Budget Thoughts:

A few of my big ticket budget changes:

Money for EST Referrals

Many times when a student is referred to our Educational Support Team, they require additional support or testing that is not covered in regular education. Thus, I am requesting additional monies put aside so that students can have more testing/support that is not covered by an IEP.

Occupational Therapy

They help children to fulfill their role as students by supporting their academic achievement and promoting positive behaviors necessary for learning. School occupational therapists (and occupational therapy assistants, under the supervision of the occupational therapist) support academic and non-academic outcomes, including social skills, math, reading and writing (i.e., literacy), behavior management, recess, participation in sports, self-help skills, prevocational/vocational participation, transportation, and more. Because of their expertise in activity and environmental analysis, practitioners are particularly skilled in facilitating student access to curricular and extracurricular activities. They focus on the students’ strengths, and can design and implement programming to improve inclusion and accessibility, such as Universal Design for Learning. Additionally, they play a critical role in educating parents, educators, administrators and other staff members. They offer services along a continuum of prevention, promotion, and interventions and serve individual students, groups of students, whole classrooms, and whole school initiatives. They collaborate within the education team to support student success. In this way, occupational therapy practitioners can contribute within both general and special education.

Speech Therapy

Speech language therapy services are traditionally viewed as taking place within a specialized room or location. The speech language pathologist might see a child individually or in a small group of children in a special location often called the Speech Room. This type of intervention model is called “pull-out” since the child is removed from the classroom curriculum for a
specific amount of time. There will always be a need for some children to receive at least partial services using this model. This setting is used for formal assessment procedures, for certain interventions that might be difficult to manage in a classroom setting, and for certain students who need an environment that is quieter and contains less distraction than their normal classroom. The downside of this model is that some children do not generalize skill usage to the classroom, home, and community. Some children with ASD may even think that the new skills should only be used in the Speech Room and are resistant to efforts to get them to use new communicative behaviors in other situations. Of course, if a more restricted or quiet environment is necessary for the early learning phases of skill acquisition, then the disadvantages of pull-out must be diminished by active planning to ensure generalization over time and place.

In contrast to the use of a Speech Room, speech language pathologists moved into classrooms decades ago to provide some or all services in this setting; this change of location for service delivery occurred more extensively in some districts than in others. Often the first step in many districts involved intervention within pre-school or special education self-contained classrooms. With each step forward into the classrooms, new information was learned and new roles added in order to enhance children’s learning and functional outcomes. In this brief article, classroom roles will be explained and examples provided to aid understanding. Although the roles are discussed separately, in actuality, it is more common to have a combination of roles in order to provide effective intervention. Some people use a more global term of “integrated services” to signify the multiple roles.

Best practice asks for both speech and occupational therapy to be integrated into the general curriculum, which is something that I am also requesting through additional money with professional development.

**Flexible Seating:**

*Why flexible seating?*

**Choice**
Students feel empowered by having some degree of choice and control over their environment. Flexible seating allows students to choose where they work and with whom. It also allows them to change their location and positions as needed.

“Outside the windows of our classroom is a dynamic, fast-paced, and ever-changing world full of choices. How can we expect our students to solve problems and make choices independently if we constantly solve their problems and make their choices for them?”

**Physical Health**

Children need to move. Flexible seating allows them to wobble, rock, bounce, lean or stand, which increases oxygen flow to the brain, blood flow and core strength. In turn, this burns more calories and increases metabolism. It also helps keep young minds more alert and focused.

It’s no surprise that physical activity is linked to higher academic performance, better health, and improved behavior.

**Comfort**

An uncomfortable student, is a distracted and unproductive student. For example, picture a student who skipped or didn’t have access to breakfast. As the countdown to lunch approaches, the sound of his or her growling stomach will make it impossibly hard to hear the teacher’s voice. A uncomfortable chair can have the same affect.

Flexible seating encourages students to find their best spot to stay calm, focused and productive. As one teacher said, “There is no better way to show your support for a student-centered classroom, than creating a classroom from a child’s point of view.” In her opinion, comfortable students are engaged students.

