



# Finance and Programs & Services Committees Budget Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Tuesday, May 9, 2023**

Finance Committee members present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Oliver, Malakie, Humphrey, Noel and Kalis

Absent: Councilors Norton and Gentile

Programs & Services Committee members present: Councilors Krintzman (Chair), Greenberg, Albright, Wright, Humphrey, Noel, Baker and Ryan

Also Present: Councilors Lucas, Crossley, Downs, Laredo and Lipof

City staff present: Dr. Kathleen Smith, Interim Superintendent of Schools; Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Financial and Administrative Officer of Schools; Toby Romer, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst; Connor Roach, Senior Financial Analyst; Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer; Steve Curley, Comptroller; Jini Fairley, ADA Coordinator; Tamika Olszewski, Chair of the School Committee; Anping Shen, Christopher Brezski and Paul Levy, School Committee members

Others present: NewTV

**Please Note:** Budget materials can be found on the City's website at the following link:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/comptroller/budget>

### **DEPARTMENT BUDGET & CIP DISCUSSIONS:**

#### **School Department**

**#1-23**            **Submittal of the FY 2024 to FY 2028 Capital Improvement Plan**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the Fiscal Years 2024 to 2028 Capital Improvement Plan pursuant to section 5-3 of the Newton City Charter.

#### **Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees**

**#1-23(3)**        **Submittal of the FY24 Municipal/School Operating Budget**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 5-1 of the City of Newton Charter the FY24 Municipal/School Operating Budget, passage of which shall be

concurrent with the FY24-FY28 Capital Improvement Program (#213-22).

**EFFECTIVE DATE OF SUBMISSION 05/01/23; LAST DATE TO PASS THE BUDGET  
06/15/23**

### **Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees**

**#1-23(4)**

**Submittal of the FY24 – FY28 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan**

HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the FY24 – FY28 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan.

## **School Department**

**Note:** Interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kathleen Smith stated that the Newton Public Schools is undoubtedly one of the premier school districts in the Commonwealth. The FY24 budget was developed with the strong partnership of the School Committee spending the past year committed to school visits, meetings, retreats and workshops with the Superintendent and staff to fulfill their role in developing policies to support student outcomes, preparing a balanced budget and selecting a new superintendent. Collaborating with school leaders, educators and staff has clarified the superintendent's understanding of Newton's unwavering commitment to academic excellence and educational equity. This commitment begins in preschool and continues throughout post-secondary programs, meaning students are challenged academically, provided with appropriate mental health and social/emotional support, and are prepared to engage in the most complex issues facing our society today. Because of this charge, the superintendent feels we are presently at a critical inflection point for our schools.

Our continued recovery from the pandemic means supporting the heightened academic and social emotional needs of students, as well as supporting our educators and staff to provide an academically rigorous and engaging program in which students have access to challenging classes and coursework.

This past October, Mayor Fuller, recognizing the challenges faced by both the City and the schools in the FY23 budget, proposed an operational override and two debt exclusions for school building projects. The override would have provided the schools with an additional \$4.5 million in the FY24 operating budget. Ultimately, voters made a different choice by rejecting the operational override while approving the two debt exclusions for the Countryside and Franklin school projects. The school department respected the will of the voters and has worked within those parameters in the FY24 budget for schools. The strategy has been to limit the impact on students while fulfilling our obligation to prepare a balanced budget. The district continues to be committed to expanding our special education programs. Expanding current programs allows the district to support students with appropriate and specialized programs to avoid outside placements with costly out-of-district tuitions. It is important to know that for our students, the impact of the pandemic is not over. Investing in our schools as a primary resource for post-pandemic recovery is a key strategy for investing in the wellbeing of students.

Dr. Smith presented an overview of the School Department Budget for FY24 including budget drivers, use of one-time funds, a review of the operating budget, revision to the budget with respect to Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), initial adjustments by program area, full-time employee changes, restoration of positions and programs, final budget adjustments, and approved fee increases. Her presentation, attached, highlights the critical challenges for the FY24 budget.

## Q&A

Q: Please explain the implications of moving \$3.2 million in retiree health to the city. What effect will that have in the future? What are the implications for the school budget?

