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350 East Main Road, Middletown, RI 02842  
(401) 842-6500 | MiddletownRI.com

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CONTACT: Matt Sheley at (401) 842-6543 or [msheley@middletownri.com](mailto:msheley@middletownri.com)



## **SCHOOLS SEEK 4 PERCENT INCREASE**

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (MAY 25, 2022) – The Middletown schools are asking for a 4 percent increase in their upcoming Fiscal 2023 budget.

According to figures presented Wednesday night to the Town Council at a meeting in Town Hall, the School Committee said it needed all funding — and more.

There was also talk of taking an additional \$100,000 in tax dollars and \$800,000 in American Rescue Plan Act money, part of a five-year plan to help offset the school's ongoing structural deficit.

No decisions were made on that or any of the items that came before the council at the lightly attended session. It was the first detailed discussion the council has had about any of the preliminary budget figures for Fiscal 2023. The council's next meeting is slated for June 4, an all-day marathon session in Town Hall beginning at 8 am where every department's proposed figures are reviewed.

"We're going to have to make the best choices to keep the impacts as far away from the students as possible," Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger said.

Normally, the council is getting ready to adopt a budget around this time. However, after questions arose about the School Department's numbers, everything was pushed back about a month.

Moving forward, the council has a budget review planned on June 6 at 6 pm in Town Hall. That's followed by public hearings on June 15 and 23 at 6 pm in Town Hall, where people can ask questions and offer support for any part of the budget. After the second public hearing, the council traditionally adopts the budget.

The annual budget process is important because it sets spending and determines revenues for the town. This helps determine what money is dedicated for schooling to fire protection, snow plowing and beach repairs and everything in between.

Figures presented by the School Committee showed the amount of tax revenue set aside for the schools would be \$29.1 million, which is 4 percent more than the close to \$28.6 million in the current budget.

If the \$29.1 million figure is okayed by the council, School Department totals showed that amount of tax dollars set aside for education in Middletown has risen close to \$2.2 million over the past two fiscal years.

When grants, state and federal aid and other revenues are factored in, the proposed Fiscal 2023 budget is close to \$44.3 million. That's \$1.4 million less than the amended numbers for the current Fiscal 2022 budget, but \$3.3 million more than the originally approved numbers from the council in June 2021.

A quick review of the proposed education budget showed most of the increases were due to salary and benefit requests, which are contractually mandated.

To hold the line on the budget, school officials said there were no new programs or staff included in the Fiscal 2023 figures. There were also five cuts to certified staff along with reductions to maintenance and service, general supplies, athletic supplies, technology and capital improvements.

Applauding the teachers and staff for their continued hard work, particularly given the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, Kraeger said everything in the proposed school budget was necessary.

“We need the 4 percent more now than ever to support the students,” Kraeger said.

**Document Link: <https://www.middletonri.com/DocumentCenter/View/4870/NYCU-School-FY23-Budget>**