**Community**

Traditional desks can make students territorial or possessive over their space and supplies. Flexible seating encourages students to share both. And, it encourages them to take turns in different locations and with different seating options.
“When preparing kids for the real world, we want students’ learning environment to reflect the environment of the real world,” said Manuel Herrera, a district tech coordinator for the Affton School District in Missouri, as he reflected on the flexible seating movement that began in the workplace. “This [flexible seating] isn’t a fad. I think it will eventually evolve into the way all classrooms look.”

**Collaboration**

Flexible seating allows students to quickly and easily pair up, work in small groups, or discuss as a whole class – without moving mountains of heavy desks to establish eye contact. Delzer agrees.

“The students we share our classrooms with don’t know life without constant connectivity, Wi-Fi, and a global audience. Our classroom environments should be conducive to open collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. This simply cannot be done when kids are sitting in rows of desks all day.”

**Commitment to Learning**

While research on flexible seating is limited, it’s clear that learning environments can have a direct impact on student achievement.

A 2012 study from the University of Minnesota found that students participated 48 percent more in discussions in a classroom with collaborative group seating versus traditional lecture-style seating, and also improved their performance on standardized tests.

How does this connect with flexible seating? Kelly Almer, a long-time educator in Littleton Public Schools in CO, recently switched to flexible seating. She says creating more student control and less teacher control has improved student engagement.

“I have witnessed a change in their commitment to learning and behavior,” Almer explained. “By making the room ‘ours’ instead of ‘mine,’ the students have a sense of ownership that has made them more invested in their own education.”
Almer’s students choose where they want to sit daily. There is a variety of high, medium and low seating, and kids move to the furniture based on their needs. But Almer puts academics first. “Wherever they choose to sit, it has to help them be their best learning selves.”

**Communication**

No one is naive enough to believe that flexible seating simply happens. Up front, teacher must establish some new classroom management tools. That includes creating a system to make seating choice fair and nondisruptive.

It also requires introducing higher-order thinking skills, like problem-solving, and emotional skills, like conflict resolution. There’s also much value in fostering turn-taking and patience – especially for a generation of kids immersed in immediate gratification.

**Sensory Input**

Many flexible seating options stimulate students’ sense of touch. This type of stimulation can help children focus and process information. Sensory input is especially helpful for students with ADHD, ADD, and ASD.

**Fun**

Flexible seating helps make learning fun. The benefits far outweigh any negatives, said Almer, who will never go back to traditional seating.

“At this year’s parent-teacher conferences, all of the parents stated that their child has a completely different attitude about school now. The kids love coming to school and learning, and they couldn’t be happier.”

She offered a few final tips for educators. Foremost, if you want to make this change in your learning environment, it’s important to bring a positive mindset and recognize that the process takes time. She also recommends being deliberate with your choices, and to not overlook practical issues, like color-coordinating the room.
The results – a more active, engaged, enthusiastic, and relaxed room of students – are worth the effort, Almer concluded.

Family Style Lunch (and cafeteria tables)

**The Benefits of Serving Meals Family Style**

There are many benefits that children and site staff enjoy when serving meals family style. Some of these include:

- Children learn and practice social and motor skills such as taking turns, sharing, and passing, pouring and scooping foods;
- Children may choose to take smaller portions of food and know they can take seconds if they want. The Institute of Medicine recommends serving meals family style because it creates a healthful eating environment that is responsive to children’s hunger and fullness cues;
- Children are encouraged to try new foods by seeing other children and adults eating them;
- Site staff act as good role models for children by sitting at the same table and eating the same meal as the children;
- Site staff and children can enjoy pleasant conversation with each other; and
- Creates an intimate, sharing, family-like environment.

Helps with the “lost art” of table manners.

**Looking to a consistent Genius Hour**

    Genius Hour is best explained by the following story. Mohini was a regal white tiger who lived for many years at the Washington DC National Zoo. For most of those years her home was in the old lion house—a typical twelve-by-twelve-foot cage with iron bars and a cement floor. Mohini spent her days pacing restlessly back and forth in her cramped quarters. Eventually, biologists and staff worked together to create a natural habitat for her. Covering several acres, it had hills, trees, a pond and a variety of vegetation. With excitement and anticipation they released Mohini into her new and expansive environment.

