



NMRSD Update Saturday, February 4, 2023

Dear NM Community,

With Monday's Public Hearing on the FY2024 Budget and joint boards meeting (a collaborative budget meeting with all three of our communities) fast approaching, I want to communicate with the entire NM community the issues we will be facing in FY2024, FY2025, and beyond.

As you may know, the NMRSD fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th of each respective year and represents a full budget year. FY2024 refers to the 2023-2024 school calendar year.

As Superintendent, one of my primary responsibilities is to present a budget that is not only responsible and sustainable, but also serves our students each year while also keeping a close eye on future budget cycles. That is a challenge annually in a regional school district like NM for the following reasons:

1. We have a minimal commercial tax base, which puts the great majority of our budgetary stress on residential taxpayers.
2. We are a regional school district, and the antiquated funding formula that assists all Massachusetts school districts with funding based on enrollment needs to be addressed at the state level.
3. We receive minimal grants because we do not qualify, as a district, as urban or rural.

In addition, each of our member communities faces challenges in providing residents with necessary services. That said, presenting a budget that is less than a 2.5% increase is no longer possible due to the fact that the following expenditures already exceed (some significantly) that percentage annually:

1. Health Insurance
2. Regular and Special Education Transportation
3. Collective Bargaining Agreement Salary Schedules
4. Utilities

As you can imagine, inflation and post-COVID needs for students have also presented significant challenges, and many of these are likely to carry forward for years to come.

The FY2024 budget proposal is currently sitting at a 6.34% increase over FY2023. Some of this increase is attributed to the fact that since the FY2023 budget was finalized, we have had to add over 15 full-time positions to meet the needs of our students. The majority of additions were due to policy limiting K-4 class sizes to less than 30 students, special education needs, and student social-emotional needs. This year, like in years past, we have been able to bridge the financial gap by utilizing grants and district-revolving accounts, however, those are not sustainable and should really be utilized for one-time costs (such as curriculum needs, professional development, capital improvements - all of which are underfunded) as opposed to annual costs.

In order to reduce the budget to what has been presented over the past four years, we would need to reduce this number by over \$2,000,000. The NMRSD budget does not have the capacity to make reductions that would amount to this without considering alternative cost-saving measures, none of which come without significant consequences.

As some may have heard at recent school committee meetings, temporarily moving students from Ashby Elementary School (AES) to the Squannacook Early Childhood Center (SECC) building was being considered. To be clear, savings from this would not solve the problems facing NM. When these types of solutions are presented, I always try to put myself in the shoes of the residents. I can say without hesitation that if I were an Ashby resident, I would want to explore every possible option of keeping AES open, especially where it is the only school in town. I also feel that based on conversations with school committee members, they agree with this sentiment.

Another scenario that is being explored is what a staffing reduction of \$1.3 - \$2M would look like in NM. As you can imagine, a reduction of this amount

would have a significant impact on class sizes, course offerings, student supervision, and culture to name a few.

In looking at projections for next year, it is possible that more teachers will be necessary to adhere to our current class size policy, but there are not contingency funds incorporated into this budget as we will likely need to make reductions.

NMRSD in past years has made some decisions that, at a minimum, would not have a negative budgetary impact. These include:

1. Limiting School Choice - NMRSD has limited school choice at all NMRSD buildings for the following reasons:
 - a. Fiscal Responsibility - the past practice, has been to break a class into two sections when a class reaches 30 students. Our updated policy calls for additional staffing once a K-4 class reaches 25 student. The district has to be very cautious here. For example, if a second grade class grows to 24 students over the summer and the school committee has allocated two school choice slots for second grade at a given school, that would bring the class to 26 students, thus forcing the class to break into two sections. NMRSD receives \$5K for each school choice student, and in this case, we would receive \$10K towards an additional teacher, who, with benefits, would cost approximately \$90K, forcing the district to come up with the additional \$80K. Once school choice slots have been approved, the district cannot take those away regardless of growth that has occurred since the vote and the approved student(s) is/are eligible to continue in the district each year through graduation. It is also important to keep in mind that our most current per pupil costs come in at just over \$18K.
 - b. Special Education Costs - school choice students often come with Individualized Education Plans, which add additional expenses to the district. These costs are partially reimbursed through the school choice claim process. In addition, if for some reason, a student who has been admitted through school choice requires an out-of-district special education extended evaluation (45-day placement) and/or additional in-district services, that cost responsibility is 100% on NMRSD.

