

# Cape Elizabeth Schools

**To:** Cape Elizabeth School Board  
**From:** Meredith Nadeau, Superintendent of Schools  
**Date:** February 25, 2015  
**Subject:** Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Overview

Fiscal Year 2016 will mark the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the implementation of the district's strategic plan. A review of last year's budget document highlights some of the significant work undertaken over the last year to meet strategic plan goals. That work includes: the implementation of full-day kindergarten and a breakfast program at all schools; increased social work support at the high school to meet student social and emotional needs; the implementation of advisory at the high school and daily advisory in grades 7 and 8; the expansion of world language instruction to 1<sup>st</sup> grade; the implementation of a universal screening assessment system in reading and mathematics; and the formal implementation of gifted and talented programming in accordance with state regulations.

The FY16 budget proposal builds on the work of prior years and advances all four goals of the strategic plan adopted by the School Board. The strategic plan and the capital improvements plan begun last year have focused on thoughtful planning for both the immediate and long-term needs of the school district and support the district's vision, mission, and values for education.

**Goal 1 of the strategic plan ("Ensure opportunities for the success of all students by providing a high-quality and comprehensive instructional program")** addresses most of the instructional work of the school district: the development and alignment of curricula, the work to develop standards-based assessment and reporting systems, the alignment and delivery of interventions across K-12, the delivery of differentiated instruction, and improved access to education for those most at risk for school failure.

Enrollment for the district is projected to decline by 2.8% in FY16. As enrollment is projected to continue to trend downward during the next few years, the same thoughtful approach utilized to develop the strategic plan and CIP will be needed to maintain the comprehensive offerings for which the district is known. We are currently looking carefully at attrition due to retirement and propose not to replace two classroom teacher positions in FY16: one at Pond Cove, based on the projected number of incoming kindergartners and one at the middle school based on the differential between the sizes of the incoming 5<sup>th</sup> grade class and the exiting 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. The high school is anticipated to maintain essentially flat enrollment for FY16.

Due to some uncertainty about enrollment at kindergarten (The two models from Planning Decisions project an incoming class size between 73 and 91.) and current class size numbers, it is recommended that the School Board maintain contingency funds to allow for the hiring of an additional teacher or teachers if enrollments should change and the need is warranted.

With the School Board's support, last summer we piloted a summer program (Open Doors Studio) for students in grades 1-8 who were either falling short of meeting Common Core mathematics and literacy standards or who were at risk of losing significant ground academically during the summer months. The program received positive feedback from parents and students, and we expect to see, as we have anecdotally heard, that students are maintaining the skills acquired and practiced during the program. The FY16 budget includes the cost to maintain this program in the summer of 2016 and to expand the program to high school students. Additionally, the program is proposed to run for sixteen days rather than the twelve days it ran during the pilot summer to provide extended learning time, as well as to align with the summer programming schedule for qualifying students with disabilities allowing us to provide more inclusive programming as appropriate for individual students.

The number of students qualifying for special education and related services has declined by 4% to a projected 153 for FY16. The FY16 budget proposes the reduction of 1 educational technician in special education and 1 special education teacher based on student needs and current caseloads in special education; both positions were vacated earlier this school year and student services and supports have been absorbed by existing staff. Given the current student population, we are proposing the reduction of the Director position to a .5 position in FY16. Some responsibilities of the position, such as oversight for the English Language Learner and Gifted and Talented programs will be shifted to the Director of Instruction, while others, such as the responsibility for evaluation of school-based personnel will shift to building administrators. Other functions such as the role of Affirmative Action officer will shift to the business and human resources office. The overall student to staff ratio for next year will be 3.4 to 1, with a student to special educator/related service provider of 5.9 to 1 and a student to educational technician ratio of 8.0 to 1.

Special education will also be working collaboratively with the Community Services program and Child Development Services (CDS) will allow the district to hire and oversee staff providing services to Cape Elizabeth preschoolers with disabilities rather than CDS staff, thus lessening transitions for families and improving the district's ability to know and support students during that earlier developmental window, prior to their transition to kindergarten. The FY16 budget also proposes the addition of \$50,000 for preschool programming. While the implementation of a preschool program was originally targeted for the FY17 budget, our work with Community Services, CDS, and the Maine Department of Education pursuant to legislative action regarding preschool has allowed us to move up that timeline. Further information regarding the preschool program will be provided during the budget workshops.

Gifted and Talented programming was launched this year with consultative support. Our budget proposes to formalize that support with a .2 FTE teacher who is able to meet with classroom teachers to discuss student needs and instructional resources and strategies.

The work on the **second goal of the strategic plan (“Expand learning opportunities for all students by cultivating an inclusive and supportive district culture”)** will continue into the upcoming year, as well. We will continue to utilize an annual survey, begun in 2013-2014, to measure district performance as benchmarked against national, and what will soon be two years worth of our own, local data. The collaborative work on climate and culture at all three schools with consultants Stan Davis (at Pond Cove) and Steve Wessler (at CEMS and CEHS), originally funded by the Cape Elizabeth Educational Foundation now has transitioned to work facilitated by our staff. For example, staff members at the middle and high school are training students in the “Stand up, Speak up” program, and the middle school has implemented a Civil Rights team.

