



To: Newton School Committee
From: Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Re: Follow up from 11/20/23 and 12/4/23 School Committee Meeting Requests
Date: December 18, 2023

Below are the answers to requests for additional information from the November 20 school committee meeting.

Just a reminder of our school committee norms: if you send us the questions and requests for information prior to the meeting, we can generally have it ready for the meeting so that we do not have to send you information in the memo, but can be ultra responsive and share the information in the meeting and the moment. This also helps us be as prepared as possible for each meeting and shape the meeting to hit the areas about which you care the most.

Rajeev asked, how can we see how we weathered the pandemic compared to other states/regions? Here's a tool from Georgetown University Edunomics lab to help with those comparisons. Since we do not have historical benchmarking in all subjects, it is hard to see how we are "recovering" except for high-stakes broad data like MCAS and ACT/SAT/AP which have many variables to consider. <https://edunomicslab.org/calculator/>

Anping requested a [Summary of Budget over time](#).

Student Services

Request for: guidance, psychologist and social worker workload changes since five years ago.

High Level Answer:

- More acute care in school - safety/risk assessments, students in school but not "school ready"
- Sharp rise in access to mental health care (number of students with mental health provider) leading to more collateral communication and intensive case coordination
- Anxiety responses have escalated in proportion to distressing stimuli - lower distress tolerance, anxiety showing up in increasingly generalized ways
- Increasing awareness leading to uptick in diagnoses - more 504/IEP for emotional disabilities - more gridded services
- More time spent assisting families with accessing resources

K-8 Social Worker current caseload. Note about social worker caseload - regarding use of time in relation to FTE, this does not take into account students who are seen more than once per week, consultation, meetings, case coordination, and family engagement. Lastly, these numbers are constantly changing to reflect cycles of general education intervention as well as special education additions.

- Angier (.5) - 40
- Bowen (.6) - 21
- Burr (.5) - 29
- Cabot (.7) - 20
- Countryside (.6) - 15
- Franklin (.5) - 38
- HM (.5) - 45
- LE (.8) - 16
- MR (.5) - 34
- MS (.5) - 20
- Peirce (No social worker FTE. There is a .5 attached almost solely to Bridge) - 15
- Underwood (.5) - 25
- Ward (.4) - 24
- Williams (.5) - 50
- Zervas (.5) - 23

Five-year overview [Psychologist caseloads](#) please read the notations for how this data is gathered/the variances in data collection at this time.

High School [Caseloads for guidance staff, psychologists and social workers before, during and after pandemic](#)

What are the industry and professional standards for caseload levels?

Peer communities range from 160 (Medfield), 164 (Wellesley), 170 (Westwood, Dover-Sherborn) on the low end to 220 (Needham) on the high end. Most peer communities try to maintain caseloads no higher than 180-185. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of at most 250:1, but our population is not representative of a normal distribution in either college-going expectations or mental health needs.

Subgroup MCAS comparisons: subgroup comparisons to comparison districts are available on pages 57-60 of the MCAS memo reviewed at the December 4 meeting.

Human Resources Section

There were requests from Rajeev for the following information and, in a subsequent conversation, he shared that these were areas he'd like us to track in the future.

- Retention rates for staff
- Changes and churn

- Have we been losing staff to other districts this year?
- How will we track retention of staff in the future?

EAP–The District’s Employee Assistance Program

- # of people accessing EAP over time/years and caseload/responsiveness of EAP for our staff
- Whether/if staff absentee rates have risen as a result of work challenges and mental health post pandemic, but absence rates are similar to pre pandemic levels

How many subs are used at the high schools each day?

There are no on-staff subs at each high school, but we’d need over 30 subs a day to handle the number of absences; more subs is not the answer to this problem. Addressing absenteeism of staff AND providing digital lessons, capacity for colleagues to be paid to cover other department mates’ classes, and use of lecture halls and other large spaces to combine classes are some possible answers to this problem. Prior to Dr. Santa joining us there have been no subs at each of the high schools. As of December 13, 2023, there are three subs about to be hired at South so HR and the superintendent can see the impact of hiring more subs at the high school level and how the staff can be deployed to reduce class cancellations.

How many classes are canceled each day at both high schools?

This information has not been tracked historically, but this year, approximately 30 classes per day per school are canceled. The rate of unit A staff absence at each high school is an indicator of canceled classes in prior years. Absences this year are less than last year and are in keeping with pre pandemic absence levels in the district.