A: Dr. Smith answered that they removed \$3.1+ million from the school budget for OPEB expense, and the allocation to the schools was reduced by the equivalent amount this year. Mr. Hurley answered the OPEB budget has been removed from the NPS budget and will be paid by the city. As a result, this shifting of responsibility from NPS to the city does have the impact of lowering our actual budget percentage increase from FY23 to FY24 but does not have any program or staffing impact on NPS. Dr. Smith added that starting this year and going forward, the OPEB expense that was previously carried in the school budget will be carried instead in the City's operating budget. The City will now be assuming the risk that OPEB goes up by more than 3.5% each year. If retiree health cost goes up more than 3.5% each year, which it has been doing, moving this item to the City budget will be a plus for the school budget moving forward.

Over time, we will need to look at where the OPEB line item belongs. For the near future, OPEB will stay in the city budget, increasing at the same rate it has been.

Q: What is carry forward money?

A: Dr. Smith answered it is necessary to have reserves. This January, knowing we were going into a challenging budget season, we began to look for cost savings. This year, there were positions we could not fill. It wasn't necessarily our teaching positions, but also aide positions. When we are unable to hire, the unspent funds become carry forward money. In January, we did a budget freeze requesting a purchasing freeze. Items were approved on an individual basis. Our goal was to carry forward approximately \$2 million. As we get closer to the end of the year we predict to carry forward \$2.3+ million. We will review purchasing and other things that we can do to relieve our budget for next year.

Mr. Hurley added that the key piece to understand is that this is a mechanism that school districts use. It's actually done in our circuit breaker revolving account. We are able to carry a year's worth of circuit breaker funds forward into the next year. In addition, we receive new circuit breaker money. We use that in ways to lower or increase our tuition line item in our budget. This is how a school district generates something similar to free cash, although it is not the same thing. Ideally, we would not have to use that money to balance our budget. The good news is that we went from relying on \$4.6 million in circuit breaker money to fund our school budget in the past, to now a lesser amount of \$2.3 million in this year's school budget. Mr. Hurley then said as part of our FY23 Budget, the School Department was reliant on the City Budget plus \$4.6 million of additional Circuit Breaker funding to balance our

budget. In the FY24 budget, in addition to our operating budget, we continue our reliance on one-time carryforward funds that we bring forward in our circuit breaker accounts, but to a lower amount of \$2.3 million. Over time, we do not want to be reliant on our Circuit Breaker account to fund on-going operations.

Q: Out-of-district tuition is now \$1.89 million for the upcoming year. The circuit breaker bridge from the Mayor out of one-time funding is \$1.4 million. Please explain the additional \$.4 million.

A: Dr. Smith answered that each year we expect about a 2% increase in out-of-district tuition. This September, we were notified it would go up 14%. We usually plan on 2%, or approximately \$400,000, in our budget as the standard increase. The 12% additional increase amounted to the \$1.4 million. We expect to see this money come back to us in the FY25 budget with a circuit breaker reimbursement. We understood why the increase occurred, and we were looking for the state to provide each district with \$1.4 million to cover it, but that has not happened. We've discussed this with senators and legislators. The House Budget has been approved; the Senate Budget is presently happening. We don't expect to have to assume this type of increase again next year, which is why the bridge loan provided by the Mayor is being provided for this one-time expense.

Q: \$1.4 million would be extremely helpful to support the school budget, is there still time to lobby State Representatives?

A: Dr. Smith answered that it has gone through the House. \$60 per student, in every district. We usually receive \$30 per student. She stated that she would provide the Council with information as to how to lobby the State Representatives.

Q: I don't like the fact that the City charges fees to families for music, sports, etc. I prefer to see a larger increase on student parking fees. This budget reflects across the board fee increases. Was there consideration of not raising fees on student participation and only raising student parking fees?

