

Q&A on the Framingham Public School District's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

Summary

On April 3, 2019 the City of Framingham's School Committee voted to put forward the Fiscal Year 2020 budget request to the Mayor for the Framingham Public Schools (FPS). This budget request is built upon the philosophy of investing in academic achievement, supporting employees, meeting the requirements of contractual obligations, establishing access and equity models, enhancing technology, continuing to streamline operations, creating opportunities for innovation, and utilizing data-driven decision making.

The request totals \$139,096,821 which would enable the the district to fund targeted and proactive education efforts in numerous departments, as well as at BLOCKS Preschool, nine elementary schools, three middle schools, Framingham High School, and the Framingham High School Thayer Campus. The total budget is supported by at least \$50 million in Chapter 70, a projected \$4,742,841 of special education support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through its Circuit Breaker reimbursement program, and a projected \$5 million in federal and state grants. The year to year increase of 4.57% and \$6,078,872 is similar to the current fiscal year's 4.48% and \$5,702,478. In the last seven years it is the third lowest FPS budget increase.

How was this budget developed and who developed it?

Dr. Tremblay recorded a short video introducing the budget process. It has been subtitled in Spanish and Portuguese and can be found on the [Framingham Public Schools website](#).

A FPS staff led budget development group led by the Superintendent and Director of Finance and Operations focused on the needs of all Framingham students and moving the District forward. The effort to build the FY20 budget began with a zero-based budget model mentality that analyzed each expense line and each individual position to ensure that the number of staff in the budget aligned with class sizes at each school.

The initial FY20 budget request at the start of the budget process, based on the needs from all departments and all schools started at 12.69% or \$16,884,139 in requests. A strong effort was put forth to analyze each new position request and only new positions that directly impacted new scheduling, increase in enrollment and compliance were moved forward to the FY20 budget request. The team understood the City revenue conversation and again, put forth a reasonable budget to be submitted to the Mayor. The Superintendent worked with the School Committee

during the budget process to reduce the original request from schools of 12.69%, to 5.66%, to 5.17%, considered additional options, and ultimately voted on the 4.57% submission.

The budget development process also was:

- Driven and designed to be reciprocal with the Framingham Public Schools Strategic Plan [*Framingham Public Schools Strategic Plan 2017-2020: Where Every Child Can and Will Reach High Levels of Achievement*](#), and aligned with individual School Improvement Plans, all of which are framed by four standards that align directly with the educator evaluation standards by the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Access and Equity Framework
- Zero-based budget model and recalibration
- Principal Defense Meeting with FPS Senior Leadership Team
- More than a dozen public meetings
- Investments Directly Related to Interest Based Bargaining, the process used to renegotiate contracts covering FY20 with multiple employee bargaining units

How will we know we are getting a return on investments?

Throughout our district we are so proud to have recent FY19 success stories showing a strong return on previous investments and reflections that the Strategic Plan is making tangible progress. This includes academic growth at Wilson Elementary School, new literacy and STEAM efforts, a student led ecolab at the high school, voter approval to proceed with the construction of a new Fuller Middle School, award winning drama and robotics programs, expanded dual language programming to include Portuguese Two-Way, new social emotional supports, a district-wide fourth-grade field trip to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and too many individual achievements by students, recent graduates, and staff to mention!

A return on an education investment, just like any other investment, requires both time and patience. If staff and administrators develop and execute a deep understanding of professional learning communities that focus on improving instruction, curriculum, and assessment, then staff collaboration and use of effective instructional practices in classrooms will increase and lead to improved student achievement. Due to the leadership changes, FPS Strategic Plan, and impacts of the FY18 and FY19 budgets, we have already seen the schools who have engaged in proactive turnaround work march proudly on the path of improvement. The District has been establishing clear expectations, providing strategic and equitable resources, and promoting data-driven and research-backed teaching practices. To move to the next phase of implementation and support our students, staff, and city, we will make the changes negotiated in all collective bargaining agreements. We believe that they will enable the district to move intentionally and proactively towards improving all student outcomes.

What Reforms, Initiatives, and investments are proposed this year?

- ***Efficiencies***
 - Numerous reforms and cost savings were proposed as part of this proposal. Examples include changes to how bulk purchases and instructional materials are procured, consolidations in central office staff, and a change in the transportation vendor for out-of-district students which alone saved \$500,000.
- ***Preparing for School Expansion and Enrollment Growth***
 - Addition of one new grade and a new bus at King Elementary School, as 5th grade is added to the school for the first time.
 - Funding to support 1% projected increase in district-wide enrollment.
- ***Accessing Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Career and College Readiness Programs***
 - Flyers By Night at Framingham High School to increase access to affordable, relevant, and potentially career-igniting classes for Framingham community members.
 - Pilot program to provide chromebooks to a to be determined group of students to take home from school.
 - Continued consolidation of all technology hardware expenses and use of the recently created Sustainability/Life Cycle Model, offering the opportunity to better leverage timing, purchase power, and equity across schools grade-levels and departments.
- ***Providing New Tools and Personnel to Reduce Student Stress & Anxiety***
 - Continued targeted investments building off FY19 to support the social, emotional, and behavioral health needs of our students.
- ***Strengthening School Safety & Security***
 - Building on last year's district wide Safety and Security Director, this proposal adds additional funding to support proactive efforts with city public safety agencies, perform District-wide assessments, and further develop and implement emergency response planning.
- ***Supporting Bilingual Education***
 - Increases to translation services, curriculum planning, and the Phonics program. This will support dual language programs at Barbieri and Brophy Elementary schools, as well as the district's diverse student population which currently services students from over 70 countries.
- ***Investing in Additional Learning Time, Personnel, and Retention***
 - Extending the School Day and Creating Equity in Teacher's Working Hours
 - The new Unit A contract compensates teachers for an unprecedented change in working conditions. As a result of the new contract, elementary

teachers will work an additional 46.25 hours each per year, resulting in an additional 22,000 hours of instruction per year for our elementary students.

