

**BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Great Barrington Stockbridge West Stockbridge**

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**MONUMENT VALLEY REGIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**February 12, 2015**

**Present:**

**School Committee: S. Bannon, R. Bradway, F. Clark, R. Dohoney, W. Fields, K. Piasecki, A. Potter, C. Shelton, J. St. Peter, D. Weston**

**Administration: P. Dillon, S. Harrison**

**List of Distributed Documents:**

*February 12, 2015 School Committee Meeting Agenda  
BHRSD FY16 Budget Book (small) Feb 12  
BHRSD FY16 Detailed Budget Book Feb 12  
Budget Presentation 2-12-15 for FY16  
Berkshire Hills Student Policy and Regulation – JFABB 2  
JFABB Regulation International Students Application 2-15  
February 12, 2015 Personnel Report*

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Any additions, deletions and/or corrections to these minutes can be found at the beginning of the next School Committee Meeting minutes.

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**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Steve Bannon called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

The listing of agenda items are those reasonably anticipated by the chair, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed, and other items not listed may be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. This meeting is being recorded by CTSB and will be broadcast at a later date. Minutes will be transcribed and made public, as well as added to our website, [www.bhrsd.org](http://www.bhrsd.org) once approved.

Members of the audience may also be recording.

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**MINUTES** – None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

a) Good News Item(s)

Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School

Principal Mary Berle reported the following good news items:

- Today the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders participated in Winterfest, an annual event at Butternut Basin. Students went tubing. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade event originally scheduled for tomorrow has been postponed due to the anticipated weather.
- Muddy Brook is getting ready for the Muddy Brook Circus. The week students' return from vacation there will be lots of circus arts at Muddy Brook.
- A district in Pioneer Valley is a partner district with us, and they sent out about 10 to 15 people, their Superintendent, four Principal's and numerous teachers to spend the day at Muddy Brook observing and learning about the peer observation project that we are doing as part of our ongoing embedded professional development, and also connected to supervision and evaluation. Bonnie Grover and Jack Curletti both presented lessons, which were observed by over 20 adults. They did a great job and there were many great conversations had.
- The Department of Education has invited Mary Berle to speak in May at a session connected to the evaluation and supervision project. They will have two speakers statewide. The topic will be supervision and observation related to evaluation. Mary is honored to be included.

Monument Valley Regional Middle School

Principal Ben Doren reported the following good news items:

- Directly after winter break Monument Valley will start their residency with Shakespeare and Company. Last year we had a one day activity around Shakespeare and language around the world. This year we will do an 8 week residency with them and the 7<sup>th</sup> grade will be putting on a Shakespeare play at the end of the residency.
- The Prevention Needs Assessment Survey will also be taking place following vacation. This survey is given every two years to 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, measuring risk factors for substance use and abuse, but also for social/emotional health and families. We use the data from this survey to plan and make good decisions around kids and to create some deep conversations across our community and how we approach these issues.
- Another area of safety we work on is how we do drills. We are able to do these drills in record time, getting kids out of the building and back in. We practice these drills a lot with our students. Students and staff work very hard at being ready for an emergency.
- Staff has finished their release days around curriculum planning. Staff has been working very hard to align curriculum, and it shows in the excitement students' display in working on assignments, projects and they love what they are doing. Mr. Doren stated he is seeing similar practices being used from classroom to classroom, similar structures and practices around writing, etc. It makes a big difference with students when everyone is talking the same language, thanks to the huge dedication from teachers. They consider themselves teammates and collaborators.

## Monument Mountain Regional High School

Principal Marianne Young reported the following good news items:

- This morning there was a wonderful presentation given by all the classes who had been working with Jacob's Pillow the last two weeks, Curriculum in Motion. An English class presented a piece that interpreted Huck Finn. A biology class also presented. The PE class did a beautiful piece about how our bodies move and how evolution has brought us to this standing position that we are in. A Social Studies class did a piece on WWI. It is really quite an innovative and successful program at Monument.
- A number of Art students at MMRHS have been honored. Every year we send our students work to Boston and the Boston Globe selects award-winning artists from high schools across the Commonwealth. Cooper Rownan, Dillon Curtis, Hannah Handel, Audriana Esperat, Isabel Morey, **cannot hear on tape** were all noted for their work. Gold medals were given to Cooper Rownan, Dillon Curtis, Audriana Esperat and Isabel Morey.
- The Spring Musical is under way. Winter sports programs are under way.
- We have also continued the Arts and Ideas Forums at Monument. These began with the Dowmel Lecture Series. Every time a speaker came for the Dowmel Lecture Series part of their contract was to present to students at Monument during the day. We have continued that. Kara Staunton, our Library Media Specialist coordinates all of these. In the last two weeks we have had an author in to work with students on writing memoirs, we have had a speaker in to talk about blues and the origins of tap dancing. This afternoon Homer "Skip" Mead from Great Barrington presented to students on the Holland Renaissance as part of Black History Month. He spoke of how the Holland Renaissance really was a front runner and kind of opened the door for the civil right movement and where we are today with civil rights in this country. He may continue to work with our teachers to bring us into a more current discussion around race in the United States.

### b) FY16 Budget Presentation

Mr. Dillon stated this year a Finance Subcommittee was formed in response to some budget challenges in the past. Mr. Dohoney will speak to the Committee's role this year, context and a shift in process.

Mr. Dohoney stated this is the first year the budget process has been initiated with the new Finance Subcommittee. The Finance Subcommittee is very much a work in process, but he believes it will end up serving the district well. He believes what Committee members will find is much of the load of what has been done at this level was done in much greater detail with the attention of the subcommittee. The subcommittee began by looking at a level program budget, keeping programming identical to what it was during the past year and then added the cost associated. That budget was discussed, and it was determined that possibly that would not be viable for this year. So the subcommittee embarked on cutting below a level program budget. That was achieved in a number of ways. All administrators were brought in and line by line, and program by program was discussed. The budget coming forth from the Finance Subcommittee does contain some significant cuts from the level program budget. The subcommittee did give this much thought, and although is not happy to have to make cuts, there was a very productive exchange of information between the subcommittee and administrative team.