A: Dr. Smith answered that if there are families struggling, our goal is to have our coaches, teachers and advisors ensure that there is no student that does not take participate in these opportunities because of the fee. We truly tried to stay away from raising the fees. The fees were raised an average of \$50 but up to \$75. Mr. Hurley added that the Newton South parking fee (page 20) collects approximately \$54,000. The fee has increased \$50, the same as the annual cost of a yellow bus. However, we are looking for hundreds of thousands of dollars. We would have had to increase parking to \$2,000 per year to make it meaningful. The fees for Newton and other districts, have become necessary evils. Newton's fees have not been raised in approximately six years. We did discuss the fees with the School Committee. Other alternatives considered included: do we only transport Kindergarten to sixth grade students that reside two or more miles from schools (per the state requirement)? This would reduce the number of buses, require more students transporting themselves and would have a major reduction in our budget. We've tried to make financial assistance easy for families through our student information system. When requests for financial assistance are

made, we only request name, household size and income. We approve 99%+ of requests for a fee reduction or elimination.

Q: It is concerning that a fee increase may cause students shame. The student perhaps will not ask and will instead go without sports, music, etc. Are we are cutting guidance counselors and/or in-house therapist positions?

A: Dr. Smith answered that shame is certainly not our goal. Students develop strong relationships with counselors, therapists, teachers and coaches. It is our goal for students to have the necessary support and to be able to participate in any activities when desired. We struggled with the fees, and we knew it was going to be of concern.

Q: I'm hearing that in the past, there were three or four jazz bands. Now it has been cut to one jazz band. It is concerning activities are being drastically cut. I was told that there are five drummers in one band, and they're not getting enough play time. Are we not able to staff enough clubs?

A: Dr. Smith answered that the department is working in the high school and middle school levels where there was a reduction of about 10% in extracurricular athletics. There have been no final cuts made. We are reviewing participation including the jazz band. If we have participants, we will provide the opportunity. We're allowing schools to make those decisions. We are collaborating with our coaches and advisors in ensuring the integrity of the programs we offer remains, and that students have the opportunity. When you have to close a \$5 million budget deficit, you have to look at each department and everybody takes a bit of this hit. Our goal is not to outright reduce something so valued in the community.

Q: Was the decision to make high school class sizes larger based on the fact that they are older students, and that is why it was not done in the elementary level?

A: Dr. Smith answered that it was due to declining enrollment. The eighth grade is a larger class size. When we reviewed the budget, because of reductions made last year in high school staffing, we had to add back to the high school staffing this year to manage class size. At the same time, we made a reduction in elementary, middle and high school because of the deficit. Classes were affected on course offerings. We felt that students would have quality instruction and be able to take necessary courses for graduation.

Q: Have you seen an increase in the individualized education program (IEP) since COVID? With budget cuts, will we have enough oversight with the IEPs and support?

A: Dr. Smith answered that she did not have the exact figures. The impact on mental health and academic loss does not always require an IEP. We're collaborating with parents who are requesting that we pay attention to the needs of all students. We have seen an increase in IEP requests. We are making sure that we are within compliance. We are also careful with class sizes and student teacher ratio to ensure all students are not shortchanged.

Q: There is a large budget cut this year for kindergarten aides. Am I reading the 44.6% reduction in spending correct?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that is correct. We are cutting aides almost close to half. There was one kindergarten aide per classroom previously and we're going to one kindergarten aide for every two classrooms with several extra aides.

Q: How many total kindergarten classrooms are there in Newton public schools?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that there are approximately 39-40 kindergarten classrooms.

Q: The current budget indicates on line number 73, page 48 in the budget book that only 17 kindergarten classes will be kept. Isn't it necessary to have 34 classrooms? Please provide the average classroom size for the kindergarten.

A: Mr. Hurley answered that the FY24 budget assumes 41 Kindergarten Classrooms. NPS aides are based on a 1.0 FTE working 40 hours per week. Kindergarten aides each are paid based on a schedule of 33.18 hours per week. This is equal to a 0.8295 FTE for each Kindergarten aide position (33.18 hours divided by 40 hours). The Kindergarten aides are reduced in the FY24 budget such that each aide will cover two classrooms in FY24. The final number of aides needed is 17.00 FTEs. This is calculated by 41 classrooms divided by 2 times 0.8295 FTE which equals 17.00 FTEs ( $41 / 2 * 0.8295 = 17.00$ ).

Q: Are the 18 elementary positions being cut kindergarten aides?

