family, you have a rainy day account set aside in case of emergency. This is a time when we might need to pull from those reserves, but we are in good shape because we do have healthy reserves right now. He added that we often complain that we really don't get our fair share of state aid but, in this instance, it may be an okay thing. Our State Aid total is about 10% of our budget. For other districts, it can be a cut in their budget of 50 or 60%, which would be very devastating.

Dr. Celano added that he feels badly for those districts and what they are going through might wreak havoc. While it is anxiety producing, we do have a very good plan. Dr. Celano stated that the governor is still hoping that states, including New York State, will

get assistance from the federal government. If this comes through, we will all breathe a sigh of relief because that federal money will be coming to schools and other services. We will have to just wait to see what happens.

Mrs. Chin stated that she has a couple of questions and comments. Can Central Administration remind her, what is the percentage of households on the tax role that pay taxes as opposed to having commercial property? Ms. Rutkoske stated that is roughly 90%. Mrs. Chin stated that this is high and the reason she points this out is because this is part of the reason why the Board takes into consideration every single dollar that is spent. This is not something that is being offset by commercial properties. The Board is always trying to be as fiscally responsible as we can with every single dollar. That is why when we go back to per-pupil expenditure, it is so much more amazing that we are able to have a high achieving District and yet have less spending per student than comparator districts. If we matched what Jericho School District is spending, it would be \$15,000 - \$16,000 more per student. That would be a huge increase to all of our homeowners' tax bills.

Dr. Celano stated that he would imagine it would be \$15,000 times 4,000 students, so the difference is in the millions. The fact that the taxes are falling on the burden of individual homeowners means we have to be efficient. Respecting the homeowners has really been a mission accomplished by the Board of Education. Dr. Celano then thanked the Board of Education.

Mrs. Chin was happy to mention the partnership we are doing with Northwell Health, focusing on social emotional learning and the fact that we are being so proactive. Mental health was something that was on the forefront of all of our minds. She added that the fact that Herricks is really spearheading this partnership in the consortium of other districts, is just an amazing partnership. In fact, it is the biggest draw of what brought our new Assistant Director of PPS, as well as our new Director of Guidance, to us. Coupled with the new Wellness Center concept of the guidance center at the high school, she believes it is just an amazing feat of our district. We recognize and see the importance of the entire social emotional aspects of our students as we go back to school, and as we start to really figure out how to deal with the aftermath of everything that people are going through. Mrs. Chin stated that she is very proud of our district and is very happy to see that it is staying in the budget regardless of anything else.

Dr. Celano stated absolutely, and it's all part of the same theme, it is an important value that we have here in Herricks. We are here for students, and that we are a very student focused school district. We are here for the whole student body, not only for academics, but for everything including social emotional learning. This is something that starts at the Board level and goes through the central administration, through the principals, and our teachers. Everybody is really focused on those social emotional issues and making sure that our students are healthy and happy. Unfortunately, not every district is managing as well as we are. Dr. Celano added that he is a little worried about the partnership with Northwell, because they told him that they need to have at least six districts participating in order for this to work. Some of the districts that originally expressed an interest are possibly backing out because of budget constraints. We are in a position where we do not have to remove the budget line.

Mr. Zanetti stated that he thinks this is significant about our district. He added that all of

these things: the Northwell partnership, additional social workers, and revamping the guidance office, all began before the pandemic. We were already looking to improve in these areas, and some of it derives from the concerns expressed by students at our annual *Fireside Chat*. He added that he wants that sense that we are listening to be acknowledged.

Mrs. Chin thanked Mr. Zanetti for pointing this out. She added that it is truly a partnership and not just the Board of Education with Administration, but with students, with our community, with our homeowners, with everybody involved. We really do try very hard to make sure that you know that we are taking everything into consideration with every single decision that is made, at all times.

Mrs. Chin asked if there was a chance that we might get money back from the \$1,000,000 grant that the District was originally waiting for to improve our instructional technology. Dr. Celano stated that the funds were granted through what is called the Smart Schools Bond. It was approved by the voters of New York State several years ago, and it did receive voter approval in a general election ballot, not a school ballot. It was approved five or six years ago, and each school district is allotted a certain amount of money. Herricks was allotted close to \$1,000,000, specific to a plan that we had to submit to the State Education Department. It was a very detailed plan of what we will be spending the money on. We have been waiting for the SED to review our plan along with probably half the districts in New York State.

Dr. Celano went on to say that originally our application was for the wide area network, until the Board wisely said we can't wait any longer. We have to figure out another way to do this because our kids are missing out every year that we wait for the state to look at our application and approve it. It was this year that was kind of a breaking point, where we said we can not wait any longer. We do have this in our regular budget, within the transfer of the capital line. Dr. Celano added that we will not be able to get the grant money for the same purpose. We are not allowed to do that, but we plan on submitting a new application because the State still owes the District that money. We are planning on using that money for something else like a new phone system and, perhaps more importantly, the purchase of additional devices. It is our hope, if everything goes well within the next few years, that we will be able to give every single student a device. We could not do that up until now because we did not have the wide area network to sustain it. Now that we do, the next step is to be able to fund purchasing more devices. Hopefully, we could use some of that grant money to purchase those devices.