Mr. Clark inquired whether the subcommittee and administration team looked at both a level program and a level funded budget. Mr. Dillon stated yes.

Mr. Dillon stated all the district work starts with and is driven by the BHRSD Mission:

*To ensure that all students are challenged through a wide-range of experiences, to become engaged, curious learners and problem solvers who effectively communicate, respect diversity and improve themselves and their community.*

Mr. Dillon stated what was hoped for in forming a Finance Subcommittee was to be able to have a more in-depth and deliberate process. In the past, programmatic overviews were given, which gave a lot of information without numbers in a very short period of time. We have made a shift to doing programmatic overviews on an ongoing basis, likely at every meeting during the course of the year. We may talk about English K – 12 at one meeting and then Technology K – 12 at another, and so on. It will be spread out over time so people have a sense of the depth and complexity of each area. Data will be shared in each instance, some accomplishments, challenges and areas for growth. The district is transitioning into that, so this budget is being brought forth based on what programming was in the previous year, and modifying it slightly. This will be a transition year.

Mr. Dillon stated one thing that can be hard about this is there are four people on the subcommittee from the School Committee, along with Mr. Dillon, Mrs. Harrison, the three building Principals, and at times The Director of Teaching and Learning and Director of Student Services. There are six people from the School Committee who were not engaged in those conversations. Part of the challenge this evening is to catch those people up on those conversations.

Mr. Dillon stated when we look at the budget process we are looking at building a budget absent two very important pieces of information. The Governor's budget has not been released yet. He has until March 4<sup>th</sup> to release it. When a new Governor is elected to office he or she is afforded a little more time than a sitting Governor in releasing the budget. So we do not know right now what direction he is going to go in. This Governor has a very strong financial background, so it could be something very interesting, or it could be something very conservative. The Governor has focused much on resolving this fiscal year's cuts and how to close those gaps, and has not said anything about the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Dillon stated this budget was built based on certain assumptions, where if there are changes made by the Governor, it will ripple through our entire budget. The other piece is we used this year's Local Minimum Contribution numbers. Obviously, we do not know next year's numbers yet. That could also impact our budget dramatically. Those are two big variables that we do not have information on.

In terms of the Finance Subcommittee it was the goal to achieve these five things: to have an educationally driven discussion, with a deeper analysis than previously done and there would be a deeper open discussion with the School Committee. In terms of process, the two big things were administrators were included from the beginning, and three budget options were analyzed.

First was Budget Option I, which was an all-in budget, level program, including some additional special education staffing, plus four items discussed by the School Committee over the past year. The four items were setting aside money for the Stabilization Fund. Although the district was given support by the member towns to support that fund, the financial situation has not been one to allow the district to put any money there. In Option I \$150,000 was to be set aside, which was later decided could not be achieved. There was also discussion surrounding providing funding for technical services and web funding, but it was decided that also could not be achieved. The Food Service Program is expensive and historically we have spent more than what was budgeted, and then at the end of the year we have pulled from other sources to cover that overage. We want to budget for the overage, but we don't feel we are able to do that. Lastly was the OPEB funding. If the district were to do an all-in budget the total assessment across the towns would be 6.6%, \$19,317,138. The increases to the three towns would be 7.23% to Great Barrington, 9.22% to Stockbridge and 1.52% to West Stockbridge. The subcommittee felt that was too high.

Budget Option II was level-programming, maintaining current staff and programming, add the additional special education staffing and additional Food Service funding. Mr. Dillon stated this looked a bit better, with 6.21% total assessment to the three towns, Great Barrington 6.84%, Stockbridge 8.82% and West Stockbridge 1.16%. The subcommittee and others participating in the discussions felt this was still too much and most likely would not receive approval from voters.

Mr. Dillon stated the budget being brought forth and presented this evening, and recommended by the Finance Subcommittee is a Level Program with Proposed Reductions.

*Mr. Dillon and Mrs. Harrison presented the proposed FY16 Operating and Capital budget. Please see PowerPoint presentation attached at the end of the minutes.*

#### Questions and Discussion Regarding FY16 Proposed Budget

Mr. Dillon asked each of the Principals to come forward and speak to the context of how they arrived at the decisions made at the urging of himself and the Finance Subcommittee.

#### Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School

Mary Berle stated she would like to start that historically, previous Principal Thad Dingman was very careful when it came to the Muddy Brook budget. Last year Foreign Language was eliminated. There is not much more to cut from the Muddy Brook budget without affecting programming.

Mary Berle stated she absolutely believes that cutting the Early Kindergarten Program is a terrible decision. Every dollar invested in the youngest learners will most definitely pay off in the long run. This is an extremely strong program and the staff are outstanding and have done a great job with the students. To cut as many dollars as needed to be cut from this budget she would have had to cut everywhere else, gym, art, music, a program that 420 kids are counting on program-wise. Ms. Berle stated that is not something that she is able to do. If a classroom teacher is cut then class size would be shifted around and would go above contractual agreements, so that cannot be done.

Mary Berle stated the budget is very tight at Muddy Brook. The only possibility may be attrition and numbers. 13 new students have enrolled in the school since January 5<sup>th</sup>. For a minute it looks like there may be some shrinkage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, but not at the moment.

The team at Muddy Brook is working very hard with tremendous commitment. Ms. Berle stated she has tried to be extremely transparent regarding this process and what it means and the conversations have been good, but it has been hard.

The Title I shift is a bit confusing. It is really important for people to understand, and Ms. Berle has had this conversation with staff. Currently, Muddy Brook receives approximately \$300,000 per year in Title I monies. This is a federal grant that is based on census data and is specifically targeted for high needs students. This grant, historically, was managed at the district level. It moved to the middle school in a tough year, it was the year the Learning and Teaching position in the district was cut, and Principal Jane Furey and the middle school was the one person who really needed that grant. At that time it made a lot of sense because the middle school had some tremendous needs. That was a good decision that was made at the time and was perfectly rational. Since then, the middle school has gone to 26% high needs and the elementary school went from 15% or 17% to 40%, so that grant needed to be re-balanced. Ben Doren has been a great partner in thinking about how we can do that, along with Joshua Briggs, our Director of Learning and Teaching. Those conversations started two years ago and we have been discussing how to make that shift. The elementary school has already been behind in having those needs met.

