

12:15 p.m. - Sunday, Jan. 21, 2024

Mayor's Newton Update

Getting our students back into the classroom for the start of the week is our absolute top priority.

The Newton School Committee negotiating team is at the bargaining table working to achieve a contract that competitively and sustainably funds our schools and our teachers.



The Newton School Committee is providing a pathway to the union for re-opening our schools tomorrow while allowing negotiations to continue by providing substitute teachers for members of the core bargaining committee. We are doing this to put our kids first.

The union can decide right now to let our kids be in school while the adults negotiate.

A Message from the School Committee

Dear NPS Families,

The decision to close schools tomorrow is solely in the hands of the NTA. The Superior Court has ordered the union to disavow the strike by 3:00 PM today.

Heading back into mediation this morning, we wish to share the following:

First, our goal is to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement with the NTA and ensure that our students return to school tomorrow.

We have put forth the most recent proposals on compensation. Yesterday, we put forth restructured proposals on every other major issue in this negotiation. We are now awaiting responses from the NTA on compensation and every major issue.

Second, to the extent that a mutually satisfactory agreement cannot be reached today, we will propose to the NTA that their negotiating team and the NPS team continue to mediate tomorrow while students and all other staff return to school.

The NTA has two full time union officers who are no longer classroom teachers. Likewise, the Massachusetts Teacher Association representatives are not classroom teachers. We will provide appropriate substitute coverage for their core negotiating team as needed.

We remain committed to returning our students to the classroom and agreeing to a competitive, sustainable contract with the NTA.

Current Proposal for Sample Steps

Below please find updates to the information published earlier that reflect proposals made to the NTA during the day yesterday (Saturday, January 20, 2024.). These charts were shared with the NTA as well. The first chart shows projected FY26 NPS salaries compared to districts published by the NTA. We updated their analysis using the most recent NPS proposals, the NTA-selected districts and the NTA’s methodology. NPS is the median of these NTA-selected districts:

--NPS and NTA dispute the correct salary table for Weston

Proposal vs. NTA Peer-Average and NTA Peer-Range

The second chart below shows how NPS proposals compare to the same NTA-selected districts:

*Sincerely,
Newton School Committee*

Leaders of many of our dedicated parent organizations had sent me a letter expressing their concern over the strike and funding of the Newton Public Schools. Yesterday, I responded.

Key points that I made include:

- The Newton School budget has never been larger.
- I have increased the funding for NPS every single year that I have been in office.
- I have always prioritized the budget increases for the Newton Public Schools.
- I agree that the Newton Public Schools need even more ongoing and sustainable funding. That requires our voters to approve an operating override.
- I have put one-time funding to work to address pressing needs at NPS and to increase the NPS budget for the foreseeable future, including an overall increase in the Newton Public Schools budget of 5% for next school year.
- We are required by state law to have a balanced budget. The growth of our tax levy is limited to a 2.5% increase (under Proposition 2½) plus new growth from development/ redevelopment, another 1% plus.
- We invest 65% of all our revenues in the Newton Public Schools and 89% of those dollars go to compensation.

- If we increase the NPS budget faster than our revenues, there is less for other key services that make our community the kind of place where we want to raise our children.
- Similarly, if we agree to increases that are not sustainable, critical services will be harmed – fewer teachers, police officers, fire fighters, librarians, road paving crews, and more.

Please read my complete letter below:

To Leaders of Newton Parent Organizations,

I'm grateful to each of you for all that you do for our students and the Newton Public Schools community.

Like you, I see the alarming trends in social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in our schools. Like you, I believe that our schools need more funding.

*I know that many of you were right there last spring advocating for voters to approve paying a little more in taxes in the Tax Operating Override I proposed. I was deeply disappointed that the override did not pass. That disappointment was primarily because **I know our schools need more ongoing and sustainable funding**. That's what the override would have provided.*

After the override did not pass, I worked creatively to get more funding into the NPS system through last spring's FY24 budget season. We used last year's Free Cash in a variety of ways, including \$10 million of it for paying down the bond on the desperately needed Lincoln-Eliot elementary school project, which in turn increased the NPS budget by \$600,000 annually. We also went to the Retirement Board and asked them to push back the pension funding schedule by a year. They agreed, while also emphasizing they had no inclination to push back that schedule any farther. Altogether, 70% of last year's Free Cash was invested in supporting teaching & learning. (Our CFO prepared a detailed memo last November on NPS funding over the years, which includes full information about last year's Free Cash. Read that [here](#).)