- Supporting our educators with responsible cost of living and steps increases
 - Higher compensation for teachers when coupled with opportunities for professional growth are the key to hiring and retaining diverse and highly qualified staff who will possess equity in their workload.
- ***Diversity Initiatives***
 - Launching new programs such as Affinity Groups and Equity Ambassadors to serve as in-house resources to students and staff and support inclusive environments where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.
 - Increased funding to provide professional development and training for school staff in cultural proficiency, anti-bias training, culturally responsive teaching along with additional diversity and inclusion work.
 - Funds for the Human Resources Department to attend a greater number of recruitment fairs, and join organizations that assist schools in the recruitment and retention of diverse teachers, administrators, and coaches.
- ***Teaching and Learning***
 - Gifted and Talented (SAGE Program) Increase
 - An investment into the SAGE Department is included in the FY20 request. Operating expenses have increased to \$20,512 and new requirements for this Department include 1.2 employees for teaching and screening.
 - Creating a new summer program at BLOCKS Preschool for incoming kindergarteners with no preschool in order to help student successfully transition into Kindergarten.
 - Enhancing online music curriculum resource for K-5 students.
- ***Increased Focus on Customer Service and Family Engagement***
 - Upgrading the routing software to allow parent access to the arrival times of their child's bus.
 - Analyzing bus routes to enable the optimization for scheduling and routing buses.
 - Establishing a Kindergarten School Choice Lottery module to establish efficiencies in the Kindergarten lottery process.
 - Supporting the Media & Communications Office to strengthen communications between FPS and families, as well as continuing the ramp up social media, and reforms to the FPS website and methods schools communicate to all stakeholders.
 - Creating parent organizers (liaisons) to assist in developing an expanded model of family engagement that focuses in on parent voice, parent rights and parent support.

- Continuing Family, Friends, and Neighbor Days, a new district initiative launched this school year to foster community, family, and business partnerships that further support and engage our relationships and encourage collaboration.
- Not increasing school breakfast and lunch prices, bus fees, and for the second straight year there are no high school athletic fees.

What drives cost increases? What in this budget saw increases?

- ***Extending the School Day and Creating Equity in Teacher’s Working Hours***
 - The new Unit A contract compensates teachers for an unprecedented change in working conditions which the district believes will strongly support student achievement and equity. Currently, the elementary day is 6 hours of instructional time, whereas middle school is 6 hours and 45 minutes of instructional time, and high school is 6 hours and 55 minutes of instructional time. As a result of the new contract, elementary teachers will work an additional 46.25 hours each per year, resulting in an additional 22,000 hours of instruction per year for our elementary students. Because all teachers will work a 7 hour work day as a result of the CBA, there will be time for teacher co-planning and collaboration, which are research-based effective teaching practices that are essential to the improvement in the education of our children.
- ***Salaries***
 - The major budget driver of most, if not all School District budgets, is personnel costs and each Union’s respective negotiated, collectively bargained contracts drive those costs. Contracts include “cost of living adjustments (COLA)” and salary schedules that allow for personnel to “step” up the salary schedule at the completion of each fiscal year.
- ***Maintenance and Utility Costs for the 15 facilities the district manages***
- ***Impact of student enrollment growth***
 - Addition of one new grade and a new bus at King Elementary School, as they add 5th grade for the first time. Adding another grade requires additional staffing and another school bus
 - Funding to support 1% projected increase in district-wide enrollment.
 - Additional students who are learning English as a second language
- ***Gifted and Talented (SAGE Program) Increase***
 - An investment into the SAGE Department is included in the FY20 request. Operating expenses have increased by 168.17% to \$20,512 and new requirements for this Department include 1.2 employees for teaching and screening.
- ***1.3% contractual increases for Transportation***

- Based on year four of a five year contract with the current vendor. An increase of one large school bus is included in this proposed budget based the addition of Grade 5 at King Elementary.

What is the process to get the FPS budget approved by the city?

- In compliance with the City Charter, after holding a Public Hearing on the Budget on March 20, and with a vote on April 3, 2019, the School Committee sent the budget request to the Mayor.
- This early submission allows the Mayor sufficient time within which to consider the effect the school department's requested appropriation will have upon the total municipal operating budget the Mayor is required to submit to the City Council by early May.
- The following text is summarized from Article VI of the City Charter:
 - Not later than sixty (60) days before the start of the municipal fiscal year, the mayor shall submit to the council a proposed operating budget for the ensuing fiscal year with an accompanying budget message and supporting documents, including the Public Schools Budget.
 - Immediately upon its receipt of the proposed operating budget, the Council shall refer the budget to the council's Finance subcommittee. The Finance subcommittee shall hold a public hearing on the proposed operating budget, providing no less than ten (10) days' notice of such hearing. The committee will thoroughly review the budget making a presentation and recommendation to the full council within twenty-one (21) days. The council shall adopt the budget, with or without amendments, within twenty (21) days after the day the proposed budget was reported out by its Finance subcommittee. In amending the budget, the council may delete or decrease any programs or amounts except expenditures required by law, or for debt service, but, the council shall have no authority to add programs or increase amounts except as provided by the general laws. If the council fails to take any action with respect to any item in the proposed budget within the 21 day period that amount shall, without any action by the council, become a part of the appropriations for the ensuing fiscal year and shall be available for the purposes specified. The vote to approve the budget, or any amendments thereto, shall be on a roll call vote.