

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE FY 2015 SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUDGET GUIDELINES AND PRIORITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

The Brookline School Committee (BSC) is responsible for approving and overseeing the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) annual budget. In accordance with those responsibilities, the BSC annual process begins with this statement of priorities and guidelines to inform the Superintendent's initial construction of a budget for the next fiscal year.

Since 2009, the School Committee has relied on the goals and objectives described in "The Strategic Plan of the Public Schools of Brookline: 2009-2014," currently being updated. The annual budget must also respond to dynamic elements in the public schools landscape -- locally, at the state level, and nationally -- that affect anticipated revenue and require choices about priorities in programming and spending.

FY2015 budget development must contend with considerable uncertainty stemming from the continued and unprecedented growth in Brookline's student population. We also continue to operate within a mercurial federal, state, and local fiscal environment. Consequently, the BSC is requesting from the Superintendent two scenarios for budget development. The first is a budget that reflects continued operation of successful programming to date as well as compensatory growth in areas where we have not kept pace with our enrollment growth and/or with pedagogical developments, such as in technology. Outlining this "catch-up" budget scenario, we believe, would help lay out for the school and broader community the true needs and vision for exceptional educational programming. Especially in light of enrollment growth, however, we fully recognize that this type of budget plan is probably not realistic short of an operating override.

The second budget scenario, therefore, should seek to protect fundamentals of our approach to public education, but should outline for the BSC and the public the kinds of compromises that would be taken if the PSB must proceed without additional revenues. We understand that reductions will have to be made in areas that not only impede or delay program improvements but also likely impact areas we have come to see as basic to our values for public education in Brookline.

Contributing to the analysis of what may be needed, an Override Study Committee (OSC) has been established by the Board of Selectman (BOS) to complete an independent review of these budget priorities and the PSB's ability to meet them. See <http://www.brooklinema.gov>. The OSC is charged with determining:

"whether substantially more revenue capacity than what is currently anticipated will be necessary to maintain desired levels of services and fund future liabilities of the Town and the schools; and, therefore, whether a voter-approved override or overrides of Proposition 2 ½ will be necessary to raise that revenue."

The OSC is expected to make its recommendations on March 1, 2014, following the due date for the PSB budget proposal of February 15, 2014.

II. BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND PRINCIPLES

The School Committee urges the Administration to follow these best practice principles for all budget development:

- Emphasize transparency and accountability in development, presentation, and management of the annual budget
- Minimize reliance on one-time revenues

- Plan judiciously for potential unexpected circumstances through adequate targeted reserve and/or contingency funds
- Maintain solvency within Revolving funds
- Seek efficiencies and savings within existing programming and staffing before seeking additional revenue
- Outline, for any targeted new investments, when and how the proposed change can achieve both improvements in teaching and learning as well as operational/budget efficiencies

III. CURRENT CONDITIONS & MANDATED PROGRAM INITIATIVES

Upward pressure on the FY2015 budget is concentrated in the following current trends and conditions:

Enrollment Growth: Enrollment growth has continued unabated. As detailed in the recently released report of the Brookline School Population and Capacity Exploration (B-SPACE) Committee:

- Elementary (K-8) student population has increased by approximately 1200 children, a 35% increase since 2005-6, requiring an additional 37 class sections across the elementary schools;
- Kindergarten enrollment for the 2013-2014 is more than 630 students while the graduating senior class is approximately 440 students.

Enrollment growth has and will continue to create unprecedented pressure on the PSB physical plant, initially at the elementary schools but eventually at the high school where current enrollments will push high school numbers at least to 2500 students in 2022. The recommendations submitted by B-SPACE and accepted by the School Committee propose a path forward for addressing capital needs within the schools.

Enrollment growth has also driven growth in the PSB operating budget as teachers have been hired for the new classrooms mentioned above. Based on a review of the research, the BSC has to date prioritized low student-to-teacher ratios, especially in the early grades. With low revenue growth, this has meant that corresponding need to increase administrative structures and student supports proportionately has not kept pace with our growing enrollments.

Special Education: Growth in the special education *budget* reflects overall growth in enrollments, primarily as a result of increases in out-of-district tuitions and associated transportation costs. In fact, over the past several years, even as enrollment has soared, the percent of children receiving special education services – both within the district and through out-of-district placements has decreased. We attribute these successes to targeted investments in district-wide programs and reforms across several of our special education service delivery accounts. We commend the Administration for these effective cost controls and urge staff to continue to look for program modifications or investments that help us to maintain this more sustainable growth curve in the special education budget while also improving student learning and experiences.

Collective Bargaining: The PSB is currently in the final year of a three-year Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Brookline School Committee and the Brookline Educators Union (BEU). In future negotiations, the School Committee will continue to be guided by the following commitment to a sustainable growth budget model urged by the OSC of 2007 and passed by the School Committee in 2008:

... “consistent with our obligations to engage in good faith bargaining pursuant to M.G.L.c. 150E, [the BSC will] incorporate into our approach to bargaining in the coming year the approach recommended in the Override Study Committee Report of January 2008 on

managing total personnel costs, so that the combination of salaries, employee health benefits, and staffing levels grow at a sustainable rate.”

State Mandates. The PSB has devoted considerable time and resources to implementing several state-mandated (and largely unfunded) initiatives. While the BSC has endorsed several of these efforts, and in particular the PSB’s approach, as contributing to educational quality, we note with concern that they will continue to require significant allocation of financial and human resources at the central administrative and school building levels at a time when our infrastructure is already stretched thin. Mandated initiatives include:

- **Social Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention.** Governor Patrick signed Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010 (“An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools”) into law on May 3, 2010. The PSB is meeting -- and exceeding -- the requirements of the law through the development and implementation of its own *Comprehensive Social Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention and Intervention Program*.
- **Educator Evaluation.** In 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) promulgated new regulations requiring school districts to develop and implement a standardized system of evaluation for all school administrators and teachers. The Superintendent successfully negotiated a staged roll-out of the new system with the BEU, to begin in the current school year. System-wide implementation is planned for the 2014 - 2015 school year.
- **Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).** PARCC is a consortium of 18 states working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. These assessments are based on the Common Core State Standards, which were adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in July 2011. PARCC assessments will be piloted in Massachusetts schools during the 2014-2015 school year, including selected classes in all of Brookline’s K-8 schools. If adopted, PARCC assessments would become the official state-wide assessment system beginning in the 2015-2016 academic year.
- **Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL).** These new regulations, adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in June 2012, seek to strengthen instruction and better support the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs). RETELL requires core academic teachers who may teach one or more English language learner to earn the new Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Teacher Endorsement. Most educators will earn their RETELL SEI Teacher Endorsement by completing the Teacher Endorsement course, a 45-hour graduate level course based upon the most current research on effective instructional practice. More than 100 Brookline educators are earning their SEI Endorsement in the current academic year.

IV. BUDGETING FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

While we encourage the Superintendent to consider a long term strategy for phasing certain aspects of a system plan in order to limit the FY2015 budget to essential components, the BSC believes a budget to sustain educational excellence requires funding for the following priorities:

- 1) Continuing investments in innovation and rigor in the educational program. In particular, we expect the FY2015 budget to reflect an ongoing commitment to those innovations and educational strategies designed to address both our persistent achievement gap *and* promote challenge for students at all levels of academic achievement;

- 2) Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of the highest quality by supporting professional development for all teachers and staff, maintaining staff supports such as mentoring and the Materials Fee program, and retaining our historical commitment to lower class sizes;
- 3) Reviewing and evaluating our progress in teaching and learning, especially by investing in the process and implementation of outcomes from Program Review and analysis of student assessment data for both individual student growth and longitudinal trends for the district;
- 4) Assessing the administrative *and* educational supports needed -- across the district -- to truly meet our enrollment growth and deliver programming that meets the aspirations of students and their families;
- 5) Continuing investment in proven student achievement initiatives such as Steps to Success, the Literacy Initiative, the Benchmark Assessment System, and advanced training for inclusion through collaboration with the Landmark School;
- 6) Maintaining racially and culturally diverse classrooms by continuing, for example, the METCO program;
- 7) Maintaining low student/adult ratios (especially in the younger grades) to allow individual attention and differentiation for struggling, typically developing, and advanced students;
- 8) Providing quality early childhood experiences for a growing population, including through the Brookline Early Education Program (BEEP) program at least at current enrollments and full-day Kindergarten funded by the PSB rather than fees;
- 9) Sustaining a commitment to K-12 art, music, foreign language, recess and physical education as a regular part of the school day;
- 10) Envisioning and planning for implementation of a technology infrastructure robust and flexible enough to allow for rapid growth in the PSB of technology-assisted pedagogy, innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and equitable and universal access to advanced technology for all our students.

We look forward to hearing from the Administration on their plans and budget requirements for achieving the scenarios and priorities described above as well as their judgment as to the consequences for that plan of a continued structural deficit from our galloping enrollments.



The School Committee appreciates the Superintendent and his staff for their effective leadership, management of change, and responsible fiscal stewardship during these difficult and unpredictable times. Likewise, we encourage the PSB's ongoing efforts to collaborate with community and regional agencies such as the Brookline Community Mental Health Center and the EDCO Collaborative to bring student supports to Brookline that we would not be able to create or sustain alone.

We continue to be grateful to the residents of the Town for their support and to the Board of Selectmen and Town Management team for their partnership and commitment to the Schools. The Committee would also like to recognize the extraordinary benefits accrued to our students, faculty and families through our partnerships with the Brookline Community Foundation, the Brookline Education Foundation, and the 21st Century Fund. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the generosity of our Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs), whose financial support and engagement enriches the learning experience and sense of community in each of our schools every day.

Submitted by the Brookline School Committee as voted on December 19, 2013.

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