A: Dr. Smith answered that the correct number is 15.3. Mr. Hurley added that this information is on page 30. Mr. Hurley answered that due to decreasing elementary enrollment, we reduced 4 teachers (4.0 FTE); however, to make room for growing class sizes, we added 2 reserve teachers (2.0 FTE). This results in a net enrollment decrease of 2 teachers. We also decreased teacher specialist positions by 0.9 FTE due to budget constraints; however, to make room for possible class size shifts, we added 0.6 FTE in reserve teacher specialist positions. This results in a net decrease of 0.3 FTE in teacher specialists. Added together, the total net decrease in elementary teachers due to enrollment and budget constraints adds up to 2.3 FTEs.

We also had a net reduction of 15.3 Kindergarten aides, and a further reduction of 2 assistant principals. Each assistant principal is a 0.5 FTE, so this results in a total reduction of 1.0 FTE in assistant principals.

In total, the teacher, aide, and assistant principal reductions add up to 18.6 FTE. We also added a 0.6 FTE for a Planning Group due to enrollment changes at the elementary level. This results in a grand total FTE reduction of 18.0 FTE at the elementary level.

Dr. Smith added most are at the middle school level not impacting classroom sizes. We have discussed restoring teachers in middle school with 6 teachers and .8 [RG5] at the middle school level at Oak Hill, Brown and Day.

Q: To clarify, the classroom teacher part is 2.3 classroom teachers. Is one of them due to a reduction in enrollment? Please provide information on how you arrive at 18 elementary positions being eliminated and the secondary losses.

A: Mr. Hurley answered yes, we restored all of the classroom teacher reductions other than planned enrollment reductions. He then said that he would provide further information on 18 positions being eliminated.

Q: Is the 13.8 FTE reductions for classroom teachers making an impact on classroom sizes?

A: Dr. Smith answered most are at the middle school level not impacting classroom sizes. Mr. Hurley answered that the 6.8 middle school teachers is a restoration, not the total number lost; in FY24, NPS will reduce middle school teachers by 11.4 FTE.

Initially, NPS planned to reduce Middle School by 18.2 FTE and increase team sizes to an average of 100 students per team. This was not advantageous, however, and when NPS had the opportunity to restore some positions 6.8 teachers were added back, resulting in a net reduction of 11.4 FTE in teachers, which will keep team sizes the same as in previous years.

Two special education teachers and student services at the middle school also support those teams. In the original budget, we were looking at close to 100 students per team. We had 100 to 110 which has been reduced to between 87 and 97 per team. During budget discussions, if we had an extra \$600,000, we would have focused on bringing back mostly middle school teachers.

Q: Are you saying that an additional \$600,000 would bring back all the middle school teachers?

A: Dr. Smith answered that it was approximately \$600,000.

Q: Regarding the Franklin School, you indicated it would open in 2027 or 2029. Why not 2028?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that it depends if we need swing space for Countryside or Franklin Schools. If we don't, we might be able to get it done in 2027.

Q: The budget shows a \$50,000 cut in elementary building supplies. Will this funding come from teachers' pockets for student supplies?

A: Dr. Smith answered yes, teachers spend additional money in their classrooms, not just in Newton. When we were looking to prepare a balanced budget to address class sizes, that's where we tried to produce that \$1.4 million. We reduced on what we spend per pupil for supplies to preserve class sizes and staffing.

Q: What sort of supplies do teachers purchase?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that the cut is approximately \$2,000 per school. The line item is called “per pupil.” The principals use the money for instructional supplies, equipment, materials and furniture. We cut this \$50,000 in the FY23 budget. We were planning to restore that funding this year, but once the override failed, we made that reduction again.

Q: Am I correct, the budget is being increased by 2.5% this year?

A: Dr. Smith answered yes, when you also figure in the OPEB \$3.1 million that came out of the budget. Originally, the Mayor allocated a 3.73% increase. When the School Committee decided not to fund OPEB, the Mayor assumed the line item for OPEB at \$3.1 million, which reduced the school budget increase when comparing last year to this year from a 3.73% increase to a 2.51% increase. Moving forward, we will not have that liability in our budget. Usually there's a 3.5% increase. If in fact, if OPEB rises faster than 3.5%, which is the projection, then it is a positive for the school budget not to have to carry it.