Our strong budgetary support for co-curricular and extracurricular activities, including athletics, provides our students with access to activities that help them to feel that they are part of a larger community. Some increases are proposed to the co-curricular and athletic budgets to provide continued support for these activities, including increases for supplies, added funds for replacement of aging equipment, and increased supplies to support our popular after school robotics program which is now offered at grades 3-12, and affords students at the high school the opportunity to earn credits for their after school participation.

Support for staff is a critical function of a school district and is the foundation of a district’s culture. The district (and town) do not have a dedicated Human Resources position at present, and those responsibilities are distributed across a number of personnel. A recent audit of HR functions on the town side identified some unmet needs and areas of concern. Under our “One Town” model, we propose to share the services of a HR Specialist with the Town at an estimated school district cost of \$35,000. That position is proposed to report to the Business Administrator. This position is also proposed to take over some of the administrative functions associated with our volunteer program.

Our strategic plan calls for expanded learning opportunities for all students and presumes those opportunities will occur both inside and outside of the classroom. Pursuant to the retirement of our long-time volunteer coordinator, Gail Schmader, we propose to eliminate the volunteer coordinator position and replace it with a full-time Volunteer/Extended Learning Opportunity Coordinator position. With some of the administrative responsibilities absorbed by the new HR position, we anticipate that this position will be able to help us develop the opportunities for student internships and field experiences in partnership with area businesses and non-profits.

**Goal 3** of the **strategic plan** focuses on “**student engagement in learning**” and “**teacher engagement in instruction.**” For FY16, the primary foci from a cost-perspective remain technology and teacher professional development. The district funds professional development through lines in each school budget under the categories of staff development and student assessment /curriculum which provide for teacher professional development work during the summer, attendance at workshops and conferences for individual teachers or teams, and release time for work on curriculum alignment. The district also funds, in accordance with the teacher’s contract, reimbursement for approved courses at the university level. Finally, the district provides opportunities for professional development through the use of Title IIA and IDEA local entitlement funds. This year, additional professional development monies at the district level are proposed to support the Gifted and Talented and summer programs.

Technology is an area where the district and its partners, including our parent associations and the Cape Elizabeth Education Foundation, have invested heavily. Our iPad initiative is in its fourth year, and the technology replacement cycle calls for two grade-levels worth of iPads at the high school to be replaced. The district proposes to purchase the new iPads through a lease arrangement through the state MLTI project which will provide better pricing, continued support for teacher devices, and ongoing network support. The three leases included in the technology budget allow the district to extend the use of funds to maintain current technology in the three schools. The approximately 250 iPads being replaced at the high school will be divided between the elementary and middle schools to provide increased access for students in grades K-6.

Software continues to be a rising cost across the schools as teachers and students employ the devices for more personalized instruction. The technology lease also includes replacement of teacher laptops at Pond Cove that have outlived their useful existence. Additional funds have been set aside for cases for repurposed devices to extend their lifespan.

At the high school, approximately \$12,000 is proposed to fund the on-site visit required for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation process.

Goal 3 is focused around engagement and maintaining learner engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires flexibility, nimbleness, and a willingness to try new things. The FY16 budget proposes that \$30,000 be set aside in the FY16 budget to support innovation within our schools. Given that budget proposals are crafted well before students enter our classrooms for the upcoming year, the ability to shift gears and still have the necessary resources available can be tricky. We propose to allocate innovation monies on the basis of proposals submitted by district staff (and students) and vetted by the Innovation Team.

Finally, our last **strategic plan goal, Goal 4**, is to “**Align the budget with strategic plan goals and target resources accordingly.**” In December, the Town Council approved the financing of a \$1.75 million school bond for multiple projects including roofing projects at each school, upgrades to the electrical system at the high school, and the replacement of a rooftop heating ventilation unit in accordance with the goals of the capital improvements plan (CIP). The CIP budget also includes additional funding for a variety of projects and maintains the path begun last year to maintain the multi-million dollar assets that are our school buildings.

In addition to CIP work, the FY16 budget includes monies to replace the accounting software utilized by the school department (and town) so that we can eliminate the need for such archaic items as dot-matrix printers, paper payroll checks rather than direct deposit, and a paper-based purchase order system. By increasing the efficiency of our current system, many hours of staff time can be reprioritized to better serve student learning and district needs.

Finally, \$20,000 is proposed to redesign our current website to improve our communication with students, families, and the general public. Communication has been identified as a School Board goal, and we believe this investment in an improved web presence which can be easily maintained by district staff is worth the expense.

The greatest portion of the school budget, approximately 80%, continues to be staff salary and benefits. Insurance premium increases are unknown at this juncture, but the proposed budget projects an 8% increase. Potential increases in costs for support staff contracts are also unknown at this time as negotiations have not yet begun. We have utilized the preliminary state revenues for General Purpose Aid (GPA) which show Cape to be receiving an approximately \$500,000 increase for FY16. Obviously, it is too early to tell if this will be the final number for GPA.

We believe this budget supports our strategic plan goals and our commitment to providing students with access to quality programs, maintaining a high-caliber staff, and preserving the district’s reputation for excellence. Given all of the variables, our current projection is for an expenditure increase of 2.6% over FY15 levels and a projected net increase to taxes of 1.5%. I look forward to the presentation and discussion of the budget during the coming weeks.