

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE  
FY2014 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 works with the Superintendent to articulate its goals and priorities for the coming fiscal year.

Since 2009, our budget guidelines have been informed by and aligned with the goals and objectives described in “The Strategic Plan of the Public Schools of Brookline: 2009-2014.” Necessarily, the budget guidelines 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.

The purpose of these guidelines and priorities is to:

- Provide the Superintendent and his staff with parameters and guidance for developing the FY2014 budget;
- Communicate to the community, school faculty and staff, and families the School Committee’s perspective on the growth, change, and needs within the schools for the coming fiscal year.

The FY2014 budget is being developed in the context of continued unprecedented growth in the student population in Brookline as well as within an extremely uncertain federal and state funding environment. Despite these pressures, the School Committee aims, through the FY2014 budget, to maintain excellence within existing educational programming, continue implementation of several key innovations currently underway and sustain progress towards our vision of equity in educational quality for all students.

***Guiding Principles:***

- Promote transparency and accountability in development, presentation and management of the annual budget.
- Minimize reliance on one-time revenues and plan judiciously for potential unexpected circumstances through the use of targeted reserve or contingency funds.
- Strive to achieve efficiencies and savings within existing programming and funding levels before seeking additional revenue.
- Prioritize those innovations and educational strategies that are designed to address both our persistent achievement gap and promote challenge for students at all levels of academic achievement.
- Continue to prioritize small class sizes and low student to teacher ratios, especially in the elementary grades, while planning for additional enrollment growth.
- Maintain the existing commitment to both METCO and to the Materials Fee Program (which allows town and school personnel to send their children to the public schools for a fee), both of which accrue significant educational and community benefits to the schools and to our students.
- Continue the positive trend of maintaining solvency within Revolving funds.

## II. RESPONSIBLE PLANNING FOR CURRENT CONDITIONS

Pressures on the FY2014 budget are concentrated in several areas: 1) anticipated continued enrollment growth; 2) growth and reorganization within our special education programming and services; 3) implementation of an already negotiated collective bargaining increase for Brookline educators and other staff; and 4) an FY2013 State Budget Gap and Federal “Fiscal Cliff.”

1. ***Enrollment Growth and Facilities Planning:*** Enrollment growth continues unabated for the eighth consecutive year. Total enrollment (K-12) for the 2012-2013 school year is up 240 students to 6,844, compared to 6,604 students for the 2011-2012 school year. The FY2013 Kindergarten class cohort is the largest class that has entered during any of the years of recent enrollment growth, and based on the comparative birth cohort, it is the highest annual yield of students (100%) experienced during this eight-year period. This pattern, based on birth data and the 2010 census, points to continued growth in the K-8 population for at least the next five years. Despite increased demand for pre-K, we have maintained early childhood enrollments at approximately 300 students because we lack space for additional early childhood classrooms. Indeed, during 2012, many early childhood classrooms had to be moved out of our school buildings to accommodate the need for more K-8 classrooms, creating not only disruptions for current families and educators but moving the district away from an integrated pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade model at our elementary schools.

Enrollment growth has created extraordinary pressure on both the PSB physical plant and the operating budget. In buildings, we have expanded two schools and repurposed and/or subdivided existing space within our other facilities. The operating budget has grown as a result of the increases in staffing to meet larger enrollments. Over the coming year, the School Committee will be co-chairing with the Town an effort to develop a long-term plan to address physical space needs. We look forward to this effort not only to plan for the continued growth of our K-8 populations, but also to address the future expansion of the high school population and the need to find a permanent home for our early childhood program.

2. ***Special Education:*** Growth in the special education budget reflects overall growing enrollments as well as increases in out-of-district tuitions, transportation and the cost of necessary accommodations for medically fragile students. That combined growth more than offsets the cost-containing measures we have taken, including restructuring classroom aides in Kindergarten and first grade and bringing quality programs into Brookline in order to serve our students in their home district.

A major concern for the FY2014 budget will be the annualization of the budget deficit from the current year, which is attributable to this growth as well as ancillary special education costs. In spite of out-of-district special education placement numbers remaining stable and special education students proportionally remaining steady, increased costs combined with enrollment-driven increases in many areas of special education support have resulted in higher than anticipated overall special education expenditures. Consequently, the contingency funding built into the FY2013 budget has been fully utilized for enrollment growth and for special education, leaving us more vulnerable to relying on one-time funds and/or necessitating consideration of programmatic/funding reductions in the current year to cover projected deficits.

Improvements in our ability to serve our students in their home district, measures that reduce our special education costs (by avoiding high-cost out-of-district placements and/or transportation) while improving students' educational experience, further complicate the question of how to amend our physical plant to serve a larger population. The priority for the BSC is to serve our students in Brookline whenever possible, understanding that space pressures will be more challenging as a result, especially at the high school.