#### **Changing tape side**

#### Monument Valley Regional Middle School

Mr. Doren stated Monument Valley is not really able to cut anything in its budget that will not affect programming. He will not cut into the core academics. He cannot cut into the Exploratory Program, but given a retirement, it does offer the opportunity to cut a position without cutting a dedicated professional position. In many ways, any cut will have a significant affect. As already pointed out by Superintendent Dillon, the middle school has been doing a lot of work around integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century learning into the school day, into the core curriculum. There are a lot of people

working on that and much leadership around that. Unfortunately, a lot of grant monies have already been garnered as well as visionary programming for next year where that position can be and would be really instrumental in making some huge steps. It doesn't mean it cannot be accomplished with the existing faculty, but it will be a huge hit. The Committee has heard Mr. Doren speak about technology in the past and realizes how passionate he is about 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning. Mr. Doren does believe some of it can be absorbed, but work in this area will be slower. Some re-arranging can be done in the Exploratory Programs and have been discussing shifts in schedules, but will have a significant impact.

There are other areas where we are able to realize some efficiency, and the cuts in stipends and Activity Advisors will undo several years of work Mr. Doren has done in advocating for after-school programming, as well as Project Leaders, which this district really values. After-school programming for all students will be reduced. We will continue to offer after-school programming through Project Connection, which focuses on a specific compliment of students. The programming being cut was meant to provide after-school activities in high interest areas to all students. The Leadership positions that are being cut were added in the last couple of years. It is unfortunate that Monument Valley will be losing these positions, but will make do with the leadership that remains.

### Monument Mountain High School

Mrs. Young stated MMRHS has had a very strong legacy of providing a diverse, competitive, rigorous educational opportunity for all students. Previously, she has written many memos championing the school, which she believes is her job to do. If the district wants to maintain a diverse, rigorous and diverse high school program that prepares young people for college and for careers that keeps the graduation rate high and keeps the dropout rate low then a range of programs is necessary. All students do not walk in and take an academic track and do well in a traditional setting. Monument has maintained a range of programs from a career and vocational/technical programs, to art and music, and a very strong academic program. The cuts that you see coming from Monument this year are what they are.

The paraprofessional being reduced is a logical reduction. There are a number of students in the spectrum program who are aging out. They will turn 22 between now and the start of next year. Their paraprofessionals will either be reallocated or they would be laid off if we didn't have the students for them. So this cut makes sense and we are still able to take care of students on IEP's, as well as the work just started this year with a paraprofessional working between the Automotive classroom and the Library.

Moving the .8 Math position to .5, while Mrs. Young would rather be expanding the number of Math offerings, especially as the high school looks at the common core and the MASS CORE requirements, along with the number of students who are going into STEM careers and want to have four years of Math, expansion would be ideal. Right now the teacher in the .8 position is co-teaching with another teacher where they were able to combine two smaller classes and make one reasonable size classroom. So the number going to .5 seems to make sense and a pretty broad Math curriculum offering will be maintained.

The Art position is not an easy decision to make at Monument. The Art Program has kept any number of students in school. The numbers of students who go on to study art and go into graphic design, art, videography, any number of fields that are routed in art is significant at Monument. Monument currently has three Art teachers and there are fewer numbers in the Art classes this year. Due to the district cutting back on school choice, and tuition enrollments dropping due to changing enrollments at Farmington River and Richmond. The Art Program will still be able to be offered, but it will not be as robust and will not be as flexible for student's schedules. But a program will not be eliminated. With the proposal presented we are able to keep our 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes at a reasonable size, although they are all higher than they were two to four years ago. Mrs. Young does not want to cut anywhere else in the high school. She does not believe the Committee, or herself, and faculty or staff or parents want a program that is any further diminished than what is being presented. Watching what the elementary school and middle school have

done in order to be responsible to the member towns is admirable. Mrs. Young respects the decisions they have made.

Beyond the cuts proposed for Monument Mountain, the district would be looking at a different high school. Mrs. Young has been saying this for a number of years. We have now reached that point where any further cuts would eliminate a program. Mrs. Young believes it is important for the Committee to understand that. If that is necessary, Mrs. Young would start with programs outside of the school day and move inward. The district is at a tipping point at the high school. She does not believe anyone wants to see the high school much different than how it exists today. If further cuts were necessary the district would really have to go to the table and look at the program all together instead of trying to do the same with less. Looking at what changes would be made and what program would work in a rural high school given the present economic situation.

Mrs. Young commended her faculty, the teachers and staff at Monument, for their professional and open response to the information they were given regarding this budget.

The students are just beginning to hear what is going on, and the Committee may begin hearing from them.

Mrs. Young stated this would be her reduction recommendation to keep the high school vibrant, keeping a program in that school for every single student that comes into it.

Mr. Dillon stated he wanted to thank the Principals and the Finance Subcommittee for completing this work with real honesty and integrity. He has been involved in other budget situations in other areas where the "used car salesman" game was played, bringing forth a small number to eventually get to another number. These folks did heavy lifting intellectually and spent a lot of time talking with their teachers and staff in coming up with very creative ways in solving what is essentially an unsolvable problem. It is everyone's strong belief that the district can go this far with reductions, not happily, but to go one round deeper with cuts would do irreparable damage to any one of the schools.

Mr. Clark inquired, under the slide for the elementary school there was a reduction of two teachers along with elimination of the Early Kindergarten Program. He understands the district already planned the bubble in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and expected that reduction this year. In regard to the reduction of the second teacher, is that in relation to the elimination of the Early Kindergarten? Ms. Berle stated yes. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher has been discussed at the School Committee level before. The second teacher reduction would be due to the elimination of the Early Kindergarten Program. One Unit A person would lose their job because of elimination of the Early Kindergarten Program.