Q: Regarding the decision to cut 56.4 positions, and subsequently reduce that to 40.3 positions, please explain how these decisions were made? What is the prioritization? What factors were considered? Is it cost, staff seniority, contractual provisions, class size or student needs? How are decisions made to add back positions when you receive more money?

A: Dr. Smith answered that the Assistant Superintendent met with 15 elementary principals informing them and every department, in order to make up \$4.9 million, we all have to make an adjustment in our budgets. When you're looking to make up a large deficit, you look at salaries. We thought it was critical in increasing class sizes to reach a point that we thought our classroom teachers could still provide a quality education and still have coaches to support students that might have had a loss of learning. This would be the best decision that we could make.

Q: It sounds like class size is one of the biggest factors that you review. Are seniority, salary or contractual provisions considered for where to cut or where to add back?

A: Dr. Smith answered yes, teachers with professional status. If in fact we have to reduce elementary teachers by five, we would review all teachers with professional status who are protected. Teachers without professional status are based on evaluations which is part of the collective bargaining agreement.

Q: Have system wide expenses and benefits increased?

A: Dr. Smith answered that it was a reduction of \$245,000. Mr. Hurley added it was a “catch all” line item including health insurance changes. The Finance Department had a reduction in administrative positions, and a financial analyst was added.

Q: What does it mean for a teacher to have “professional status?”



A: Dr. Smith answered that teachers have professional status when they have reached a day beyond their third year with evaluations that are proficient. It used to be called tenure.

Q: Has Understanding our Differences (UOD) been cut from the budget?

A: Dr. Smith answered yes, a reduction of \$63,000 in the budget. It was a recommended reduction based on a number of factors. One of the factors is the curriculum revision. We were reviewing a delivery model all the while appreciating the wonderful 45 years of the UOD. We are a different district moving forward. Students engage in inclusion throughout the district. Students with complex needs participate in a way that they might not have been involved in years past. Counselors are working on restructuring lessons for disability awareness and inclusion. We are reviewing our delivery model, but we're also hoping to be able to come together with the Task Force. The School Committee put back \$32,000 in our budget for plans moving forward. The \$63,000 from this budget specifically went to UOD while planning for the future.

Q: There wasn't effective communication with UOD about eliminating them out of the budget. It came with a complete lack of understanding or knowledge of what UOD brings to the table. What is the expertise of the individuals that will be doing inclusion programming in schools moving forward?

A: Dr. Smith answered that counselors started discussing to ensure what's happening in our classrooms every day, is really understanding our differences.

Q: Do the counselors have expertise in disabilities? Receive training? What is their understanding of discipline?

A: Dr. Smith answered that the counselors had training. They serve these children every day. I don't have information on their expertise. Dr. Smith stated she has every faith we can bring not only our experts, special education training, counselors and school psychologists to work with outside organizations, including UOD, to discuss how we move our program forward.

Q: I remain baffled since we first heard about the UOD cut. It just seems very opaque and is not well explained. What are the problems we are trying to solve? Complaints seem to be related to autism. City Council has received more emails and calls on this concern than any other part of the school budget. Was consideration given to dropping the problematic unit of the autism unit, if that was the main source of complaints? What are we going to receive for \$32,000? How is that money going to be used? How do you hope to create a program, over the summer at this point?

A: Dr. Smith answered that with respect to a budget deficit of \$4.9 million, \$63,000, is a small amount of money. Previously, there was concern presented by teachers with the delivery model, parent volunteers and training. There was concern about outdated curriculum. It was time to review the way we deliver in our classrooms inclusive and welcoming environments. Our plan, even without the \$32,000 was to bring staff together as a Task Force and an opportunity to come to the table with UOD. There's been outreach supporting disability awareness and education and what UOD has respectfully

brought for 45 years to the schools. UOD is able to be part of the solution and expand their programming beyond public schools in a way would benefit students. The incoming superintendent is committed to bringing a Task Force together to look at our own resources with high school students who have experienced challenges they may have with a disability.

Q: There was discussion about the short life lifespan of Chromebooks. Are there student Chromebook policy changes?

A: Dr. Smith answered young students shared iPads. Chromebooks are used at second grade and beyond. I've heard concerns about screen time, and time should be spent more with direct learning. We are trying to find a balance.

