

MT. BLUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Working together to provide high-quality educational opportunities for all

CHESTERVILLE – FARMINGTON – INDUSTRY – NEW SHARON – NEW VINEYARD – STARKS – TEMPLE – VIENNA – WELD – WILTON

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TO: RSU 9 Parent Memo
FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent
RE: 22-23 Budget Next Step, Water, and COVID-19 Updates!
DATE: 5-19-2022

2022-2023 RSU 9 Budget Update

We are now into the 3rd phase of finalizing the 2022-2023 district budget. Next week, on Tuesday, May 24th we will have our Annual District Budget Hearing starting at 6:30 pm in the Bjorn Auditorium at the Mt. Blue Campus. This is a time when voters from all our 10 towns have the opportunity to make your thoughts known about the proposed budget, a copy of which, hopefully, you have received in a mailing sent to each home. The decisions at this meeting will be voted on by referendum in each of our towns on June 14th.

The 2022-2023 Budget Draft being presented by the RSU 9 School Board contains:

- An overall budget increase of 2.91%
- However, because of added state funding along with using a portion of our balance forward, the overall tax increase for you, our taxpayers, is 0.62%, the lowest of all districts around or near us.

Our 22-23 RSU 9 Budget is based on the following areas of focus:

- Supporting student and staff supply, book, and furniture needs
- Managing and adjusting our present positions as needed for 22-23
- No new program creation in 22-23 - RSU 9's Strategic Plan will drive future student program decisions
- Improving professional development supports for new and veteran staff
- Stopping the further delay of some building needs while transitioning to a 10-year Maintenance Plan
- Using Federal ESSER funds for some Maintenance & Operations needs where possible
- Be transparent in following a "fiscal responsibility" mindset.

The Board and I urge each voter in RSU 9 to come to your meeting to both model for our students' democracy in action in our communities and to let your vote and voice be heard. *Thank you!*

"It is up to you to contribute some small part to a program of human betterment for all time." Francis Perkins

School Water Update

We have received more of the testing bottles we have been waiting for and have taken more samples and sent them away to be tested. We have also recently been told we will **now** be allowed to take more tests at all faucets used for handwashing in our PreK – 2 buildings (appr. 110 more faucets). *Progress!*

Keeping a Close Eye on COVID-19 in our Schools

In Franklin and Somerset Counties we are currently considered MODERATE for COVID-19 cases. We are closely monitoring our numbers and numbers around the state as several counties in Maine have moved to the High designation forcing some to return to greater protections.

With approval from the RSU 9 School Board, we adjusted our COVID plans at the April 26th School Board Meeting to return to pre-COVID conditions on May 2nd. We did this as state numbers were at their lowest levels of infection and because COVID vaccines, booster shots, treatments, and beds at hospitals were all easily accessible. The data told us it was time to try and return.

While we believe this was the right move, we also knew that we would need to be on the lookout for worsening conditions. Our changes allowed us to:

1. Bring guests, volunteers, and visitors back into our facilities to be with our students and staff.
2. Start field trips for PreK-12 students.
3. Continue with Pooled Testing until it ended state-wide the second week in May.
4. Continue to make available rapid tests for symptomatic staff and students.
5. Continue to recommend optional masking, especially for students and staff with a cough, sneezing, etc.
6. Continue with our COVID cleaning expectations through the end of the school year.
7. Ask parents, students, staff, and now guests to continue or start to use the daily health screener.
8. Continue the Superintendent's authority, until the end of the school year, to return to universal masking on a school-by-school basis, including associated bus transportation, for up to a two-week incubation period if an outbreak in cases at one of our schools was deemed concerning by the Maine CDC.

We currently are not recommending any changes to our COVID-19 procedures but are concerned with some of the COVID-19 case numbers we are seeing around our state. *Please help us stay vigilant!*

PLEASE FOLLOW the Health Screener: As a reminder, we need you to continue to help us keep our schools open by reviewing and completing the [health screener](#) for you and your student(s) on a daily basis, and testing when any of you has any COVID-19-like symptoms. If students are sent to school sick or with symptoms our nurses will be sending them home to keep COVID-19 from spreading and potentially closing a school and sending students into remote learning. *Thanks for your help!*

Free COVID-19 Test Kits: Are available for every student. If you did not fill out the survey to request a free kit for each of your children and now want one, please contact your child's school nurse to get them. *Thanks!*

Testing at school - Rapid Testing Update: The Maine Department of Health and Human Services has updated its allowable uses for rapid testing in Maine schools. The only allowable use is for students and staff who have COVID-19-like symptoms. If your child doesn't have symptoms, we can no longer test them as a precaution.

Thanks for taking the time to read the above!

"Preach, my dear sir, a crusade against ignorance." Thomas Jefferson