Mr. Clark continued, looking at the cuts, which really are not cuts, they are cuts from the 1.1 million dollar increase. We still have an \$800,000 increase, so he believes the committee should be careful how that is presented. Also, he believes these reductions from the request are reasonable, but they are also things the district should have been looking at anyway. The reduction of the teacher position because of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade "bubble", and integration of computer technology into the classroom. Previously, a teacher to teach technology skills was necessary, but given the integration of technology into the classroom the need for those services is past. It is unfortunate that positions need to be cut at any level, but in other ways Mr. Clark does not believe these to be deep cuts. These are areas the district should have been looking into anyway.

An inquiry was made of how many children are in the Pre-K Program. Ms. Berle responded that there are four classes in every grade except for the Early K and Pre-K Programs. Each of those classrooms has one classroom. One of the things the district wanted to bring to the surface in making this cut is the Early-K Program is not a perfect structure right now as it only serves those cohorts who were born between September 2<sup>nd</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup>. If the program were to be kept Ms. Berle would like to consider re-structuring the program to possibly include the entire cohort. Usually the Pre-K has had approximately 20 children. This year the class has 14 children.

Mr. Clark stated he is surprised that the Committee did not hear about the increase to healthcare costs until February. He believes that information should have been shared much earlier. He was outraged when he heard a 9 ½% increase to insurance rates. Mr. Clark would like to point out, as he did last year, when the Committee presents salaries and benefits as 75% of the budget, a good 21% of the budget is on two lines. The retirement and healthcare costs, which is over \$5,000,000 of the operating budget. When we have a 9 ½% increase in the healthcare line that is representing a significant amount of money, \$400,000. The increase was the same last year. Mr. Clark does not see how the district can continue to do this. This needs to be looked at in depth. This budget season is not the time that can be done. We have a vote as a member of the Berkshire Health Group and Mr. Clark is not pleased that the Committee was not included before that vote was taken. Mr. Clark stated he made the same comment last year, and nothing different happened for this year's budget. Mrs. Harrison stated the Berkshire Health Group does not set its rates until the final Monday in January. It doesn't even discuss potential rate increases before that date. They wait to get the first 6 months of claims from Blue Cross/Blue Shield. They get the information for July 1<sup>st</sup> through January 1<sup>st</sup> and take two to three weeks to work the numbers through and do the projections. The rates are discussed and set on January 26th, so there was not a way to bring any information back to the Committee prior to that. We try to get the information earlier. This is actually very, very early this year. They are processing immediately as the claims come in. The reason they are set in January is because of the regional school districts having to set their budget. There would be no way to set those rates before that time period.

An inquiry was made whether the Berkshire Health Group sets these rates based on the entire group, or is it based on the claims of the Berkshire Hills group only? Mrs. Harrison responded they set the rates based on the claims of the entire group because it is self-funded. Mr. Dillon stated several years ago the district made a choice to go with the Berkshire Health Group versus the GIC. Even though this is perceived to be a significant increase, had the district chosen to go with GIC it would be much, much worse. Mrs. Harrison stated the retired teachers used to be part of the GIC group. There was a study done in 2005 – 2006 and costs of the GIC and costs of the Berkshire Health Group were compared. The current employees were already in the Berkshire Health Group. The retirees were also bought in with the Berkshire Health Group because it was actually a cost savings to do so. The other thing with the Berkshire Health Group is the members of the group do have more control. With GI, they can change the policy, change copays, they can make changes throughout the year at any time. This year the GIC is in a very deep hole. Mrs. Harrison expects them to have an additional assessment to get them out of the hole, plus a 9 ½% increase. Only once in 15 years has the Berkshire Health Group had to do that, but with the GIC it is a common thing to have a mid-year additional assessment.

An audience member stated they see all the reductions are tied to educators. They inquired whether when looking at reductions whether non-educator positions were also looked at. Paraprofessionals and clerical positions. Mr. Dillon stated they looked long and hard at a range of places, and followed the guidelines of affecting areas that would least impact students. Mr. Dillon stated a common thing is to cut the Central Office, which is operating pretty much with a "skeleton crew". Several years ago there was discussion of whether the district needed a Director of Learning and Teaching, and certainly the district does need that position. That position and that person is essential to all the work in the schools. They also happen to be a very successful grant writer and generates enough funding in grants to cover that position. If we were to eliminate that position we would be "shooting ourselves in the foot" and pulling much support away from the Principals and the Superintendent. Another area is whether we could do with less in the back office roles. We need somebody to pay the bills and to do receivables. By design it is two different people. You cannot have one person doing both to reduce the opportunity for fraud. There are not positions to be eliminated at the Central Office. A concerted effort was made to put an additional Custodial position back in the middle school. It was a situation where you pay now or you pay later. The buildings need to be maintained. The audience member questioned secretarial positions, etc. Public schools across Massachusetts are really looking very closely at their budgets. As a position empties the decision is being made whether to fill that position or whether to disperse the duties. Mr. Dillon stated the district has done some of that, but you have to also look at actual savings in moving duties around. Much time was spent with the Principals as to what areas could be cut realistically. Mr. Dohoney stated every effort was taken to impact the students as minimally as possible.



Sharon Gregory inquired as to whether there are ways to corroborate with other districts, and whether there was discussion surrounding those possibilities. Mr. Dillon stated the six South County Superintendents meet regularly every two weeks for two hours. They have all performed inventories of their technologies and network maps and are currently discussing that. They will probably bring in someone to do an audit of the six districts and look for places where they can work together. At one meeting the six South County districts committed to several days within a calendar for the potential to share professional development. We are just beginning those conversations now as to what might be the most impactful things to do. There are also ongoing conversations about sharing particular services and positions. We are hoping to have a meeting with the Superintendent's and Business Managers to look at shared purchasing. Our hope would have been to come up with some shared services for this budget process, but more likely what will happen is some of those decisions will be made for some shared ideas within our processes for the following year.

Mr. Weston inquired whether the district should add money to the budget to cover the OPEB liability. Should we be increasing our assessments to try and cover that? The Town of Stockbridge has started to fund it. It would be a responsible thing to begin funding it. Mr. Weston stated he believes the shift needs to be made. Mrs. Harrison stated the \$30,000,000 will not come due at one time. When you are looking at the total, that is the total liability, but what gets booked is the difference between what the annual projected is and what you are paying. It also has to do with, a place that has a 50/50 contribution has a much different liability, even though they may have more retirees, because the contribution is different. It may not be funding the liability. It may be reducing the liability. It is a complicated issue.

