



North Middlesex Regional School District
Superintendent's FY2021 Budget Message Draft #2
February 10, 2020

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Superintendent of Schools

The mission of the North Middlesex Regional School District is *“To provide a comprehensive educational experience focused on students becoming contributing members of society.”* Each year, it is the Superintendent’s job to advance that mission with a budget that puts in place people, programs, and appropriate facilities; that support energized instruction and engaged learning; that pushes innovation in all aspects of the school experience; and remain aligned with our core values.

The newly adopted 5-Year Strategic Plan of the North Middlesex Regional School District provides a road map for our work, with goals and strategies tied to our mission. In addition, we measure the value and success of our work against five (5) Core Values:

1. The well-being of our students is at the heart of what we do.
2. Learning is a lifelong process for both students and staff.
3. A safe and supportive school climate is essential to student success.
4. All members of the North Middlesex community have the capacity to grow and develop their character.
5. We respect diversity in all forms.

With respect to the FY2021 budget, one of our main focuses has been to improve our communication with our member towns by hosting a series of preliminary budget meetings in order to be as transparent as possible. For each budget meeting, member towns were invited to send a team made up of:

- Town Manager/Administrator
- Board of Selectmen Member
- Finance Committee Member

Realizing that each town has its own budgetary challenges, we approached this budget as one where the District will, in most cases, only pursue increases in areas of absolute need so that we can maintain level services in order to address student needs, maintain strong academic programming, provide adequate staffing, and maintain our facilities and technology. The FY21 budget, while considered a level services budget does include some increases on FY20 due to our inability to properly maintain our new high school due to inadequate staffing, the need for increased social-emotional supports at the elementary school level, and reinstating a librarian and drama position for equitable programming in our schools.

Budgets are the vehicle by which leaders communicate their priorities and implement the mission, vision, core values, and goals of the organization. Without a commitment of financial resources, the goals of the school system cannot be accomplished. The decrease in student population has had little impact on services due to increases in the areas of contractual obligations, rising health insurance costs, transportation increases, and the need to address social-emotional education and supports for our students.

Specifically, this budget is consistent with the district's vision and education priorities. Areas of focus include:

1. To create a proposed budget that is transparent and specific so that the School Committee and community leaders can understand our proposals and how they support the educational vision of the District.
2. To continue to create programmatic consistency at both the elementary and middle levels as we work towards truly becoming a PreK-12 district. We have made a great deal of progress in this area and will continue to move in this direction to ensure similar student experiences.
3. To begin to build a support system to assist the Assistant Superintendent with curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data analysis as well as building principals with additional support in educator evaluation.

4. To examine all potential sources of revenue that the District has at its disposal in order to fund additional enhancements without overly burdening the annual operating budget.
5. To build an equitable technology infrastructure so that we can increase our purposeful use of technology to benefit students and staff.
6. To begin the implementation of a long-term vision for instructional materials and equipment.
7. To continue conversations towards the development of a stabilization fund in order to address our growing list of capital needs.

Overall Budget Picture

The FY2021 budget development proposal represents a 3.78% increase over FY2020. The current FY2021 budget estimate is a total of \$58,661,116.

The 3.78% increase breaks down into the following categories:

- 1.62% Employee contractual obligations
- 0.04% Reading OG/Admin Coverage
- 0.07% Curriculum Supplies/Implementation
- 0.11% Increase Adjustment Counselor
- 0.04% Textbooks, classroom supplies
- 0.23% Regular and special education transportation increases
- 0.93% Active and retired insurance
- (0.10%) Insurance & Unemployment
- 0.63% Debt service
- 0.29% Plant facilities/utilities/security/staff
- 0.30% Technology
- 0.13% Middlesex Retirement assessment
- (0.01%) Special education tuitions
- (0.52%) Charter School and School Choice Assessment
- 0.02% All other budget modifications

In addition, our budget is based on three (3) key overall principles:

- Classroom teachers and maintaining appropriate class sizes are important.
- Professional learning and program evaluation are critical elements of a successful organization. A second focus has been on teaching and

learning, program review, professional learning around system objectives, and data analysis as the building blocks of continuous improvement.

- We have prioritized providing consistent programming at the elementary and middle levels, while putting a focus on how to actively market NMRHS as an institution that offers an education and overall culture that, at minimum, matches private, technical, and charter schools in the area.

While these beliefs have served our students and families well in the past, they do not fully capture the priorities of this school system and community. The aforementioned investments represent increases to the FY2020 budget, however, the FY2021 budget still does not address other needs such as:

- A more aggressive approach towards 1:1 in technology. Technology is an important component of a quality teaching and learning environment. Equitable access to the contemporary tools of teaching and learning for all teachers and students is no longer something that is “nice to have.” Appropriate tools are the basics of a quality classroom and are necessary to prepare students to be college and career ready.
- Appropriate funding for curriculum and materials.
- The district’s growing and substantial capital improvement needs.
- The addition of Curriculum directors to help support the assistant superintendent and building principals with curriculum, instruction, assessment, and educator evaluation.

It is important to understand that equity does not mean equal. Some of our students require more of our teachers and services than others in order to meet the high academic and social standards we set. Our emphasis on differentiation within the classroom and using quality assessment to drive instruction to provide two tangible examples of our work to meet the needs of all learners, which can only be accomplished through reasonable class sizes and adequate staffing in the classroom and student services. Furthermore, our special education programming directs important resources to particular populations to ensure that all students and families have access to quality instruction, support, and information.