3. ***FY2014 Collective Bargaining Costs:*** FY2014 will represent the third year of a multi-year Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Brookline School Committee and the employee groups represented by the Brookline Teachers Union (BEU). This agreement is for the period FY2012-FY2014. These contracts were structured in a manner to minimize costs in their first year, FY2012, which was the year of the (first) Fiscal Cliff - due to the loss of Federal Stimulus Funding. The structure of the Unit A and Unit B contracts was a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) of 0%-2%-2% (over each of the years of the agreement, respectively) to base wages, with additional costs in this third year to fund additional and needed collaborative time among staff.
4. ***FY2013 State Budget Gap and Federal "Fiscal Cliff."*** In addition to the known cost pressures the PSB is facing in developing its FY2014 budget, as outlined above, we are contending with significant budget gaps and other unknowns at the State and Federal levels across nearly all our funding sources and revenue streams. At the State level, Governor Patrick has already exercised his mid-year budget reduction authority for FY2013, resulting in immediate and significant reductions in local aid, special education and reimbursements for school districts to transport homeless students. The state level budget gap is being fueled by not only lower than expected tax revenues at this point in the fiscal year, but also from the economic uncertainty associated with the as of yet unsuccessful negotiations at the federal level to avoid the fiscal cliff which will trigger automatic spending cuts and tax increases at the start of the new calendar year.

### **III. SUSTAINING A COMMITMENT TO INNOVATIONS, IMPROVEMENTS AND MEETING NEW STATE MANDATES**

The School Committee commends the administration for its continued focus on innovation, professional development, and careful assessment, all critical to maintaining the vibrancy of the schools during these years of fiscal constraint. Achievements in these areas have in many cases anticipated new state mandates, in particular in educator evaluation. We look forward to hearing from the Superintendent about specific proposals that support Strategic Plan goals and/or create efficiencies to free up sustainable resources for these educational initiatives.

1. ***Program Review.*** The BSC is committed to continuing to promote a culture of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) through our now well-established process of Program Review. This process has allowed us to assess and identify new opportunities for practice, and to direct resources to innovation, program enhancements, and systemic improvements in educational quality, equity, and efficiency. Innovative approaches have yielded progress in 21st century skills as well as advanced our approach to educational equity through, for example, the partnership with the Landmark School for specialized literacy instruction, and the Calculus Project, which has raised the academic aspirations and achievements of

students of color. Data collection and analysis, critical to assessing the value of these investments, have also steadily improved. During the coming year, we look forward to participating in and hearing the results of a Program Review process for both Enrichment and Challenge Support (ECS) and Mathematics, which we would expect to have implications for our Strategic Planning process and/or the FY2015 budget.

2. ***Educational Technology.*** Expanding the use of new technologies for improving system-wide and school-based communication as well as for pedagogical purposes, remains a top priority. Better use of technology – within our classrooms and schools – provides an opportunity for us to be not only more environmentally responsible but also to be more current, efficient, and cost effective in delivering our educational programming, ultimately better preparing our students for a globalized, high-tech economy as well as for their lifelong roles as local and global citizens.
3. ***Benchmark Assessment System (BAS).*** Now in its first year of full, district-wide implementation, the Benchmark Assessment System is designed to significantly improve teaching and learning in literacy across the district. Use of the BAS will allow our classroom teachers, special educators, and specialists to better understand the literacy skills of our students, and over time, to adjust instruction to respond to literacy needs at every level of achievement. This Herculean effort involved assessment of nearly 3,000 of our students and required the participation of more than 230 educators across our school buildings.
4. ***State Mandates.*** The PSB is also in the process of implementing two significant new state mandates that the School Committee supports and recognizes will require a significant allocation of financial and human resources at both the central administrative and school building levels over the next several fiscal years:
  - ***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 Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) is meeting the legislative requirements by developing a Master Plan and a comprehensive, system-wide social emotional learning and bullying prevention and intervention plan. These plans and curricula are designed to influence school culture and provide the knowledge, skills, procedures and processes required to foster positive student behavior in support of learning.

The PSB *Comprehensive Social Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention and Intervention Program* is in the early stages of implementation with a current focus on training for staff on the reporting requirements of the law and the specifics of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the school starting in the fall of 2013.

- ***Regulations on Evaluation of Educators.*** In 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) promulgated new regulations requiring school districts to develop and implement a standardized system of evaluation for all school administrators and teachers. The purpose of the new evaluation system, among other things, is to link educator practice and student learning so that student learning is central to

the evaluation and continuous professional development of administrators and teachers. Under the Superintendent's leadership, we are currently piloting a new teacher evaluation system, with full implementation planned for the 2013 - 2014 school year.

#### **V. LOOKING BEYOND 2014**

These guidelines and priorities have benefited each year from the direction of the PSB's five-year Strategic Plan, developed and approved in 2009. Now in its last year of implementation, the Strategic Plan will be reviewed and revised this year, providing an opportunity for the School Committee and the PSB administration to engage with the community and school staff to understand what we are currently doing well and what areas could be improved. While we do not expect the Vision, Mission, or Core Values to change significantly, we expect this effort to result in the development of more specific goals, measurements, and action plans to guide the schools over the next five (5) years. A diverse Strategic Plan Committee, chaired by Susan Wolf Ditkoff, School Committee Vice-Chair and Jennifer Fischer-Mueller, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, will present recommendations to the School Committee in May of 2013. The School Committee looks forward to the opportunity to align the FY2015 operating budget with the revised strategic plan.



The School Committee commends the Superintendent and his staff on their successful leadership, management of change and responsible fiscal stewardship during these difficult and unpredictable times. We continue to be grateful to the residents of the Town for their support and to the Town Management for their leadership and a sense of common purpose. 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 18, 2012.

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