Mr. Fields stated he was one of the members of the Finance Subcommittee, and would like to ask Mr. Doren about not replacing the computer tech position. It sounds like the teachers will be doing more because of this reduction. Will the teachers be asked to pick up the load, and does that fit into state standards and the common core? Where there other options discussed? Mr. Doren stated every cut means more work for everybody. He does not think this will create more work for teachers. It does mean, however, that the middle school's ability to grow in 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning will be slower. It is significant and it is important. He did not want to increase class sizes, but this will significantly reduce the ability to grow in 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning, and also will hamper creating some of the enrichment opportunities for students, but it will not increase the burden on teachers. Technology is a given. We are not in a place where we need to teach kids how to use computers, however, there is a level in terms of our curriculum in teaching kids the systems and the tools, teaching kids about digital culture, citizenship, as well as increasing Science Engineering and Mathematics, preparing students for computer science careers. Getting kids involved in all the other technical applications. It will impact how we do common core. It will be slower. There is an expectation for students to grapple with new media. There is a way of looking at a video as a text. The way we use audio files. That will be impacted in terms of the rate we can do this at.

Mr. St. Peter inquired about the cuts in the stipends and Activity Advisors? Mr. Doren stated the after-school activities are sports and other types of high interest activities that keep kids engaged and loving being in school, and creating ways for teachers to build relationships with kids outside of the regular school day. In terms of the leadership, it is about our ability to support some of the programs. Development and leadership will just go slower. Mr. Dohoney inquired whether these cuts would eliminate these opportunities for kids. Mr. Doren stated yes.

Mr. St. Peter appreciates the work the Finance Subcommittee and Administrators have done on the budget, but personally he feels, especially when it come to the Early-K and the Art Teacher, that the cuts go too far. They are really affecting the educational integrity of the district. Mr. St. Peter is proud of the district and how well the district prepared him when he was in school, and cannot support these cuts.

Mr. Clark inquired whether some of the after-school activities been "back-filled" with an after-school grant? The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant also funds after-school activities. Mr. Doren stated that is true. Programming is provided for many students through that grant, but it is also a targeted grant and it does have expectations that the playing field is being leveled for many different high needs students. What is being cut is the programming available to all students. Mr.

Clark stated he has previously made comments about the personnel report and the stipend list being very large at the middle school, and many are small grants, but the numbers are enormous. It was explained to him that if a need arose there was a fund that could be used to create a title and a job description and assign a value to it. Mr. Clark stated he believed the School Committee was completely left out of that process. There was no control over it. We had worked to stabilize stipends and equalize the dollar values, and many stipends are actually written into the contract. The stipend program at the middle school seemed to grow beyond that. Mr. Doren stated he actively increased and presented the stipends each year. It was presented as part of the budget, explaining exactly what the ideas were.

Mr. Dillon stated he wanted to add two other things that were quite intentional at the district level. Six years ago a lot of professional development money was spent on bringing outside people in to do “drive by professional development”. We have largely stopped bringing in outside people to perform professional development and have largely relied on the experts of our colleagues to push thinking. Some of the stipends are for after-school programs around activities, etc. But a number of the stipends around highly focused work connected to curriculum and connected to learning with very clear and explicit outcomes. We have partnered with teachers on doing remarkable work that is changing how they work and how kids learn, issuing stipends as a catalyst and incentive to get that to happen. Much of the work around building curriculum has been connected to stipends or summer opportunities. We also made a commitment last year in the context of the negotiation process to take some time and look at the stipends, and that is something we need to do.

Mr. Bradway wanted to thank the Finance Subcommittee for their work and the hard discussions they had to have. He is very thankful that the Committee is going through this process. So now we are talking about cuts. Looking at the budget and seeing what is written on the wall for this year, his gut is telling him the district will be in the same position next year. Mr. Bradway stated he agrees with Mr. St. Peter that he is not a fan of these cuts and believes the district could be “shooting itself in the foot”. He understands the budget is lean, but there is a cost of doing business. We have to recognize that we have to pay those costs of doing business. If we do not want to pay those costs, then we have to change the way we are doing business. Mr. Bradway is going into his 5<sup>th</sup> year on the Committee, and there has been talk about collaboration and consolidation and so forth, and those are difficult discussions, but it seems every year those discussions do not go anywhere and get pushed down the road. At this point Mr. Bradway believes there is no better time to start discussing how to change how we do education so we can make this much better for us to absorb. If the Committee does not see that writing on the wall he believes they will be in the same position next year and will be hearing about much more painful cuts that he will not support. Mr. Clark stated he agrees with everything just stated. The Committee will be in the same position for years to come if it does not look at how to do things differently. Mr. Clark stated his problem with this budget is it is not sustainable. The district needs to look at balancing the educational needs against the resources available.

Mr. Bannon stated one advantage that the Committee has for next year is the Finance Subcommittee will have opportunity to meet and to help work through this. It may not mean we have all the answers, but this year’s trial seems to have been good with the time the subcommittee has had to meet. Mr. Bannon states he agrees with much of what has been said. Mr. Dillon stated he believes getting into the cycle of programmatic overviews each meeting and looking in-depth at one area K – 12 will set the Committee up well to have the discussions necessary to redefine as a district going forward. You really have to do 20 of those to have a sense of the entire picture, to then be in a position to redefine.

Mr. Bradway stated he wanted to clarify that he personally believes he would rather pay more as an individual so the cuts do not need to happen. But also, he does not want to speak solely for himself knowing that he represents an entire community. In absence of having the difficult discussions he personally is willing to pay the money to have what is needed to have a really great school district. He also believes the Committee does need to have these difficult discussions so well-thought out changes can be made, if reasonable.

Mrs. Harrison stated she does not disagree, but the flip side is the school district has talked about contacting the State on various issues or taking some sort of action, and one of the things she would like to put on the table is what is

happening now in looking at the foundation budget. A few years ago at the lead of the MMA there was a study done that showed the foundation budget was underfunded by a billion dollars. That really is what the issue is. The costs are increasing and the foundation is not keeping pace with that. It is not adequately accounting for the increases in special education costs. It is not adequately considering insurance costs. It is not considering increases in salary. This has been published and may be something that one or more members of the School Committee may want to get into because in 2003 almost 19% of our budget was covered by Chapter 70. Presently it is 11%. That is one of the reasons why we are having such difficulty. The foundation budget may be one of the topics the School Committee, jointly with the towns, may want to find a way to participate in.

Mr. Dillon stated the irony is not lost on him that the dollar amount the Committee is considering cutting is almost the same amount that the district was short-changed this year in regional transportation.

An audience member stated he found this to be incredibly depressing. When he came tonight he did not anticipate seeing these kinds of cuts. The budget is going up overall, but he didn't realize that was going to happen. Secondly, he and his wife have had two daughters go through the Berkshire Hills school system. One graduated in 1987 and the other graduated on 1990. They both took many Art classes in the high school and both were Art majors in college. One daughter is an architect and the other is head of the Art Department of Albuquerque High School in New Mexico. The fact that they got their art education in this district, which continued in college and then in life, he believes he owes an enormous debt to the high school at that time. He finds cutting the Art position and the Pre-K incredibly troubling. He urged the Committee to put that \$248,000 back into the budget. He believes all those cuts are hard, and \$248,000 is not a huge number. He believes these cuts will have the district stepping backwards, and stepping backwards is unacceptable. He would at least like to see the district tread water.

Mr. Bannon suggested to those in the audience and those listening at home that they make an effort to attend the Public Hearing being held on February 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:00. Typically the Public Hearing consists of opening of the Public Hearing, one or two people speaking to budget concerns, and then the closing of the Public Hearing. Mr. Bannon stated he would urge and welcome community members to attend that night and speak their mind. The School Committee will listen and take those comments into consideration when making their decision. It is helpful for the Committee to hear from the public. The cuts are depressing, but it is also depressing when the public does not attend the public hearing, but instead makes their comments at Town Meeting when the budget process is over. Mr. Bannon urged the public to attend the public hearing.

An audience member spoke as a Great Barrington tax payer, and as a Great Barrington tax payer they stated Great Barrington pays the lion's share of the school budget. They view the cuts as the Committee trying to meet the taxpayers half way, and if the cuts are put back into the budget they will vote no on the budget at Town Meeting. They cannot afford the increase.

Mr. Dohoney stated the measure of the tax burden to the Great Barrington tax payer came up at every single meeting of the Finance Subcommittee when discussing the cuts. He does not believe that is fair and is evidence of the flawed system the district is working with.

Sharon Gregory stated she believes the tax payers may be able to accept a higher budget if the Committee were also able to come forward with very specific areas they are working on, with an approximate timeframe, whether it be consolidation, etc. Not necessarily to bring those ideas to a conclusion, but showing the community the Committee is working on this issue. Mr. Bannon stated he would agree. The Committee has been working on a lot of things, tuition agreements, speaking to other districts about collaboration and regionalization. The problem is putting a timeframe on these things. He agrees a list should be developed of what the Committee has been doing. Sharon Gregory stated community forums may also help people understand.

An audience member inquired whether lower fuel costs have impacted this budget. Mr. Dillon stated no. The district uses some heating oil, but really does not use a lot of fuel. Where the district is getting hammered is electricity. A

couple of meetings ago the district signed a solar agreement that will allow the district to receive credits, but we cannot count on those savings until we start seeing them. It is anticipated there will be savings realized from the solar project.

Mr. Dohoney stated there is a unanimous, passionate position of the entire Committee and community that sharing costs and potentially consolidation is what needs to happen and is what other districts are doing. It cannot be approached in an artificial way. It involves forces so far beyond the control of the Committee, and frankly a lot of hard work and a lot of luck. There is a consensus around that. Possibly conveying that to the community would be more important. The pie is the pie and we have to change it, otherwise it will continue to be cut up more.

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## **SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- a) Policy Committee
  - First Reading – Policy # JFABB – Acceptance of International and Exchange Students

Mr. Clark stated the Policy Committee met recently and included in this evenings packet is Policy # JFABB – Acceptance of International and Exchange Students that Mrs. Young has been working diligently on formatting. The district has always had a policy regarding exchange students for what the State Department classifies as J1 students that are sponsored by Rotary International. Those students have attended Monument Mountain for one school year. They have always enriched our programs and their costs were always paid by either Rotary or the other sponsoring agency. About a year or two ago we decided we wanted to accept international tuition students. Other high schools have been doing this quite successfully and there is a great demand for it. Monument has great programs to offer. The program did, however, need approval from the US State Department. Marianne and her staff worked very hard and received that approval. Those students are F1 VISA, a different classification. This new policy is a modification of the previous policy to include F1 International students who would come and spend a year at Monument as tuition students. The rough tuition rate would be the full cost of attending the school. It is not written into the policy because it would be reviewed and voted on every year. We have been talking about approximately \$16,000. Mr. Dillon stated it is important that people understand this is not the per capita cost to the member towns for tuition. That is the number that includes all the grants, all the federal money and all the additional money per pupil. It does not include capital costs. Mr. Dillon stated it is a good number for the district and is still attractive to international students. Mr. St. Peter inquired whether that charge could be inflated higher. Mrs. Young stated there are no guidelines from Homeland Security or the State Department on tuition. What we charge is strictly a School Committee decision. Many schools charge a tuition rate that they believe is affordable and that will attract students. Another point is to require payment in full so that we do not become bill collectors. Mr. Bannon stated one thing the subcommittee had to consider is a district could price themselves out of this business. Mr. Clark stated the district is not providing any room and board for these students or transportation services for any of these students, other than the regular bus service. In addition to the tuition a sending family would have to pay, they would have to pay for their round trip fare, room and board for the year and incidental costs that may come along. Mrs. Young stated tuition ranges from \$5,000 to \$20,000. The average is the per capita cost. Once the policy is approved Mrs. Young will work with agencies to facilitate a couple of International students in the fall, if possible. Mr. Clark stated the district would like to invite two students to come for the beginning of the next school year, and further evaluate the program with those first two students.

