

**THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE
OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS**

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June 5, 2020

Dear Brookline School Community,

In our June 4 meeting, the School Committee heard passionate statements about next year's anticipated budget cuts from more than thirty staff, families, students, and residents. We also read hundreds of emails from the community before the meeting. Many speakers and writers expressed frustration at the budget situation, the impact on educators and children, and lack of timely, detailed communication about the budget process.

After the Public Hearing, the School Committee expressed our deep appreciation and concern for our valued educators, expressed our own frustration at not getting enough direct input from members of our school community during the budgeting process, voted to take additional steps to reduce the deficit (summarized below), and agreed to bring back as many of our educators and staff as quickly as possible.

At this point, the remaining budget gap to be closed is roughly \$500,000, plus additional COVID-related expenses and possible deficits in BEEP and food services (see below for more detail). The School Committee directed that all additional areas of cuts be identified in non-personnel line items to the extent possible.

That is where we stand as of today. In addition, since the financial picture has changed a number of times, we wanted to provide a detailed history of the important budget actions to date.

1. In April 2020, before the effects of COVID were fully known, \$1.35 million in cuts to the Schools budget for the 2020-2021 school year were needed to balance out projected increases in contractual and collective bargaining personnel expenses, increased tuition, and transportation costs. At that point, the Superintendent recommended four actions for FY21: eliminating an optional professional development day for staff; consolidating a few small classes in upper elementary and middle school levels; making very limited staff reductions based on class enrollment; and reducing funds for additional maintenance to the school buildings. Those actions brought the FY21 budget back into balance as of April 2020 (\$125.9 million budget for FY21).

2. Then, on May 15, the Town directed the Schools to plan for an additional reduction of \$6.3 million (\$119.6 million budget for FY21) to account for the Town's revenue losses due to the COVID emergency which included reductions in parking meters and fines, hotels and meals tax, and marijuana revenue. For the schools, this meant that the FY21 budget would be approximately \$300,000 less than this year's (FY20) budget. The Town also projected a possible worst-case scenario of \$9 million in budget cuts to the Schools, but did not advise the Schools to plan for that scenario at this point. None of these scenarios included new, unknown, direct COVID expenses related to reopening the schools (primarily public health expenses such as testing, PPE, distancing, other mandated measures, etc.). As a result of this information, the District prepared reduction-in-force (RIF or layoff) notices for staff on May 29, in order to address this planned reduction as well as unknown future revenue reductions and new pandemic-related expenses.

3. On May 29, the Town reduced the capital improvements program (CIP) budget and allocated part of it to help close the budget deficit in the Schools. The Schools received a \$1.9 million restoration. This brought the Schools reduction from \$6.3 million communicated on May 15 down to a \$4.4 million gap (\$121.5 million FY21 budget).

4. Last night, June 4, the School Committee voted to cut \$1.7 million from central office/district-wide personnel and expenses for FY21. The School Committee also removed \$2.2 million from a budget line item for potential salary increases district-wide. This is not a "full salary freeze" since \$1.8 million remains in the budget for contractually-obligated increases in steps and lanes and other contractual obligations for the BEU, AFSCME, and other compensation obligations for FY21.

These two actions closed most of the remaining \$4.4 million gap, leaving a gap of approximately \$500,000. With this direction from the School Committee, the Superintendent can now bring back as many staff as possible, as quickly as possible, and not wait for the Town Meeting vote. We expect that the district will begin to send these recall letters to teachers early next week.

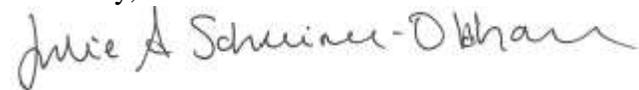
5. With respect to the BEEP program, the Schools face a shortfall of approximately \$650,000 this year (2019-2020) because we continued to pay all BEEP educators in full, but did not charge families tuition for April, May, and June. For next year, the School Committee reaffirmed that BEEP will continue with BEEP staff and students. The BEEP program model and cost to BEEP families will become clearer in the coming weeks as soon as new state regulations for the fall are issued. Any BEEP deficit is not included in the \$500,000 deficit noted above. The School Committee will continue this discussion about BEEP at our meeting on June 11.

6. The remaining \$500,000 deficit noted above also does not include an estimate for unknown COVID expenses. COVID-related expenses are not captured because state guidelines and mandates have not yet been provided to the Town and the Schools about reopening our buildings. COVID-related reopening funds are largely public health related expenses and will need to be jointly forecasted and borne with the Town.

We hope this detailed information answers many of the questions that arose about the details of the budget situation. More information can be found at <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/108> for Schools and <https://www.brooklinema.gov/851/Budget-Central> for the Town of Brookline.

We look forward to a continued productive dialogue with our educators and the community in this incredibly difficult and painful time for our town, our country, and our world.

Sincerely,



Julie Schreiner-Oldham
School Committee Chair



Suzanne Federspiel
School Committee Vice-Chair