



## Franklin Public Schools

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To: Franklin School Committee, Town Council, Finance Committee  
From: Sara E. Ahern, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Re: FY20 Budget Update  
Date: March 6, 2019

I have been invited to share more about the FY20 School Department budget in advance of the Wednesday, March 13, 2019 Town Council meeting. At that meeting, the Town Administrator's office will be presenting the Town's Fiscal Forecast for both FY 20 and beyond. This meeting will continue the community's conversation about town finances, following the School Committee's Legislative Forum on Tuesday, February 5, 2019.

At its March 4, 2019 meeting, the School Committee's Budget Subcommittee, Miriam Goodman, and I discussed the following points related to Franklin Public Schools and our financial climate:

1. *Students Today:* Although FPS student enrollment is down, students are presenting with more complex needs than ever. While our overall student population has decreased, the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch in Franklin has doubled in ten years. We know that statistically 1 in 5 children is struggling from a mental health condition, most of which are going untreated. Additionally, we are seeing growing, more complex needs among our students who require specialized education services.
2. *Contemporary Education:* Our rapidly advancing, technologically rich, and globally interdependent world requires our students to have different and more sophisticated skills than in the past. In addition to traditional content, our curriculum has expanded to include new literacies emerging as a result of technology. Curriculum frameworks in all major subject areas have been revised and we anticipate the revision of others, including art, in the near future. We are renewed in our commitment to the development of Social-Emotional learning, which is needed now more than ever. And we are doing this all within the same school structure -- school year and school day -- as in the past. Our "Critical Needs" presentation highlights just some of the strategic investments that are needed in order for us to realize our meaningful district goals and meet student needs.
3. *Purpose of Schools:* Schools are increasingly being seen as broader social agencies, serving students and families in ways that extend far beyond basic education. The "wraparound services" we coordinate and offer are perfect examples. I highlight our Weekend Backpack program with the Franklin Food Pantry, our support of Project Interface (a community-wide resource for behavioral health services), and relationship with YOU, Inc. (a behavioral health agency) as three such services.
4. *Competitive Context:* School has now become a highly competitive marketplace. Currently, we are most concerned with the impact of the Charter School expansion but we also are cognizant of

students having other choices for high school as well as school choice into districts in nearby cities and towns. This decrease in enrollment siphons money away from the district, making it even harder to be competitive to keep and draw students to Franklin.

5. *Financial Picture*: The Foundation Budget Review Commission has pointed out the ways in which the state is not keeping up with an adequate education in the areas of special education, English language learners, health insurance, and low socio-economic status students. Additionally the Charter tuition assessment and reimbursement formula proposed in the Governor's budget is devastating to a community like Franklin. Furthermore, as a minimum aid community, we are only seeing small increases in the Chapter 70 allotment each year. Because of the Charter formula, we anticipate a *decrease* in funding this year. The state has not always fully funded Circuit Breaker, a critical resource that helps to mitigate the high cost of many special education services.
6. *Mitigation Strategies*: Over the past ten years, Franklin Public Schools has engaged in many strategies to operate in a fiscally responsible manner. Our in-district specialized programs are excellent in quality and have grown over time. As a result, we are able to retain students within our district who might otherwise be placed in out-of-district schools at a much higher financial cost. We are running more of our own vans for specialized transportation, saving on costly contracted services. There have been enrollment-driven reductions of positions across our schools, particularly at the elementary school level; although there have been reductions, elementary class sizes remain with School Committee guidelines. We employ technology, where helpful, to streamline processes and make them more effective. We have created partnerships within our community in order to leverage resources. There have been cuts to programs and services, some of which have shifted to a fee for service model through the Lifelong Learning Institute. User fees were instituted across the district for student activities, transportation, and athletics.
7. *Balancing FY 20*: It seems that the School Department's budget will not be fully supportable given the town's current fiscal climate, necessitating reductions. This was previewed during the budget development process as a gap that would need to be closed. Certainly no decisions have been made and there is still some uncertainty about state funding, but I believe I will find myself in a position of reluctantly recommending the following to the School Committee:
  - a. Reduction in expenses
  - b. Loss of positions and services
  - c. Examination of new revenues including fees and accepting school choice

I wish to also convey my grave concerns about the financial picture for FY 21.

The above points are not all inclusive, but highlight several main ideas. The School Committee will have an opportunity to discuss this at its meeting on March 12, 2019.