

NPS Budget Guidelines—FY24

This is a year of significant transitions and uncertainty for the Newton Public Schools, and so the School Committee offers these budget guidelines with the hope of providing both stability and resiliency to the families and staff.

What's staying the same? Our fundamental commitment to academic excellence and equity remains our steadfast mission. At heart, NPS has tremendous momentum, a dedicated and committed administrative and teaching staff who need and deserve budgetary support to carry out their roles. Likewise, we operate in a city that highly values K-12 education, with parents and guardians who have provided resources and personal time and effort in making our schools integral to the life of the community. The transition from the remote and hybrid learning environment of the pandemic years continues, with challenges related to both academics and social and emotional factors.

What's different? After a 12-year term in office, the superintendent has departed, and we are served by an able interim superintendent while a search proceeds for a permanent successor. A three-year collective bargaining agreement with our teachers and other staff, and must be renegotiated. The City of Newton faces a major decision with regard to a tax override, the results of which will determine the overall level of funding available to NPS for general operations and for renovation and replacement of key facilities.

Reflecting on these matters, we offer the following guidance to the superintendent and senior staff in constructing next year's budget. An overriding objective is to enhance teaching and learning activities at all grade levels, and minimize negative impact on the student experience as much as possible.

Dual Budget Submission

We ask two budgets to be submitted, one with the assumption of additional revenues based on passage of the override and one based on a failure to pass the override. The approved NPS system-wide objectives should be used as a guide to proposed budget changes in both instances. We ask that a summary be included that shows proposed changes (both additions and cuts) from the previous school year, which will be updated with each iteration of the budget.

Class Sizes

Class size is a very significant factor in giving classroom teachers the ability to meet each student's needs and to provide extra support to those who need it as well as extending opportunities to students who need more challenge. Accordingly, while there may be opportunities to reduce classrooms in some elementary schools because of enrollment declines, we should do our best to avoid increasing average class sizes from where they are now, especially in the elementary grades. We ask

that the budget should highlight projected increases and decreases in class sizes, as well as the number of teams at each middle school. Special attention should be paid to maintaining reasonable team sizes and breadth of program at Bigelow Middle School. We need to ensure an equitable student experience across all our middle schools, despite declining enrollment at Bigelow.

Breadth of Programming

Especially at the high school level, one of the hallmarks of our district is the wide range of core academic classes, classes in the fine arts and applied sciences, career and technical educational programs, and clubs, athletic and extracurricular activities supported by faculty, staff and coaches. Preserving this broad range of programs, across all classes and levels, should be a priority in this budget. It takes sufficient staff to be able to provide all of those programs both during and after the official school day. We would ask the superintendent to consider opportunities to consolidate programs rather than cutting them entirely.

Educational programming

Improving the educational experience of *all* learners is a priority. We ask the Superintendent to examine cuts made last year, and identify any areas of restoration if possible. Continue to focus on educational programming to further mitigate the impact of the pandemic on student outcomes.

Mental Health Supports

If our students are dealing with mental health struggles, they will not be able to learn optimally. The post-pandemic period may require further increases in mental health and social and emotional needs of our students. Preserving supports that we currently provide and adding strategic supports in particular areas of need should be a focus of our budget planning. Explore opportunities to partner with mental health providers in the community to address currently unmet student needs.

Student Services

We ask the Superintendent to continue to provide essential high quality programming for ELL and Special needs students. The goal should be when possible to keep these students in-district even if that means investing in in-house programming.

Professional Development

Funding of professional development should continue to be a priority, as continuing education for educators boosts student outcomes. Ensure that any investments in new math or reading programs include the necessary professional development for program success.

Operational Infrastructure

Maintenance and improvements to the building and the technology infrastructure are essential. Include a reasonably comprehensive list of expenditures likely to be required to maintain our physical plant. Devote part of the budget discussion to the condition of food service equipment and maintenance and replacement needs in that arena.