

# NPS Budget Guidelines—FY25

This is a year of significant optimism as well as some uncertainty for Newton Public Schools, and so the School Committee offers these budget guidelines with the hope of providing both stability and new opportunities to our students, 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, with 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. There continue to be lingering academic and social-emotional challenges due to the remote and hybrid learning environment of the pandemic years.

What's driving our optimism? After a thorough search process we have a new superintendent who brings fresh perspectives, a collaborative leadership approach, and ambitious plans to ensure NPS remains one of the premier school districts in the country. The success of these plans depends on the support and engagement of our teachers and staff. Establishing new three-year collective bargaining agreements with our unions will help us move forward with our key guiding principle of doing what is best for our students.

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.

## Superintendent Entry Plan Priorities

We ask the Superintendent to tie her budget recommendations to the priority areas contained in her Entry Plan, showing where allocations of resources support the objectives she has laid out in that Plan and also where she has been forced to pull back on those objectives because there are insufficient resources to accomplish them.

## 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. Reducing large class sizes, especially in the high schools, should be a priority.

## 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 and Professional Development

Improving the educational experience of all learners is a priority. Using data-supported interventions and evidence-based curricula will help to drive improved outcomes for all students. NPS will also benefit from curriculum consistency at each grade level and increased sharing of best practices across schools.

For years now, professional development funding has been slowly decreasing over time. Funding of professional development must be a priority again, as continuing education for educators boosts student outcomes and ensures our teachers are at the forefront of educational best practices. We must also ensure that any investments in new math or reading programs include the ongoing professional development required for program success.

## Student Services and Mental Health Supports

If our students are dealing with mental health struggles, they will not be able to learn optimally. The post-pandemic period requires further increases in mental health and social and emotional supports for our students across all levels. Preserving supports that we currently provide and adding strategic supports in particular areas of need should be a focus of our budget planning. We should explore opportunities to partner with mental health providers in the community to address currently unmet student needs. We should also focus on managing caseloads for our counselors and mental health professionals to bring them back to pre-pandemic levels where possible

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. Investing in in-district programming should have a neutral or positive financial impact in the long run.

## Operational Infrastructure

Maintenance and improvements to the building and the technology infrastructure are essential. While we are making great strides in updating the elementary schools most in need of renovations or upgrades, there is an ongoing list of updates at other buildings that are frequently reprioritized due to budgetary constraints. We ask the Superintendent to review this list of updates with her facilities team and ensure there is sufficient funding in the maintenance budget to cover all critical items. We also ask the Superintendent to take a more detailed look at the condition of our secondary schools.

## School Committee Input

Paul Levy:

Thanks for getting this moving. I have only one suggestion:

We ask the Superintendent to tie her budget recommendations to the priority areas contained in her Entry Plan, showing where allocations of resources support the objectives she has laid out in that Plan and also where she has been forced to pull back on those objectives because there are insufficient resources to accomplish them.

Chris Brezski:

From my perspective Anna has really led our budget guidelines with her entry plan, and her stated focus on elem MTSS, HS programming and class size, and curriculum development.

Cove Davis:

1. Educational program: I would like to prioritize teaching and learning. I would prioritize appropriate class size and use of data supported intervention. I would like to ensure that new programs (ie the new literacy program) are supported with teacher training and support. I would like to prioritize the HS class sizes/
2. Operational infrastructure: Maintenance and improvements to the building and the technology infrastructure are essential.
3. Professional Development: This is important for the literacy program and also to ensure consistency between schools.
4. High Quality Varied Programming for students: We want to continue to offer a wide variety of programming for our students.

Anping Shen:

Thanks to you both for efforts updating this budget guidelines and the extended deadline.

Here are some of quick suggestions:

Dual budget submission should be off, apparently.

Breadth of Programming and Educational Programming could be combined as one "High Quality Programming", which could include ELL programming from "Student Services".

Special Needs education and Student Services (with SEL) could be combined as one budget area.

Professional Development could be part of "High Quality Programming".

Keep "Operational Infrastructure" and "Class Size".

So my suggested sequences for the budget planning is like the following:

High Quality Programming  
Strong Student Services  
Optimal Class Size  
Effective Operational Infrastructure

Hope this helps.

**Kathy Shields:**

My highest priorities for next year's budget are class sizes and breadth of program (particularly at the high school level). I agree with the narrative associated with both of those topics from last years Budget Guidelines document.