2. Moving Special Education Programs to Varnum Brook was a cost savings measure of over \$200K annually. This is due to the fact that many students in our programs require specialized transportation. Specialized programs are programs that serve a low-incidence population (those with autism or with an emotional disability requiring a substantially separate classroom). These district-wide programs serve students from all three towns and are located in one building per level (elementary, middle, and high). In reviewing these programs at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, we noticed that a majority of the program students are/were from Pepperell, and moving the program to Varnum Brook resulted in a dramatic decrease in transportation costs. In addition, there is less time lost in travel for both the Evaluation Team Leader and service providers, who previously were traveling between multiple schools, which has also resulted in a cost savings.
3. Solar and other utility upgrades - The district has implemented solar energy on three buildings and has contracted to purchase solar credits through the Locke Brook Solar farm. All of our member towns have also supported utility cost reductions by including the NMRSD in the application for Green Communities state grants. A number of projects in all three towns have been implemented that reduce energy consumption. We continue to explore ways to keep the operating costs down.

In talking with superintendents of other regional school districts, our proposed budget increase number is either comparable to or lower than many.

We are also trying to be mindful of the challenges that lie ahead, which include:

1. At the conclusion of FY2024, all five of our collective bargaining agreements expire, and negotiations will likely commence this summer. Like districts across the country, the goal has moved from not only recruiting new and talented staff but also retaining existing staff. There is a significant teacher shortage on the horizon, and NM was able to avoid issues this year, but with the number of people entering the profession not keeping pace with the number leaving, competition will increase, and we will need to ensure our salary schedules are competitive.
2. At the conclusion of FY2024, our busing contract expires. Based on the last contract, we are projecting a 3-year contract with an increase of 20-25%.

3. The potential of building projects at both Ashby Elementary and Hawthorne Brook Middle School.

In closing, I have reached out to our elected officials at the state level numerous times over the past few years in an effort to put regional school district funding and the obstacles they face on the table for discussion. There seems to be some progress here, so there is always hope the state will come through with additional funding or that some of our projections around health insurance and transportation will come in lower. What is clear is that the proposed increase of 6.34% would result in town assessments north of 10%. The challenges of FY2024 and FY2025 could result in increases that our residents cannot afford and this is without factoring in any additional increases that building projects could create.

In the meantime, if you are interested in learning more about the budget process and the thought that goes into it, I would encourage you to review the full budget message, which can be found [here](#).

Parent Input regarding District-Wide Family Informational Opportunities

As part of our strategic plan, our administrative team both at the central office and school levels were assigned to monitor progress and implementation of the action steps to help work towards achieving our strategic objectives. Mrs. Cromwell-Gapp, AES Principal, and Mrs. Smith, NMRHS Assistant Principal, have been focusing on Strategic Priority 2.3, as part of the objective of Meeting All Needs of All Students. Under Priority 2.3, the district offers three district-wide informational opportunities annually to support and educate the student's social-emotional needs. Please take a moment to complete our survey in planning topics and times for next year's events. [CLICK HERE](#) to access the survey. We appreciate your input in developing and offering parent informational workshops that best meet the needs of our community. To view our strategic plan, [CLICK HERE](#).

Kindness ROCKS!!!

Be on the lookout for Kindness ROCKS! Students in the Sidekicks Program have designed and painted rocks with the hope to spread KINDNESS and have some fun.

Here's how it works...

Students have placed these rocks all over Pepperell, Townsend, and Ashby. You may even see one at the beach, the mall, or a favorite

restaurant. If you are lucky enough to find a rock you may pick it up and keep it. That little rock will stay with you until you do an act of kindness, no matter how big or small. Then you can send that rock on its way for the next person to find. You can put that rock anywhere you want in the world. Hopefully, the next person that finds it will do the same!

We all do acts of kindness every day from our hearts and don't need recognition, we want to encourage others to do the same.

On the back of each rock is a code that you can scan on your phone so that everyone can track the spreading of kindness. PASS IT ON!

Please click on the link below for more information.

Kindness ROCKS Project.pdf

Pepperell Study Hall Opportunity

Please click on the link below that gives residents the opportunity to attend a free weekly study hall.

This is sponsored by the Town of Pepperell Recreation Commission and will be supervised by a retired dean from UMass Lowell who actually started UML's Honors Program. He will be donating 3 hours a week and will provide food and drink as well as a quiet area for NM students in grades 7-12, as well as college students and adults looking to get some work done. This will be held in the Sis McGrath Community Center and is ***open to any age-appropriate resident in Pepperell, Ashby, or Townsend.***

Pepperell's Study Hall.pdf

Communicating with Central Office

We have received feedback from parents and caregivers who are having difficulty contacting Central Office administration.

One of the more frequent issues has been a breakdown in communication when I (Brad Morgan - Superintendent) am confused with Brad Brooks (Director of Special Education/Student Support Services). This occurs, for example, when I receive a phone call after not responding to an email, when, in fact, the email was sent to Brad Brooks, who replied to the email/phone call, and vice versa. Please note, in instances where someone leaves a phone message and sends an email, only one of those will be replied to when the message/inquiry is the same. In instances where more than one administrator is in the email thread, one administrator will often respond to the email for the group.

To assist with this, the contact protocol is as follows:

Parents/Guardians - Who to Contact

Very often students and/or parents are not sure who to contact in the North Middlesex Regional School District in case of questions, concerns, or problems. Please direct these to the appropriate contact(s) below to ensure a prompt response.

*Classroom issues...*contact the teacher first. If you have additional concerns, contact the guidance counselor. If you are still concerned, contact the building Principal.

*Scheduling issues...*contact the Guidance Counselor first. If you have additional concerns, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal.

*Curriculum issues...*contact the appropriate teacher first. If you have additional concerns, contact the building Principal. Finally, contact the Assistant Superintendent's office to speak with the applicable Director.

*Special Education issues...*contact the appropriate teacher(s) first and then your son/daughter's special education liaison (listed on your child's IEP), if warranted. If you have additional concerns, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal. Finally, contact the Student Services office.

*Behavioral issues...*contact the teacher first. If you are still concerned, contact the Guidance Counselor and then the building Assistant Principal/Principal.

*Social, emotional, personal, health, or family issues...*contact the Guidance Counselor, the School Adjustment Counselor, or the nurse to discuss your concerns with them. If necessary, also contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal. If you feel your concern has gone unresolved, contact the Student Services office.

Homeless or temporary housing status (McKinney Vento, Foster Care, or Military Status): Contact the Guidance Counselor and inform them of your status. In some instances, they may direct you to the building Principal. Finally, contact the Student Services office. The homeless liaison (Brad Brooks) will be notified of the status, and transportation will be arranged through his office (if needed).

All homeless students, once identified, receive free lunch for the remainder of the school year, and this is certified by the homeless liaison to the free/reduced lunch coordinator. If you become homeless within the school year and then are able to obtain a new residence (either within NM or another community), your child may still be eligible to remain in their school through the remainder of the school year. Please communicate this with your child's counselor and the homeless liaison if this happens.

*Athletics issues...*contact the coach first. If you are still concerned, contact the Director of Athletics. Finally, contact the Principal.

*Attendance issues...*contact the Guidance Counselor first. If attendance issues continue, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal.

*Report Cards & Transcripts...*contact the Guidance Counselor first. If you have additional questions, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal.

*Harassment & Discrimination...*contact building Principal. If you are still concerned, contact the Title IX and VI Coordinators. Finally, contact the Human Resources office.

*Suspected Bullying...*contact the Guidance Counselor. If you are still concerned, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal. You may be asked to fill out a Bullying Reporting Form (available on the district website)

*Technology questions and/or issues...*contact the district technology office.

*Student Activities/Clubs...*contact the advisor first. If you are still concerned, contact the building Assistant Principal/Principal.

*Special Education Transportation (VanPool Transportation)...*contact the Student Services office.

