



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Office of the Mayor

Telephone
(617) 796-1100
Fax
(617) 796-1113
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
Email
rfuller@newtonma.gov

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To Leaders of Newton Parent Organizations,

I'm grateful to each of you for all that you do for our students and the Newton Public Schools community.

Like you, I see the alarming trends in social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in our schools. Like you, I believe that our schools need more funding.

I know that many of you were right there last spring advocating for voters to approve paying a little more in taxes in the Tax Operating Override I proposed. I was deeply disappointed that the override did not pass. That disappointment was primarily because **I know our schools need more ongoing and sustainable funding**. That's what the override would have provided.

After the override did not pass, I worked creatively to get more funding into the NPS system through last spring's FY24 budget season. We used last year's Free Cash in a variety of ways, including \$10 million of it for paying down the bond on the desperately needed Lincoln-Eliot elementary school project, which in turn increased the NPS budget by \$600,000 annually. We also went to the Retirement Board and asked them to push back the pension funding schedule by a year. They agreed, while also emphasizing they had no inclination to push back that schedule any farther. Altogether, 70% of last year's Free Cash was invested in supporting teaching & learning. (Our CFO prepared a detailed memo last November on NPS funding over the years, which includes full information about last year's Free Cash. Read that [here](#).)

This past summer and fall I worked hard to use our new one-time available money from an Eversource settlement to improve NPS budgets for the foreseeable future. The City Council twice did not approve such plans at the time.

In December 2023, Superintendent Nolin, School Committee Chair Brezski, and I rolled up our sleeves and successfully crafted **a different plan to use 70% of these funds for additional NPS funding over multiple years. This plan includes an overall increase in funding to the Newton Public Schools of 5% for next school year.** I've made that commitment to them. I repeat it here to you.

We are using our Free Cash and Overlay Surplus funds and prioritizing the Newton Public Schools.

We are deploying this year's Free Cash on behalf of NPS. To date, \$8.6 million is in the process of approvals for curriculum investments and school building and field improvements.

I would like to address the references to "budget cuts," "chronic underfunding," and "fully funding" that were in your letter. On the one hand, **I have increased the budget for the Newton Public Schools every single year that I have been Mayor.** In my years, the NPS budget has grown from \$219.4 million in FY2018 to \$268.7 million this current year, FY2024, an increase of \$49.3 million. NPS accounts for 65% of all our City of Newton expenditures. I have prioritized the funding for NPS when I put together the budgets for our other important services (Police, Fire, Roads, Library, etc.) and needs (debt service and retirement liabilities). By State law, we have to have a balanced budget. On the other hand, the cost of the NPS contracts (compensation is 89% of the NPS budget) and other critical NPS services have grown even faster than the increases in the NPS budget, leading to the difficult decisions made by the

Superintendent and the School Committee about the number of employees and investments in areas such as maintenance, professional development, and curriculum.

The percent increase in the NPS budget annually, known as the allocation, is in no way arbitrary. We start by looking carefully at our revenues. Revenues are tightly capped by Proposition 2 1/2. Our tax levy can only increase by 2.5% annually by State law, plus new growth from development and redevelopment (often in the range of another 1% plus, which is quite low compared to many other communities). **Our overall expenditures have to match our overall revenues.** Our biggest department, the Newton Public Schools, and the NPS contract, cannot grow faster than overall revenues, without harming other necessary services.

As an aside, contrary to popular perception, the City will not see any change in our overall property taxes as a result of Eversource now paying their taxes on a timely basis. For 12 years we've been including their taxes as part of our budgeted revenues. Rather, our uncollected taxes will no longer include the Eversource amount owed.

My priority will always be to do what is best for the Newton Public Schools, for its present and its future. What is best for the Newton Public Schools is indeed what is best for Newton as a whole.

Please know that many of our other City Department budgets directly support our students. Our Health and Human Services budget supports our students, as our School Nurses are part of that Department. Our Parks, Recreation and Culture budget supports our students, as their team maintains our school grounds, plows school sidewalks and walkways in winter, stewards our playgrounds and fields, and more. Our Public Buildings budget supports our students, as more than 75% of their budget goes directly towards maintaining our school buildings and managing our major school projects. Our Police budget supports our students, as School Resource Officers and School Crossing Guards are part of that department. All together about 65% of our total expenditures go directly to our schools. The remaining 35% goes to nurturing the sort of community in which we want to raise our children.

Let me return to the fact that we have to have a balanced budget. Increasing the budget in one area of our City and School Department means less elsewhere. This is what every City and Town in Massachusetts struggles with. That's why the Chair of the Andover School Committee said after they recently reached an agreement following the strike of the Andover teachers, "The final agreement is inconsistent with the principles of the town's long-range financial plan so, to live within our means, we will need to make meaningful program, service, and staff reductions." I don't want this for Newton. We can't have this for Newton.

I'll close where I started – with gratitude. What we all feel most acutely in this moment of crisis will remain when our students are again able to join their teachers in their classroom: the Newton Public Schools need more ongoing and sustainable funding. I will work with each of you to make that happen.

Thank you for your service to our students, our teachers, our schools and our community.

Sincerely,



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller