



FY23 BUDGET MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Over the past two years, we have faced unprecedented challenges in our classrooms, our school buildings, and our community. I am grateful to our educators, staff, and administrators who have worked tirelessly to educate our students and to provide the social and emotional supports to guide them through this stressful and uncertain time.

Over the past several years and continuing through the pandemic, we have been able to expand and strengthen many academic and social-emotional initiatives. These efforts have included:

- Expanding math and literacy interventions
- Strengthening capacity to analyze and use data to inform educator practice
- Expanding critical mental health support for students
- Maintaining favorable class and team sizes at elementary, middle, and high school levels
- Expanding electives and number of AP classes with a more diverse student enrollment
- Expanding access to technology, both devices and software, at all levels, and providing training to educators to facilitate mastery of new applications and skills
- Strengthening our longstanding commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by the formation of a dedicated leadership team devoted to ensuring that both our professional development and our policies and practices are current, thoughtful, and dynamic

I am proud that we have continued to make so much progress on our system-wide goals over the past few years. However, the financial impact of the pandemic, combined with other pressing financial challenges, have created our current fiscal reality. While we have worked diligently to manage costs with minimal impact to students and staff over the past two years, we have now reached a point where we must make extraordinarily difficult choices.

We knew that our budget would be very tight this year as we did everything possible to maintain academic and social and emotional support for students while keeping our class sizes favorable. This approach was critical given the needs of our students and staff as they returned to in-person school full-time following a year of hybrid and remote schooling models. While we did consider budget reductions last year for this current school year, we decided to delay and instead manage our budget as tightly as possible given the anticipated needs of our students.

Unfortunately, a number of unanticipated costs have created even greater financial challenges over the course of this year, including:

- Continued COVID costs



- A higher than projected number of health plans utilized
- A larger than expected decline in revenue from school building rentals
- An increase in substitute costs

To address some of these challenges, we instituted a purchasing freeze in the middle of this year.

For the past several years, we have been able to use budget surplus from the previous year to balance the budget for the following year. This year, we do not have a budget surplus to balance next year's budget. In addition, we must cover current operational and contractual costs, as well as address new and/or increased costs, including:

- Increased health insurance costs
- A more expensive transportation contract for buses and vans
- Launching and expanding special education programs to meet growing student needs

As a result of the extraordinary challenges both this year and next, we have to close a budget gap of just under \$4 million for the 2022-23 school year in order to meet our operating costs. The gap includes approximately \$2.7 M in operating expenses and \$1.3 M in special education program development and expansion. Our budget gap was initially \$5.2 million and that number is now lower due to additional COVID reimbursement funding from the City.

With regard to our special education programs, we are firmly committed to expanding programs that allow more Newton students to stay in our district, learning with their friends, neighbors, and peers. We have expected this expansion over the past few years as we have observed the needs of our students. Launching new programs and expanding current programs allows us to provide the support our students need by hiring additional teachers and staff. Further, expanding our programming options allows us to recognize both short and long term savings, as we would otherwise need to fund tuition annually to outside placements to ensure our students receive appropriate and tailored educational support.

In preparing this budget, we have diligently explored all non-personnel options to reduce costs. However, because 88% of our budget is personnel and the remaining 12% is largely fixed, we now have no choice but to make extremely difficult personnel reductions to balance the budget. The heart of our district is our employees and making any reductions at all is exceptionally difficult.

In sum, we will reduce approximately 40 staff positions due to the budget gap and another 13 positions due to enrollment decline. We will also add approximately 10 positions to support the expansion and creation of new special education programs.

We are doing everything possible to limit the impact on the student and adult experiences in our schools. However, the magnitude of the reductions will have an impact on some of our staff who are



already experiencing stress. We are also worried that some of the reductions will disproportionately impact some of our most vulnerable students.

The current proposed reductions include:

- **Elementary:** Reduced elementary literacy intervention and coaching and math intervention support.
- **Middle School:** Reduced middle school literacy and math support and school counseling. Reduced team teachers resulting in some larger class sizes and a small number of teachers instructing classes outside of their primary area of specialization.
- **High School:** Increased class sizes in certain courses. Reduced school counseling and likely some elective classes.
- **Districtwide:** Reduction in K-8 curriculum and instructional leadership in virtually every subject. Decrease in professional development and curriculum initiatives.

Given the financial resources available, our collective challenge in preparing this budget was to determine how to balance the preservation of the many positive initiatives, programs and services created over the last several years with our current fiscal reality. While this budget does reduce some programs and services, it also maintains critical mental health supports added over the past several years and keeps significant academic programs in place.

The Newton Public Schools have faced daunting financial challenges on several occasions in the past. Each time, the district had to make painful reductions in order to balance its budget. Thankfully, we as a community have a history of overcoming difficult financial circumstances and I am hopeful that it will be the case again. In the meantime, I have no doubt that our skilled and dedicated faculty and staff will continue to do everything possible to support both the academic and social and emotional needs of our students during this critical time.