*Transportation (Dee Bus)...*contact the building secretary, followed by the building Assistant Principal/Principal. Finally, contact the business office.

*Food Service...*contact the Food Services Manager. Finally, contact the business office.

*Ethics Questions...*contact the Massachusetts State Ethics Commission. The

Commission's Legal Division provides free, confidential advice to anyone subject to the conflict of interest law. To obtain advice from the Commission, call (617) 371-9500 or (888) 485-4766, or submit a request for advice online.

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/state-ethics-commission-frequently-asked-questions>

*District Policies...*contact your School Committee representative or the committee chairperson.

For email contact to a specific faculty, staff, or committee member, please enter the person's first initial and last name @nmrsd.org, for example:

jdoe@nmrsd.org.

2022-2023 NMRSD Administrative Team

Name	Role	School
Anne Cromwell-Gapp	Principal Extended Day Program Coordinator	AES
Kate Guziejka	Principal	SMS and SECC
Kristen Fearon	Assistant Principal	SMS
Diane Gleason	Interim Principal	VBES
Ami Dolan	Assistant Principal	VBES
Jason Webster	Principal	HBMS
Chantele Olmstead	Assistant Principal	HBMS
Lauren Young	Principal	NMS
Evan Worth	Assistant Principal	NMS
Tim McMahon	Principal	NMRHS
Laurie Smith	Assistant Principal	NMRHS
Ryan Demar	Assistant Principal	NMRHS
Matt Dawson	Athletic Director	NMRHS

Oscar Hills	Director of Facilities & Grounds	District
David Amari	Assistant Director of Facilities and Grounds	District
Cathryn Hampson	Supervisor of Health Services	District
Jeremy Hamond	Director of Technology & Facility Rentals	District
Nancy Haines	Business Manager	District
Anne Marie Tucciarone-Mahan	Director of Human Resources Title VI/IX Coordinator for Staff	District
Brad Brooks	Director of Student Services/Special Education McKinney Vento Homeless Liaison ADA Compliance Officer	District
John Judge	Assistant Director of Special Education	District
Margaret Desilets	Evaluation Team Leader	District
Gary Burboa-Reese	Assistant Superintendent Homeschool Coordinator Title VI/IX Coordinator for Students	District
Kevin Cormier	Director of STEM (Math, Science, & Engineering)	District
Lisa Comeau	Director of Humanities (English, Language Arts, History & Social Sciences)	District
Brad Morgan	Superintendent	District

North Middlesex Patriots Apparel and Spirit Wear

Shop NM Patriots apparel, clothing, spirit wear, and merchandise on our NM District Apparel Flash Store or shop by sport on our NM Patriots Athletic Apparel Flash Store. Orders are due on **Sunday, February 12, 2023.**

North Middlesex School District Apparel Store - Orders due Sunday 2/12/23

North Middlesex Athletic Apparel Store - Orders due Sunday 2/12/23

IMPORTANT: To ensure proper distribution, please begin by selecting the school you want to receive your merchandise. We will arrange to have orders sent home with your student. Parents will also have the choice to pick up during specified hours.

From the NMRSD School Committee ... The School Committee formed a Communication Subcommittee to review School Committee interaction with district communities. As part of that work, they decided to post quarterly updates on our website, reviewing major agenda items and decisions as a part of their meetings. The updates can be found [here](#) on our website.

Community Coffees (Virtual)

All Community Coffees will be virtual and will be held at 4:00 pm on the following Mondays:

February 13th

March 27th

May 8th

The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Student Services will attend the coffees.

2022-2023 School Committee Meeting Dates

For the time being, all sub-committee and most school committee meetings will continue to be virtual as we continue to receive feedback that it is more convenient for the public to attend. Attendance at school committee meetings is one of the best ways to remain current with district policy, budgetary matters, and news.

All meetings, unless noted otherwise, are held on Monday evenings and begin at 7:00 pm. For the full docket of meetings, please click on the link below:

[2022-2023 School Committee Dates](#)

Please note that these dates are subject to change as committee business necessitates.

2022-2023 School Calendar

For the full 2022-2023 school calendar, please click the link below:

[School Calendar](#)