

2023 – 2024 USD 417 Morris County Needs Assessment Review and State Testing Review for Budget Considerations: District Summary

(A) Identify the barriers that must be overcome for each student to achieve grade level proficiency on assessments.

Our teachers, students, and families face a number of challenges in ensuring student proficiency on assessments. Some of those challenges in our School District include:

- We believe using one assessment score is not an accurate measure of student success, especially because assessments are written in a way to avoid 100% success for every assessment participant.
- High levels or increased levels of student trauma (Adverse Childhood Experiences, ACE Study)
- An increasing level of social emotional challenges and needs of students
- Special Education funding shortfall has limited supports of our highest need students.
- Difficulty in retaining and attracting highly qualified teachers and replacing teachers as they retire
- Difficulty in scheduling and finding more time to provide teacher/staff collaboration that would support improved student learning
- High percentage/number of free and reduced students and increased poverty rate
- Increased or high levels of student discipline issues, including high numbers of suspensions and/or expulsions
- It is difficult to encourage a student's highest performance on an assessment that does not impact their future.
- Potential language and cultural barriers for our hispanic subgroup.

(B) Identify the budget actions that should be taken to address and remove those barriers.

Given an appropriate level of funding for both general education and special education, there are a number of budget actions we could take to remove some barriers. Some of them include:

- Increased salary to recruit and retain high quality certified and classified staff
- Additional staff members hired to meet the individual learning and SEL needs of all students
- Increased funding and time for staff development
- Additional substitute teachers for teacher release time
- Increase paraeducator support in special education classrooms
- Increased funding to expand extended school year and summer school programs for students
- Maintain low teacher/pupil ratio for greater individualized instruction
- Increase funding for Pre-K programs
- Allocating budget to focus on prevention, identification, and intervention concerning trauma and mental health issues

(C) Identify the amount of time the board estimates it will take for each student to achieve grade level proficiency on the state assessments if the budget actions would be implemented.

We measure growth each year and document in our KESA plans our success on a variety of student success factors. We emphasize growth and strive to lead the world in the success of each student. Although we do this and are proud of the work we do, many factors make it impossible to estimate a time that every student will achieve a definition of grade level proficiency. Such factors include:

- While assessment scores are one measure, our district does not believe that student assessment scores should be the sole measure of student proficiency
- Many of the factors that affect student success, such as trauma, poverty, mental health and student disabilities, are out of the local board's control, so giving a time estimate on things that consistently change, or are under the control of other agencies, is not a realistic practice of a local school board.
- The current and future levels of school funding have a significant impact on student learning and any increases or decreases have an effect on student success. Any changes to those funding levels, in either direction, impact the ability of students to meet proficiency criteria.
- Lack of constitutional funding of special education continues to impact our ability to fully meet the needs of all students
- Our ever-changing student population brings a varying degree of cognitive abilities and disabilities which precludes us from being able to guarantee a date when all students will meet a singular level of proficiency.
- Similar to how other professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, etc, cannot ensure 100% success due to a variety of factors and obstacles, we will be unable to achieve 100% proficiency