Mr. Bradway stated according to the policy this program would be capped at two. Mr. Clark stated that is under a J1 VISA through the rotary. Mrs. Young stated the J1 language was already the district's International Exchange Student Policy.

Mr. Bannon stated if anyone has any other questions on this policy please email Mr. Dillon. The Committee will bring the policy back for a vote at the next meeting.

b) Buildings & Grounds Subcommittee

Mr. Bradway stated the meeting for this evening was canceled and will be rescheduled.

c) Superintendent's Evaluation Subcommittee

Mr. Weston – Nothing to report.

d) Technology Subcommittee

Mr. Bradway stated the committee will be meeting in two weeks, February 26<sup>th</sup>, to discuss the Technology Vision Statement and planned outcomes to target for the next two to three years.

e) Finance Subcommittee

Mr. Dohoney – Nothing further to report. There is a tentative meeting scheduled for March 4<sup>th</sup> at 4:30.

**PERSONNEL REPORT**

Mr. Bannon stated a Personnel Report was included in the Committee packet.

| <u>Position:</u>  | <u>Effective Date:</u>  | <u>Salary Stipend:</u>  |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| <b><u>Non-Certified Appointments:</u></b>                   |                         |   |
| Childs, Rebecca      Kitchen Helper - MMRHS                 | 1/26/2015               | \$11/hr/6/hr/day - (replaces Ted Furey)   |
| <b><u>Long-Term Substitute Appointments:</u></b>            |                         |   |
| Fleming, Jill      Physical Education Teacher - Muddy Brook | 02/09/2015 - 3/12/2015  | days 1-10 per diem - BA Step 1<br>days 11 forward per diem - MA step 5<br>(replaces Jessica Pleu)   |
| Gutter, Cindy      Music Teacher - .6 MMRHS/.4 MBRES        | 02/23/2015 - 05/29/2015 | days 1-10 per diem - BA Step 1<br>days 11 forward per diem - MA step 5<br>(replaces Julie Bickford) |

**Resignations:**

|   |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
| Knoll, Mona      Paraprofessional - Muddy Brook | 2/4/2015 |  |
|---|----------|--|

**Extra-Curricular Appointments:**

*(all 2014-2015 unless otherwise noted)*

**Monument Mountain Regional High School**

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Baldwin, Lisa      Class of 2018 Advisor  | Stipend: \$948      |
| Cutter, Cindy      Spring Musical - Music Director (split w/ L. Joe Rose)       | Stipend: \$1,423.50 |
| Rose, Lloyd Joseph      Spring Musical - Music Director (split w/ Cindy Gutter) | Stipend: \$1,423.50 |
| Robbins-Zust, Maia      Spring Musical - Lighting                               | Stipend: \$2,372    |
| Rose, Lloyd Joseph      Spring Musical - Musician - Keyboard                    | Stipend - \$672     |

|                           |                           |                   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Mace, Linnea              | Spring Musical - Director | Stipend - \$3,798 |
| Morehouse, Pamela         | After-Prom Co-Advisor     | Stipend - \$474   |
| Mooney, Michael           | After-Prom Co-Advisor     | Stipend - \$474   |
| <b><u>Volunteers:</u></b> |                           |                   |
| Laramee, Jason            | Boys' Basketball Coach    |                   |
| Green, Shawn              | Wrestling Coach           |                   |

**BUSINESS OPERATIONS** – None

**EDUCATION NEWS** – None

**OLD BUSINESS** – None

**NEW BUSINESS** – None

**WRITTEN COMMUNICATION** – None

**PUBLIC COMMENT** –None

**Mr. Weston made a motion, seconded by Mr. Dohoney to adjourn the public meeting at 9:45PM.**

**Unanimous approval.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Debra E. Brazie, Recorder

\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary

**Berkshire Hills Regional  
School District**

**FY 16 Proposed Budget**

**February 12, 2015**

**Mission**

To ensure all students are challenged through a wide range of experiences to become engaged, curious learners and problem solvers who effectively communicate, respect diversity, and improve themselves and their community.

2

**Budget Process**

- More In-Depth & Deliberate Process
- Programmatic Overviews Going Forward
- Transition Year for Process

3

**Budget Process**

- NOTE:
- FY16 House 1 Not Yet Released
- FY15 Minimum Local Contribution Used

4

**Finance  
Sub-Committee**

- Educationally Driven Discussion
- Deeper analysis
- Deeper Option Discussion with SC

5

**Finance Sub-Committee  
Process**

- Included administrators
- Analyzed Three Budget Options

6

## Budget Option #1 ALL-IN

- Level Program -- *Including*
- Additional SPED Staffing -- *PLUS*
- Four items discussed by SC  
(Over the past year)

7

## Budget Option #1 ALL-IN

- Stabilization - \$100,000
- Web Communications - \$12,000
- Food Service - +\$50,000  
(existing program)
- OPEB - \$10,000

8

## ALL-IN Budget Assessment Impact

|                         |       |                     |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| <u>Total Assessment</u> | 6.60% | <u>\$19,317,138</u> |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------|

- Great Barrington      7.23%      \$13,525,216
- Stockbridge            9.22%      \$ 2,833,301
- W. Stockbridge        1.52%      \$ 2,958,621

9

## Budget Option #2 Level-Program

- Level Program -- *Including*
- Additional SPED Staffing -- *PLUS*
- Additional Food Service Funding  
(existing program)

10

## Level Program Budget Assessment Impact

|                         |       |                     |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| <u>Total Assessment</u> | 6.21% | <u>\$19,246,753</u> |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------|

- Great Barrington      6.84%      \$13,475,810
- Stockbridge            8.82%      \$ 2,822,919
- W. Stockbridge        1.16%      \$ 2,948,024

11

## FY 16 Level Program *with* Proposed Reductions

12



## Reduction Request

- Reduce Operating Budget by \$250,000
- Reduce Net Assessment Impact
- Reduce Assessment Increase to Great Barrington to 5%
- Other Assessments Also Reduced

13

## Reduction Process

- Recognize Mandatory or Non-Discretionary Requirements
- Impact as Few Students as Possible
- Maintain Strong Programming