Mrs. Chin pointed out that on one of the last slides in tonight's PowerPoint presentation, there was an email address to use if you wanted to register to vote. She added that the acronym BOE is not the Board of Education, but that it is the Board of Elections. If you need to register to vote, it is not the Board of Education, so even though it has the same acronym, it is completely separate. This is the Nassau County Board of Elections.

Mrs. Chin also reminded the Public that the absentee ballots must be mailed.

Mrs. Chin stated that we will now read questions that were emailed to the Board of Education. She added that we have three questions that were emailed so far and told the Public that if you have any questions regarding tonight's presentation, please email them

in and we will try to answer all of them.

Mrs. Chin then read the first email question from a resident as follows: I would like to understand how the Board of Education is planning for the possibility of schools not being open in the fall of 2020 in the Budget. For example, if teachers and students need special equipment or tools for online learning, is that being planned for in the Budget?

Dr. Celano answered by stating that in terms of remote learning what we have in the budget funds different tools. We have additional devices that we have loaned out to families that needed help. We also have professional development in the Budget for both over the summer and into the school year, specifically relating to technology learning. So, absolutely, this is a part of what we have allocated in the Budget.

Ms. Guercin answered by stating that this is definitely something we have been thinking about and looking at, in the last few months. Teachers have been using a variety of resources, and a lot of things were given for free from a variety of vendors. It is a great opportunity for us to explore tools that we thought would be very efficient for online remote learning. She added that we have already been in the process of reallocating some of the resources and funds within the budget. Ms. Guercin added that we took into consideration both what we would call student facing tools and teacher facing tools, so that we could really have efficient remote learning and effective remote learning for both, in terms of how teachers are delivering instruction and how to teach students to work at home.

Mrs. Chin read the next question from a resident which went as follows: Are we offering any tax increase breaks for residents who have been affected with COVID-19 financially?

Dr. Celano answered by stating that New York State law controls any possible tax exemptions. These must be approved by the State through legislation, before the District or any school district can participate. Unfortunately, there is no exemption for taxes because of the pandemic at this point. This is not a Board of Education decision; this is something that the New York State legislature has to approve by law in order for a school district to be able to participate in an exemption. Dr. Celano added that this is probably a good idea but unfortunately, at this point, is not approved.

Ms. Rutkoske added that Dr. Celano covered it all in terms of what we are able to offer for the pandemic and exemption. This would be similar to the Veterans' exemption the District offered, which was approved by the governor and state, and not by the district.

Mrs. Chin then read the third question sent in by a resident; it is a two-part question. It read as follows: Is a contingency plan in place for any state cuts that may come down the pipeline as revenue loss continues for the state while it remains in lockdown? How would we offset the loss of federal and state aid that we normally receive without sacrificing class size, faculty, student services, athletics, clubs, etc?

Dr. Celano answered by stating that we want to protect class size, programs, extracurricular activities, and athletics. We do have a plan and it is a very good plan. He added that we can cut some of those one-time expenditures and, if we need to, also rely on some of our reserves, we will.

Ms. Rutkoske stressed that without a doubt, 2021 is going to be challenging and certainly 2020 has been challenging. She wants to assure the community that none of us were sitting here undermining what might be down the pipeline but fortunately, when she came to the District in 2016, the Board and Administration were already planning at finding that right balance both short and long term. She added that in 2016, the District had the gap elimination restored and has been carefully managing that to make sure that we do not spend ahead. We are in good place to hopefully weather 2021, but obviously just like we have been doing for the last few years, we will continue to monitor that. We will hopefully continue that right balance between the list of one-time priorities and needing our reserves.

Mrs. Chin stated that we just received another question from a resident. It read as follows: I am new to the area, how can I find out more about the two new names and the incumbent trustees? Will they have presentations or is there a website I can find out more about them?

Mrs. Chin thanked the resident for the question and stated that she would like everyone to know that the Herricks District Council of PTAs will be hosting a virtual *Meet the Candidates Night*, which is taking place on Tuesday, June 2 at 7:00 PM via Zoom. It is going to be moderated by our North Hempstead Town Clerk, Wayne Wink. She added that she believes a Listserv was sent out today with the information, as well as her seeing it on different Facebook posts, and various social media groups, such as Herricks Moms & Dads and Herricks Strong. You can also find more information on it on our website, probably under District PTA.

Mrs. Chin then encouraged the public to look through their emails, as they should have received an invite for *Meet the Candidates Night* on Tuesday. She added that if you are still undecided on who to vote for, and you want to get to know all the candidates, then listen in on Tuesday. You will still have plenty of time to get those ballots in the mail before they are due.

Mrs. Chin then thanked Dr. Celano, Ms. Rutkoske, Central Administration, Ms. Maggiacomo for running the meeting, Ms. Guercin for always chiming in, and her fellow Board Members for all that they do.

## **VI Adjournment**

Before adjourning the meeting, Mrs. Chin told everyone to stay safe. She then told the Public that if they have any other questions that may not have been answered tonight or they did not get answered in time, to please do not hesitate to email the Board. Someone will always return your email. We are here for you and we thank you. Stay safe everyone, and don't forget to vote.

Dr. Celano reminded the Public to vote.

At 8:42pm, Mr. Zanetti made a motion to adjourn tonight's Budget Hearing. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hassan and passed by unanimous vote.



**Respectfully submitted,**

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**Lisa Rutkoske, C.P.A.**  
**District Clerk**