

Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023

Mayor's Newton Update

I deeply value the education of our children and know that excellence in our schools is a direct result of the commitment and excellence of our teachers and staff at Newton Public Schools (NPS).



I have been working closely with Superintendent Anna Nolin and the Newton School Committee to supplement a 3.5% increase in next year's NPS FY2025 Budget with the use of one-time funds from a large cash settlement with Eversource (a.k.a., an "Overlay Surplus"). These additional funds will support ongoing NPS operations in a way that will not result in fiscal hardship when these unusual, one-time funds are used up.

More specifically, I have given my commitment to using 70% of the \$26 million in Overlay Surplus plus associated interest income to augment the NPS budget to address pressing needs.

This additional financial support comes on the heels of my commitment of nearly \$275 million of investments in our school facilities, programs, and operations above and beyond the annual budget over the last four years. Even with this, I am still not done using one-time money to invest in our schools. I will be announcing soon additional funds to help address even more facility and program needs for our schools using another one-time funding source, Free Cash.

With my commitment of Overlay Surplus, Free Cash and a 3.5% increase in the NPS Budget, Superintendent Nolin is making a set of recommendations to the School Committee for uses of these funds – including reaching a fair and sustainable contract settlement with our educators and addressing some of the most acute needs of our school system and our 11,000 plus students. (Please see her letter below.)

The City Council has twice hesitated to use the Overlay Surplus funds. That said, I know how much the City Council supports our students and the Newton Public Schools. I look forward to working with them during the Budget process to secure these critical funds for teaching and learning.

As Mayor, I believe that these investments are critical to the community in Newton. Also, as a mother, I understand how important these commitments are to our collective future, our children.

I am grateful to our educators and staff in the Newton Public Schools. They bring great skill and big hearts to their work. They have my full confidence.

Warmly,

Ruthanne

The following is the letter to NPS families from Superintendent Nolin that she sent earlier today regarding this critical funding:

Dear NPS Families,

Since I started here in Newton, I have been working closely with the Mayor to articulate the true and very real needs of the students and staff in our district. Reductions over the past few years have resulted in increased class sizes and reduced supports and opportunities for our students.

On Monday, December 11, after several months of discussion, collaboration, and exchange of information and iterations of ideas presented to the City Council and the School Committee, Mayor Fuller has provided the district with an updated strategy to direct additional funding to NPS by utilizing some of the City's overlay surplus fund as a supplement, separate from NPS's yearly budget allocation.

We look forward to upcoming budget workshops with our School Committee and City Council partners to further explain the use of these funds and the full modern and complex needs of our school district in this post-pandemic environment. Their partnership in moving the district forward is critical.

I have made recommendations to the School Committee for use of this additional funding to enable a competitive and sustainable contract with the NTA, to address some of the most acute needs in our district, and to remedy some of the past cuts we have had to endure. My recommendations also aim to align with concerns and issues raised by our teacher union partners in our ongoing negotiations (class sizes, additional social workers, heating and cooling issues, and elementary intervention and planning supports). As educator partners, there are many places where we are aligned in our vision and values for student and educator support.

Therefore, my recommendation to the School Committee this Monday is that this additional funding be used to address the following, most critical needs of the district:

- *Reach collective bargaining agreements with our unions that provide competitive salaries and benefits that are financially responsible*
- *Reduce high school class sizes in math and science*
- *Restore some high school electives, most critically in science and engineering (this is based on course request data from both high schools)*
- *Create additional planning time and dedicated math and literacy intervention blocks in the elementary schools where they are needed most*

- *Address critical safety and access infrastructure needs, such as cooling and filtration systems, drainage and ADA upgrades in our buildings (e.g. Williams playground, South chiller.)*
- *Invest in math and STEM curricula which have not been reviewed or upgraded in well over a decade.*

With this additional funding and keeping in mind the importance of addressing the critical needs of our students and staff, I believe the School Committee will have the capacity to move forward with a new offer to the NTA at the scheduled mediation session on Monday, December 18, 2023. It is my hope that Monday's session will be fruitful and that both the School Committee and NTA will move closer to an agreement. A settled contract will allow me to move forward with some of the most critical planning work of the district as we seek to improve and strengthen our programs and practices. I look forward to the outcome of that scheduled session and trust that the School Committee and the NTA will engage in a meaningful and collaborative way. Our students are counting on us all.

Sincerely,
Anna P. Nolin
Superintendent of Schools



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