Q: On line item 217, Student Chromebooks have a 95% increase in funding. Is the increase of \$190,000 correct? Is that due to the moving to a one-to-one ratio for Kindergarten and first grade?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that the pandemic really forced all districts to go one-to-one. Prior to the pandemic, we had funded approximately \$200,000 for high school one-to-one. iPads are shared in the Kindergarten and grade one levels. Second through 12th grade, we were trying to get to a higher funding level, because we had only funded the one-to-one model the past four years. We plan to stay in that plan. We have been using one time ESSER and city funding to pay for Chromebooks.

Q: Other than the strings program, were there other extracurriculars cut?

A: Dr. Smith answered yes, when the \$1.4 million was added back, we were able to bring back the strings program. Extracurriculars were cut across the board with secondary, middle and high school levels at approximately a 10% reduction. There will be reductions based on low enrollment. We continue to fund to ensure students have opportunities if there is interest.

Q: There were tiers of potential restorations including the strings program. Is there anything else if the allocation had been higher that would or could have been added back in?

A: Dr. Smith answered that at the time, we were looking at \$2 million, going beyond the \$1.4 million.

Q: If the OPEB hadn't been moved to the city side, the allocation would have been 3.73%. The move brought the allocation down to 2.51%. Would the NPS allocation have been a 3.73% increase this year?

A: Dr. Smith answered that there would have been an additional \$3.1 million in the allocation without the OPEB move. \$782,000 was the difference between the \$1.4 that was brought back and the remainder getting to \$2 million. That was class size at the middle school level, including teachers and special education teachers. In November, our budget guidelines with the School Committee we reviewed different items in our remaining 40 staff members.

Q: What would have been the elementary reduction in terms of aides due to enrollment, as opposed to budget cuts?

A: Mr. Hurley answered that for elementary schools, we have it as a minus 2.3 net enrollment reduction. Then we added reserves. Dr. Smith added the reason for the reserve teachers is that situations happen over the summer which changes enrollment. We want to make sure we're not caught if we have to add a classroom teacher. In FY24, enrollment is projected to be at 4,967 students in elementary education, a decrease of 31 students.

Q: Any insights on why there is difficulty filling 8 support positions? Is it due to compensation?

A: Dr. Smith answered that this year, positions are being paid competitive wages. Positions remain unfilled. The district is competing with a job market that we can't find employees we need. We started with a full slate of teachers this September, although we're starting to see people leaving the profession. It isn't the compensation, some of it is the job pool.

Q: How many other districts use one-time funds to balance their budgets?

A: Dr. Smith answered that she cannot answer that question. Districts are being careful with their ESSER funding. It was necessary, whether it was CARES ACT or ESSER funding that allowed us to revert to a virtual learning technology. There was discussion with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that we needed to be careful about weaning ourselves off one time funding. One time funding allowed us to function during those years. I heard from my team that they were getting very frustrated each year using one time funding come budget season. We were pleased initially in our budget to be able to restore \$410,000 to a line item that had been drastically reduced. This year, we were hopeful to bring back the one time use of \$410,000 in last year's budget to bring back positions. We are trying to wean ourselves off of one time funding, reduce the structural deficits, not rely on the carry forward to have appropriate class sizes. With this challenging budget, we're down to \$2.3 million in our carry forward from \$4.6 million the previous year. Mr. Hurley added that there are districts that may have funded more positions on ESSER or permanent positions. Many districts, though, are probably in a similar boat in terms of having rising costs.

Q: Some voices in our community say we need more funding in our school budget despite the fact that we've had declining enrollment, because the nature of administering education has changed. Other voices in our community say that the School Department must right-size its budget to a smaller number because we have a smaller number of students. Can you reconcile these ideas? We are down approximately 1,000 students from FY20 to FY24. We are up in the total number of aides, from 431.6 in FY20 to 506.8 in this budget. We are up in administrators, coordinators and teachers.

A: Dr. Smith answered that she has heard some of the same things. We brought together classroom teachers, social, emotional, interventionist and literacy coaches to discuss what does it mean when you have a student coming off of the pandemic? A student collaborates with a counselor to get regulated to enter a classroom as quickly as possible. Regarding the administrators and coordinators line item,

the district looks at student population. We have a decrease in enrollment every year. When reviewing the budget deficit, we reviewed the enrollment, making those reductions due to the budget gap. Administrators and coordinators are at the low end. We have to make the correct decisions supporting the teachers with their curriculum and professional development.