This past summer and fall I worked hard to use our new one-time available money from an Eversource settlement to improve NPS budgets for the foreseeable future. The City Council twice did not approve such plans at the time.

*In December 2023, Superintendent Nolin, School Committee Chair Brezski, and I rolled up our sleeves and successfully crafted **a different plan to use 70% of these funds for additional NPS funding over multiple years. This plan includes an overall increase in funding to the Newton Public Schools of 5% for next school year.** I've made that commitment to them. I repeat it here to you.*

We are using our Free Cash and Overlay Surplus funds and prioritizing the Newton Public Schools.

We are deploying this year's Free Cash on behalf of NPS. To date, \$8.6 million is in the process of approvals for curriculum investments and school building and field improvements.

*I would like to address the references to “budget cuts,” “chronic underfunding,” and “fully funding” that were in your letter. On the one hand, **I have increased the budget for the Newton Public Schools every single year that I have been Mayor.** In my years, the NPS budget has grown from \$219.4 million in FY2018 to \$268.7 million this current year, FY2024, an increase of \$49.3 million. NPS accounts for 65% of all our City of Newton expenditures. I have prioritized the funding for NPS when I put together the budgets for our other important services (Police, Fire, Roads, Library, etc.) and needs (debt service and retirement liabilities). By State law, we have to have a balanced budget. On the other hand, the cost of the NPS contracts (compensation is 89% of the NPS budget) and other critical NPS services have grown even faster than the increases in the NPS budget, leading to the difficult decisions made by the Superintendent and the School Committee about the number of employees and investments in areas such as maintenance, professional development, and curriculum.*

*The percent increase in the NPS budget annually, known as the allocation, is in no way arbitrary. We start by looking carefully at our revenues. Revenues are tightly capped by Proposition 2 1/2. Our tax levy can only increase by 2.5% annually by State law, plus new growth from development and redevelopment (often in the range of another 1% plus, which is quite low compared to many other communities). **Our overall expenditures have to match our overall revenues.** Our biggest department, the Newton Public Schools, and the NPS contract, cannot grow faster than overall revenues, without harming other necessary services.*

As an aside, contrary to popular perception, the City will not see any change in our overall property taxes as a result of Eversource now paying their taxes on a timely basis. For 12 years we've been including their taxes as part of our budgeted revenues. Rather, our uncollected taxes will no longer include the Eversource amount owed.

My priority will always be to do what is best for the Newton Public Schools, for its present and its future. What is best for the Newton Public Schools is indeed what is best for Newton as a whole.

Please know that many of our other City Department budgets directly support our students. Our Health and Human Services budget supports our students, as our School Nurses are part of that Department. Our Parks, Recreation and Culture budget supports our students, as their team maintains our school grounds, plows school sidewalks and walkways in winter, stewards our playgrounds and fields, and more. Our Public Buildings budget supports our students, as more than 75% of their budget goes directly towards maintaining our school buildings and managing our major school projects. Our Police budget supports our students, as School Resource Officers and School Crossing Guards are part of that department. All together about 65% of our total expenditures go directly to our schools. The remaining 35% goes to nurturing the sort of community in which we want to raise our children.

Let me return to the fact that we have to have a balanced budget. Increasing the budget in one area of our City and School Department means less

elsewhere. This is what every City and Town in Massachusetts struggles with. That’s why the Chair of the Andover School Committee said after they recently reached an agreement following the strike of the Andover teachers, “The final agreement is inconsistent with the principles of the town’s long-range financial plan so, to live within our means, we will need to make meaningful program, service, and staff reductions.” I don’t want this for Newton. We can’t have this for Newton.

I’ll close where I started – with gratitude. What we all feel most acutely in this moment of crisis will remain when our students are again able to join their teachers in their classroom: the Newton Public Schools need more ongoing and sustainable funding. I will work with each of you to make that happen.

Thank you for your service to our students, our teachers, our schools and our community.

Join me in calling on the union to put the kids first and continue to negotiate while students learn, if we don't come to a final agreement today.

I will update you later today.

Sincerely,
Mayor Ruthanne Fuller



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller | 1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459

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