



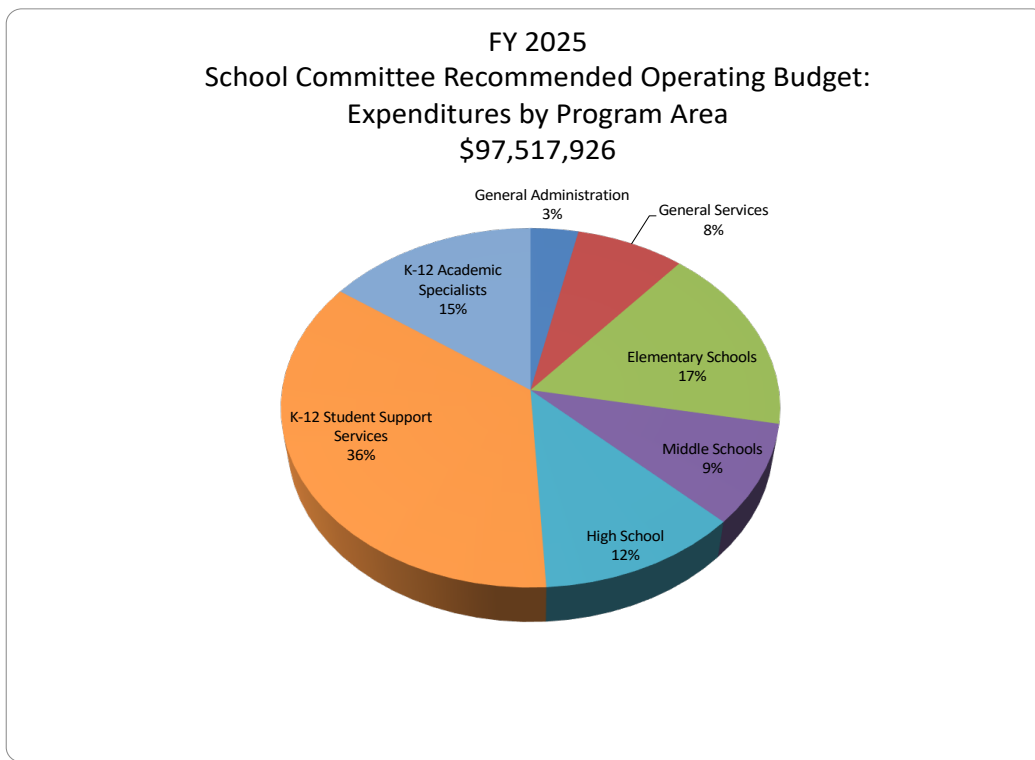
NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1330 HIGHLAND AVENUE
NEEDHAM, MA 02492

March 24, 2024

Dear Town Meeting Members,

In consultation with the Town Manager and Town of Needham Finance Committee, the School Committee presents our FY25 operating budget request in the amount of \$97,517,926. This represents a \$5.4 million (5.8%) increase over the current budget year.



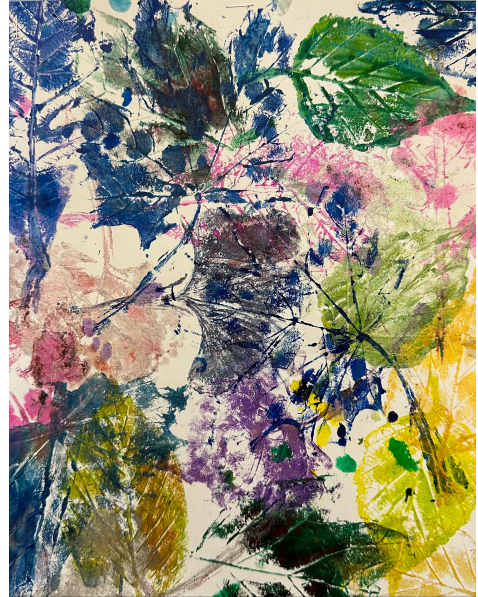
Portrait of a Needham Graduate Strategic Vision Guides Budget Development

Since 2019, our efforts have been guided by the *Portrait of a Needham Graduate* strategic vision. This vision sets forth the skills and competencies we want our students to develop over the course of their Needham education, from preschool through post-graduate. The FY25 budget will allow us to continue implementing our vision to develop students who are Creative Thinkers and Problem Solvers, Communicators and Collaborators, Socially and Culturally Responsive Contributors, Responsible and Resilient Individuals and Empowered Learners. This budget also allows us to respond to a sustained increase in student needs related to lingering academic and social emotional/mental health impacts from the pandemic.

Budget Request Highlights

This budget request is essentially a level service request, allowing us to move existing programs and services forward into the 2024-2025 school year, as well as comply with the terms of our collective bargaining agreements. The increase over the current budget year is comprised of the following:

- Contractual Salary Increases: \$2.9 million (53%)
 - Last year, the School Committee negotiated new contracts with three of our collective bargaining units: teaching assistants, administrative and technical staff, and nutrition services. This budget includes fair and sustainable cost of living adjustments for all of our union and non-union employees that will enable us to recruit, support and retain our talented and increasingly diverse faculty and staff.
- Level Service Requests: \$2.4 million (45%) – more detail provided in the three underlined sections below.
 - Of this amount, \$1.4 million (26%) is for additional special education out-of-district tuition and transportation costs.
- Program Improvements: \$127,755 (2%)
 - These include a part-time American Sign Language teacher at Pollard (currently funded through a Needham Education Foundation grant) and additional funds at the elementary level for staff training in the Responsive Classroom social emotional learning framework and Science Center program support.



Dani Erlich, Broadmeadow Gr 1
“Leaf Print”

Additional Staff Requested

This budget includes a net increase of 8.95 full-time equivalent staff (FTE) made up of the following:

- 4.60 FTE Special education staff to maintain a classroom for students with moderate to severe special education needs that was added this year at Newman Elementary School.
- 2.32 FTE Special education teaching assistants funded in the current year by grants.
- 0.80 FTE English Language Learner (ELL) teachers to address areas of concern identified in a state programming audit.
- 0.60 FTE Maintain Teacher of the Deaf hired during the current school year.
- 0.63 FTE Net additional staff throughout the District.

Special Education Tuition and Transportation Increases

This budget request includes a \$1.2 million net increase for out-of-district special education tuition. This reflects an increase in the number of students requiring costly residential placements and a state-mandated 4.69% increase for private school tuitions in FY25 (which comes on top of the 14% increase provided in FY24). In addition, out-of-district special education transportation costs are increasing by \$175,144 due to a larger number of students being transported as singleton riders than in the past, as well as students being transported longer distances at higher rates. The District receives partial

reimbursement for extraordinary out-of-district tuition and transportation costs from the State through the Circuit Breaker mechanism, and this budget reflects an estimated 73% effective reimbursement rate for prior year tuition expenses, and a 57% reimbursement rate for prior year transportation expenses.

Other Increases

The budget request includes additional funding for the following items:

- \$135,075 for yellow bus transportation to avoid raising bus fees for families.
- \$92,378 for software licenses and translation services.
- \$75,000 to augment the replacement cycle for digital devices that were acquired for all K-12 students during the pandemic.
- \$60,625 to protect the fiscal sustainability of the integrated preschool program and avoid raising fees for families.
- \$30,000 for our athletic program to avoid raising participant fees.

Pollard Middle School Building Project

In December, Needham was accepted into the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s (MSBA) Eligibility Period for a project to renovate and expand the Pollard Middle School. Warrant Article 26 requests \$2.75 million for a feasibility study for this project. This warrant article is the first step in securing partial state reimbursement for a Pollard project that would achieve the following goals:

- Address Pollard’s significant building infrastructure and space needs.
- Bring Grades 6-8 back together in a single building, maintaining the benefits of the current 6th grade experience while expanding opportunities for students, limiting student transitions, and allowing for more efficient middle school staffing and operations.