14

## Transportation

- |                   |   |           |
|-------------------|---|-----------|
| 1. Regular Day    | 1.38% CPI   | -\$4,286  |
| 2. Private School | 1.38 % CPI  | -\$6,127  |
| 3. SPED           | 29.41%+   | \$125,000 |
| a)                | 1.38% CPI   |           |
| b)                | increased need for out-of-district transportation |           |

15

## Health Insurance

- 15.0% increase to active plans
- 5.4% increase to Medex
- 4.5% increase to dental plan
- \$402,165 increase; 9.5% net

16

## Other Insurances

- \$16,919 increase; 12.63% net

17

## Berkshire County Retirement Assessment

- \$40,824 increase; 8.0% net

18

## Utilities

- \$64,823 increase; 6.96% net

19

## Special Education

- \$37,540 increase; 4.36% net

20

## Personnel

- All contracts settled to 6/30/2017
- Three Retirements
- Add Speech Language Pathology Asst.

21

## Reduction Request

### *Considerations*

- Impact as Few Students as Possible
- Maintain Strong Programming

22

## Reduction Process Step #1

- Reviewed All Accounts at District Level:
  - Virtual High School -\$ 3,850
  - Internet Service Fees -\$ 5,500
  - Add. Food Service Funding -\$50,000

23

## Reduction Process Step #2

- Request Reductions at School Level:
  - Recognized that cuts for FY16 would impact programming

24

## **Personnel** ***Elementary***

- ES Reduction of 2 Teachers
  - 1 through attrition – 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 4 sections
  - 1 through RIF
- Elimination of EK for FY16
- Elimination of 1 Paraprofessional
- Addition of 1 Title I teacher – moved from MS

25

## **Personnel** ***Middle***

- MS Computer Technology Retirement – not replaced
- MS:
  - Stipends -\$ 7,050
  - Activity Advisors -\$11,000

26

## **Personnel** ***High***

- HS Reduction of 1 Art Teacher
- HS Reduction of .8 FTE to .5 FTE
- Elimination of 1 Paraprofessional

27

## **Personnel**

- To meet reduction (continued):
  - ES Elimination of EK for FY16
  - ES Elimination of 1 Para. Position
  - HS Elimination of 1 Para. Position

28

## **Total Reduction**

- **\$248,626**
- Further Impacts would cut too deeply into programming, and
- Affect a Greater Number of Students

29

## **FY16**

### **Finance Sub-Committee** **Recommended Budget**

30



## Revenue

37

## Revenue

|               |               |          |
|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Chapter 70    | \$ 2,787,932  | 1.25%    |
| Chapter 71    | \$ 557,460    | 0%       |
| School Choice | \$ 1,350,000* | (10.06%) |
| Tuition       | \$ 963,000*   | 18.29%   |
| MSBA          | \$ 1,120,934  | 0%       |

\*Includes use of Fund Balance

38

## Revenue

Other

Medicaid Reimbursement

Interest Income

Miscellaneous Income

All Other \$ 110,000 (0.77%)

39

## Revenue

Excess & Deficiency

➤ FY 16 Use

➤ \$350,000 0%

➤ Represents 48% of E&D balance

40

## Assessments

41

## Assessments to Member Towns

### Three Considerations:

- Population Allocation
- Minimum Local Contribution
- Net Assessment

42

## Assessments to Member Towns

### Population Allocation

|                  | FY 15      | FY 16    |
|------------------|------------|----------|
| Great Barrington | 69.3647% → | 70.1932% |
| Stockbridge      | 14.0369% → | 14.7508% |
| West Stockbridge | 16.5984% → | 15.0560% |

43

## Assessments to Member Towns

### Minimum Local Contribution

|                  | FY 15         | FY 16       |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Great Barrington | \$6,511,186 → | \$6,511,186 |
| Stockbridge      | \$1,359,333 → | \$1,359,333 |
| West Stockbridge | \$1,454,156 → | \$1,454,156 |

44

## Assessments to Member Towns

### Minimum Local Contribution

1. " ... shall annually appropriate [an] amount equal to not less than the sum of the minimum required local contribution . . . "

2. "The district may choose to spend additional amounts; . . . charged to members according to the district's required agreement."

MGL Ch. 70, § 6

45

## Assessments to Member Towns

### Net Assessment

|                  | FY 15          | FY 16        |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Great Barrington | \$12,613,163 → | \$13,276,273 |
| Stockbridge      | \$ 2,594,152 → | \$ 2,780,987 |
| West Stockbridge | \$ 2,914,309 → | \$ 2,905,225 |

46

## Assessments to Member Towns

Total Assessment      4.64%      \$18,962,484

- Great Barrington      5.26%      \$13,276,233
- Stockbridge      7.20%      \$ 2,780,978
- W. Stockbridge      -0.31%      \$ 2,905,225

47

## Assessments to Member Towns

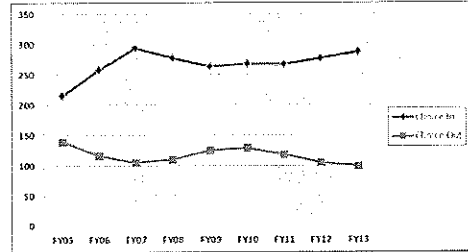
Total Assessment      4.64%      \$18,962,484

- Great Barrington      5.26%      \$ 663,110
- Stockbridge      7.20%      \$ 186,835
- W. Stockbridge      -0.31%      \$ (9,084)

48

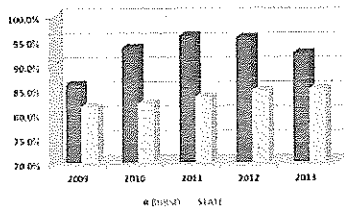
# Questions?

## Choice Comparison



50

## 2008 – 2013 Graduation Rates



51

## Choice Out ?

- \$5,000 per student paid to receiving district; set by state
- FY 15 – 106 residents choiced to other schools
- \$650,000 budgeted for FY 16

52

## Stabilization

## Stabilization

- Approved in May 2012
- Could fund beginning FY 14
- Included in ALL-IN Budget
- Not Recommended for FY 16

53

54