    But it was too late. The tiger immediately sought refuge in a corner of the compound, where she lived for the remainder of her life. Mohini paced and paced in that corner until an area twelve-by-twelve feet was worn bare of grass. – Tara Brach on the Tim Ferris podcast
What does Mohini the tiger have to do with the students at RISD Elementary Schools? It turns out, quite a bit. It also fits with the model of project based learning, and we have come to the conclusion that students are not offered enough choice or voice in their educations. Due to many initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, teachers are being asked to spend a lot of time testing and preparing to test, and less and less time preparing students for the world. Kids come into the world so curious and with distinct likes and dislikes, learning styles, and abilities. However, education in 2018 sometimes feels like fitting round pegs (our students) into square holes (our curriculum and educational demands).

Education can no longer be about preparing our students to pass a test or to recite correct answers, but it is imperative that education prepares students to be lifelong learners and critical thinkers. As our culture evolves with stronger demands on adults to be thinkers and doers, so must the educational system evolve.

Genius Hour began in the offices of Google about 14 years ago. The executives found that adults learn best when inspired (not shocking), and instead of trying to encourage ingenuity with bonuses or competition, they decided to dedicate 20% of their company members time to allow them to explore their own interests. They found that providing this time for people to create and explore their own interests allowed the company to truly thrive. Such things like Gmail, Google Drive, and even the Google Car came from this initiative. Google was at the forefront of providing choice for their staff members, and the company is reaped the benefits. Think about it – how many times in the last month have you heard or uttered the phrase, “google it”? This is due to allowing people to explore their passions.

Other “happenings”

**Intervention and Extension**

We are about to start our newest round of intervention and extension for our 5/6 students:

Here are the options:
- Theater, Tai Chi, School Newspaper, Movement for Learning, Felting, Girl Power, Coding, Stop Animation, Genius Hour, Working with younger students, PE, Chorus, Video Production

**Busy busy times!**

**Here is the upcoming special event schedule:**
Monday 12/3 at SME 530-645:
The Samuel Morey Elementary 5th/6th Grade Team would like to invite you to dinner and an informative presentation and discussion about healthy relationships. Children make relationships with teachers, with parents, with siblings, and friends and other individuals in their communities and this talk will help all of us teach children healthy relationship-building skills for friendships, siblings and more!

Wednesday, 12/5 Both Schools
Report cards sent home

Wednesday, 12/5 at Dartmouth College 930-2
Students in grades 3-6 are invited to a Girls' basketball game and discussion about healthy choices and being a student athlete. Please get permission slips in!

Wednesday 12/5 at SME from 6-7
6th grade Greek Culture Exhibition

Friday, 12/7 at WES from 330-530
Art from the Heart - a wonderful tradition at Westshire, now for the both schools! Students are invited to come and make art for their families to give as Holiday gifts!

Wednesday, 12/12 at Northern Stage from 930-2
Students in grades 3-6 are invited to see the play, *Matilda*! All students must pay $10 to offset ticket cost, and are encouraged to dress up! We are sorry that we cannot invite parent chaperones, as we only have a limited number of tickets and the show is sold out.

Monday, 12/17 at SME 6-7
Grade 6 "Chopped Junior" exhibition

Wednesday, 12/19 at Rivendell Academy 630-730
RISD Elementary 1st Annual All Elementary Concert! (*Please note the change of date*)

12/21 - K-4 field trip to WES for some holiday cheer! (Parents are welcome) 9-1030!
12/22-1/2 - Holiday break

1/10 – Winter Programming Begins

**Winter Program Update**

Winter Program planning is going strong and we are ready for our 6 week program that will begin after break. We have about 80% of the signups for students and are ready for all three events.

As of now -

- 77 kids going to Hulbert!
- 66 kids skiing
- 40 kids at SME for the following options:
  - Skating, Snowshoeing, Painting, Gym Games, Jewelry Making, Cooking, Origami, Knitting, Sledding, Broomball, Outdoor games

Things are going very well in the two elementary schools! We have made many changes and I so appreciate the work of our wonderful teachers and staff! :)