Timmy Christen, Grade 8
“Tile Design”

Undertaking a project at the Pollard School first (before a project at the Mitchell School) allows us to:

- Avoid building costly, temporary swing space during a Mitchell School project. We can move students into High Rock School while we rebuild Mitchell, saving roughly \$40 million.
- Expand elementary classroom capacity. We can open High Rock as a 6th elementary school upon completion of the Mitchell project.

Under the current project timeline, and assuming feasibility study funds are appropriated at this Town Meeting, the School Committee would seek construction funding and a debt exclusion in the Fall of 2026, with the new school projected to open in September 2031. The total Pollard project cost is currently estimated at \$315 million, not including any MSBA reimbursement. The MSBA reimbursed approximately 20% of the Sunita Williams total project costs; this equates to a potential Pollard reimbursement of over \$60 million. We look forward to engaging with Town Meeting members and the entire community to provide more information and receive feedback on this critical project.

Additional FY25 Capital Requests

Additional school capital requests in the Annual Town Meeting Warrant (Article 25) include:

- \$54,000 for playground improvements at the integrated preschool at Newman Elementary.
- \$34,000 for design funds for the replacement of the Eliot Elementary boiler.
- \$32,673 for replacement of fitness center equipment at Needham High School.
- Annual funding requests for replacement of school equipment: technology (\$661,150), copiers (\$66,767), vehicles (\$66,388) and furniture (\$25,000).

The Special Town Meeting Warrant includes an article requesting \$344,558 for upgrades and improvements in school auditoriums. Of this amount, \$114,630 is needed for code-related repairs to the stage equipment in the Newman, Pollard and Needham High auditoriums. An additional \$229,928 is being sought for design funds to study theatrical sound and lighting upgrades for the Newman auditorium, with a construction funding request anticipated at a future Town Meeting. More information about the requested code repairs and improvements is documented in the 2023 Hewshott Study available on the [District website/IT Services/Plante Moran Report](#).

Finally, the School Department supports the following school-related operating and capital budget requests submitted by other Town departments, including:

- Ongoing support for facilities maintenance (Warrant Article 7) and the Department of Public Works operating budget.
- \$2.6 million for tennis court improvements at Needham High School (Article 21).
- \$800,000 to install electric vehicle charging stations (Article 25).
- \$454,000 for renovation of the Library's Young Adult Area (Article 25).
- \$100,000 for the sustainable building retrofit program (Article 25).

Information Technology Services Consolidation

Along with the Select Board, the School Committee strongly supports the proposed consolidation of school and municipal information technology services as outlined in Warrant Article 12. Earlier this year, the Superintendent and Town Manager engaged a consultant to review the organizational structure of town-wide information technology services. The consultant's report, [available on the NPS website under Departments/Information Technology Services](#), recommended that the Town and School technology departments be unified in a single structure under the direction of the School Department. The planned consolidation will result in more efficient deployment of staff and services, greater cohesion and collaboration, more comprehensive strategic planning, and more consistent implementation of policies, procedures and staff training. Detailed information about the proposed consolidation and the funds requested in the Warrant Article is presented in a separate FAQ document.

Conclusion

This budget request provides the resources our District needs to continue implementing our *Portrait of a Needham Graduate* strategic vision, which aims to provide an outstanding and holistic learning experience for our students that is grounded in the principles of equity, inclusion, antidiscrimination and antiracism. We are immensely fortunate to have partners throughout the Town of Needham, notably the Select Board, Town Manager, Finance Committee, and Town Meeting, as well as our amazing students, families, faculty and staff who support us in our important work. Please reach out to the School Committee at schoolcommittee@needham.ma.k12.us should you have any questions. We respectfully ask for your support of our operating and capital budget requests as proposed.

Sincerely,



Andrea Longo Carter
Chair, Needham School Committee ('25)



Emma Rogovoy, Grade 8
"Beyond the Border Chameleon"

This page is intentionally blank.