Q: How many aide vacancies this year? How did you function with those vacancies? After a while if a position has been vacant, and we're functioning well, the question is do we need these positions?

A: Mr. Hurley answered in a typical year we have 10 to 20 open paraprofessional vacancies. Our budget assumes a certain amount of turnover. In the last several years, it has been closer to 20 vacancies.

Q: Describe what you think the impact will be in a kindergarten class with no aide?

A: Dr. Smith answered that a decrease in aides is going to have an impact and challenge in kindergarten classrooms. Most kindergarten classes have between 18 to 20 students.

Q: What is the ideal size of a middle school team?

A: Dr. Smith answered the ideal size is between 85 to 90. We're at 97 in this budget, some classes are as low as 87.

Q: How many half teams are there today?

A: Mr. Hurley did not have this information and will provide it.

## Comments

It is disappointing the override did not pass. An override would have put us in a much stronger position to be able to wean ourselves off of one time funding for the long term and was in the best interest of the city. We use one time funds for other ongoing needs. We use a certain amount of free cash every year to balance our city side budget. We want to wean ourselves off of all of those things. Is this the moment to wean ourselves off to this extent? It is concerning that students need more, and we are not providing it to them. It is concerning we are reducing kindergarten aides by 17 and leaving our middle school class sizes too large.

It makes no sense for the bus and student parking fee to be the same. The bus fee should be eliminated because we ought to be encouraging students to take the bus. The way those fees are structured, is the same fee, whether you're going to take the bus, walk or drive. The impact the fees have on the budget of the buses actually increased approximately 16% to 24%.

It is disappointing to hear of the UOD cut, a national program. If money is available it should be added back to this program.

One time funds are in the budget every year, it is a chronic problem that municipalities have. There's never enough money to run a budget. One time funds are necessary to keep cities going.

### **Understanding our Differences (UOD) Resolution**

Councilor Noel stated the resolution requests the School Department work closely with UOD with the \$32,000 reinstated in the budget but is not tied to the UOD curriculum. The way in which this was managed, does not give me confidence that our children are going to be exposed to thoughtful curriculum that talks about differences. Let's honor the unique students in our school system and be thoughtful about how we're going to talk about this.

Councilor Noel offered and recited the "Resolutions For The Schools Related To The Inclusion Education in Newton Classrooms." Councilors Downs, Grossman and Oliver requested their names be added to the resolution.

Ms. Tamika Olszewski, Chair of the School Committee stated that the School Committee authorized \$32,000 for the disability inclusion program. That contemplates vendors, of which UOD would be one of those prospective vendors, to have an opportunity to meet with the School Department and its team to discuss how to best service the needs of our students with regard to the disability inclusion programming. The mechanism for doing that was to set aside the funds. The purview and the discretion of the superintendent and our new incoming Superintendent Dr. Nolan and her team will curate that program specific to the needs of our students. The School Committee has authorized those funds and that's where our authority ends. The superintendent has the purview to allocate the funds, not the decision making as to what that program looks like or how it will be implemented.

### **Resolution votes**

Councilor Noel made a motion to approve the resolution in both the Finance and Programs and Services Committees.

The Finance Committee took a straw vote. Committee members agreed 6-0-0.

The Programs and Services Committee took a straw vote. Committee members agreed 7-0-1, Councilor Baker abstaining.

The recommendation will be referred to the COW requesting submission of the Resolution to the School Department.

### **Budget votes**

The School Budget totals \$268,655,413, a 2.51% increase from FY23.

The Finance Committee took a straw vote to accept the School Budget along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP. The Committee voted 0-0-6.

The Programs and Services Committee took a straw vote to accept the School Budget along with the Supplemental CIP and the CIP. The Committee voted 2-0-6, Councilors Krintzman and Baker in favor.

Councilors thanked Dr. Smith, Mr. Hurley and School Committee members for their efforts in providing education with a complex budget.

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair  
Finance Committee**

**Josh Krintzman, Chair  
Programs & Services Committee**