



David Fleishman
Superintendent of Schools

BUDGET MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

It was a little over a year ago that I presented the budget for the 2020-21 school year. At the time, we expected a rather uneventful budget year. Instead, the pandemic resulted in a year of unprecedented unpredictability as we have navigated the challenge of educating over 12,000 students in ways that we could never have imagined.

The pandemic has had a tremendous impact on school districts in a multitude of ways over the past year, including financial. In Newton, we have spent millions of dollars that we did not anticipate spending when we first presented our budget last spring.

- We allocated significant funds for ventilation, testing for our staff and students, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- We spent a significant amount on technology, ensuring that all students, regardless of family income, had the necessary devices to participate in all aspects of both online and in-person learning.
- We hired almost 100 additional staff members needed to support our elementary Distance Learning Academy (DLA), connect to hybrid students on their remote days, and provide coverage for middle school teachers working remotely. These positions will not be needed in FY22 and have been removed from the budget as we plan our full in-person return.

While our additional costs were more than \$13 million, we did receive significant grant funding from the various federal and state programs. We also had some spending reductions in a number of areas, particularly transportation. However, given that our unbudgeted expenses were greater than our additional revenue and spending reductions, the FY21 budget has been a challenge to manage. Thankfully, we have collaborated closely with our city partners and do expect to finish the year with a balanced budget.

As we prepare for a full in-person reopening in September, our students and families can continue to expect favorable class sizes, a rich educational program, and a full continuum of general and special education supports. However, we are fully cognizant that the start of school will be different, even with all students returning to the building. In preparing the FY22 budget, much of our discussions have centered on four critical priority areas that have been a major focus over the past year and will continue as we return to full-time in-person schooling. While our staffing levels will return to pre-pandemic levels, we will be making targeted investments in these four priority areas through funding we will soon receive from the American Rescue Plan.

1. *Support students who have not made satisfactory progress over the past year and remain significantly below grade level*

We will expand our summer school programs over the next few years by offering seats to students in non-Title 1 schools; and developing engaging and student-centered after school opportunities for students in need of support during the 2021-22 school year. In addition, we will continue to prioritize and support teachers' ability to provide Universally Designed curriculum and instruction that offers each student more varied ways to access content and demonstrate understanding.

2. *Ensure that race and equity is the center of all of our work*

Our commitment to equity and excellence is long-standing in the Newton Public Schools. The events of the past year—the inequities exposed by the pandemic and the race-based hatred and violence—have ignited an energy and passion in our community and among our students, faculty and administrators. Over the past year, our new Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has structured professional development that will continue to expand next year. Faculty, staff and administrators are working in multiple groups and settings to review practices in their spheres of influence from an equity lens. We also recognize the need for teachers to expand their capacity to facilitate student's discussions of race and racism and will provide the necessary resources to support this work. In addition, this budget supports the development of a system for reviewing curriculum and ensuring an anti-racist, anti-bias lens as well as promoting positive identities, diversity, social justice, and action.

3. *Support the social and emotional needs of students following a harrowing year*

When we open in September, roughly 25% of our students will be returning to our school buildings for the first time in eighteen months. While we hope that most will transition smoothly, we know that we will need to acknowledge and address the challenges we've all experienced during this time with attention to the social and emotional impact of both the pandemic and race-based hatred and violence. We also know that the impact on students is not uniform, and that some have experienced trauma and loss to a much greater extent than their peers. To address these needs, we will be expanding our social work team and strategically deploying social and emotional support resources for our full return.

4. *Integrate technology to improve teaching and learning*

This past year has forced educators to use technology—devices, infrastructure and applications have allowed teaching and learning to continue despite our inability to occupy the same spaces. Though many of our educators were already using technology as an instructional tool, many others had to learn multiple new skills and applications very quickly. It is to their credit that NPS teachers and support staff have understood the necessity of learning these new skills, as technology offers more opportunities for implementing Universal Design for Learning, with multiple ways for students to access content and to display understanding. This budget

allows our skilled educators to continue to use technology to explore innovative ways to engage their students.

Preparing a budget is a major undertaking for our leadership team, especially this year. I am grateful to work with a leadership team who is deftly able to redeploy resources on a regular basis in order to support the ever-changing needs of our schools.

Special thanks to our Business and Finance team of Liam Hurley, Sean Mannion, Stephen Marshall, Katy Hogue, Alyssa Baringer and Janelle Sutherland for their careful planning, thoughtful analysis and accurate projections. I am also thankful for our partnership with Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo.

In sum, I believe this budget provides us with the resources necessary for a successful full return to our buildings, and the capacity to provide a full range of academic and social and emotional support to our students. Our collective challenge is to build upon some of the valuable lessons we have learned over the past year while returning to many of the school structures and routines that we so cherish. This budget helps to ensure that we will be prepared.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Fleishman".

David Fleishman
Superintendent of Schools