We know that compromises and choices will need to be made and that these ideas will require a substantial financial commitment on the part of the NM

taxpayers. We look forward to the opportunity to continue these discussions over the coming months.

This FY2021 budget proposal represents an opportunity to provide critical resources to support student services, to continue to enhance our special education services in NM, to reaffirm our commitment to the belief that class size matters, and to reiterate our pledge to provide an equitable technology plan throughout our schools within the framework of the larger, ongoing conversation about the resources and choices that will be necessary to make our mission, vision, core values and goals a reality.

I have actively consulted with my leadership team, in formulating the FY2021 plan. The following spending plan represents my best judgment of the greatest good in line with our obligations to both the current citizens and the taxpayers of the next generation.

Expenditures

Educator, Secretarial, Nursing, Custodial, & Paraprofessional Increases

Based on our current projections, which include student population, class size, individual education plan needs, and scheduling, we are projecting a 14.62 FTE increase in staffing over the FY2020 budget. While a 14.62 FTE increase sounds substantial, in actuality it is only at 4.12 FTE increase because both the paraprofessionals (9.5 FTE) and fine arts teacher (1.0) were funded through other savings we identified in the FY20 budget (mainly savings in salary lines). Paraprofessional needs are in constant flux from one year to the next due to both changes in services and student transiency but are mandatory as they are aligned to student service plans, which all districts are required to follow.

FTE	Location	Position	Salary	Rationale
1.0	SMS	Library Media Specialist	\$58,598	Add back this FTE that was reduced in FY2020 budget - Consistency
1.0	HBMS	Fine Arts Teacher	\$53,392	Add back this FTE that was reduced in the FY2020 Budget.
2.0	NMRHS	Facility & Grounds	\$80,000	Support during the week and provide weekend coverage - These positions were a part of the FY19 budget - one was cut and one was out on medical and not filled - the new high school requires these positions in

				order to keep up with the work of the new facility.
.2	CO	Facility & Grounds Secretary	\$13,000	Additional support for Plant & Facilities
.5	SMS	SAC	\$39,500	Make full time
.5	VBES	SAC	\$39,500	Make full time
PT	DW	Grant Writer Oversee Title I & ELL Principal Coach Administrative Sub	\$60,000	This position will replace the four (4) curriculum specialists, which were not filled in FY20 due to an increased need for paraprofessionals over the summer. This person will help support the work of the Assistant Superintendent, cover buildings when an administrator is out, and coach our new principals - which is required by DESE. We currently have four (4) administrators in the district who are coached and next year we will have five (5). Coaches have been out-of-district professionals who have been hired in the past at a rate of \$3-5K annually.
	DW	Facility & Grounds Foreman	\$10,000	Currently, when our Director of Facilities & Grounds is out, we do not have anyone who is specifically "in charge." Although the work is absorbed, we need to address this as these are union personnel.
9.5	DWS & SECC	Paraprofessionals	\$200,000	Since the approval of the FY20 budget, additional paraprofessionals have been brought back to cover a number of changes in student needs. The change in paraprofessionals was covered with savings in other areas in FY20. The FY21 grant amounts are unknown at this time. We typically plan conservatively for a return of two staff to the general fund to account for the potential reduction of grant awards. We anticipate adjustments in this area once the final grant amounts are known.

Potential Other Additions to FY2021

I believe the FY2021 budget proposal described above represents a realistic scenario for the fiscal year. However, there is some possibility that NMRSD may receive additional revenues that would permit us to enhance this budget plan. Although final recommendations will be formulated when and if these funds become available, and in accordance with any restrictions imposed by the eventual funding program, our priorities for additional improvements and

restorations would include the following (in no particular order):

- Purchase a 14 Passenger Van/mini-bus (To replace existing 2009 Wheelchair Van currently used by the Gateway Program)
- Install a Community Walking Path along the high school fields
- Additional monies for capital projects that have been identified by the school committee

FTE	Location	Position	Salary

Reductions

FTE	Location	Position	Salary	Rationale
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Employee Salaries & Benefits

1. Employee retirement expenses directly impact the budget on an annual basis. Specifically, we are forecasting exit costs of cost of \$75,000 (level funded) in FY2021. However, through the recruitment process to fill

these positions, we will look at a combination of skill-set and cost to the district, which usually results in a decrease.

2. The FY2021 preliminary active employee health insurance budget is estimated to increase by \$314,086 or an increase of 6.36%. The rates for Middlesex Nashoba Health Group are normally voted on by the membership in early February. The GIC assessment for retired teachers is estimated to increase by \$202,985 or an increase of 9.90%. The FY2021 GIC assessment will not be released until the GIC votes the new rates for FY2021. This vote takes place in mid-February as well. Together, the active and retiree health insurance increase is 16.27% over the FY2020 budget.
3. Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Secretaries, Custodian and Nurse's collective bargaining agreements have been settled. Each of these agreements includes a 2% COLA for FY2019, FY2020, and FY2021.

Utilities & Legal Fees

The district continues to look for ways to optimize utility costs across buildings. The district went "live" with two solar projects this past year on the North Middlesex Regional High School and Ashby Elementary School. The projects generated 669,832 kilowatt-hours and saved approx. \$40,500 in electric costs the past year. The School Committee is reviewing the possibility of an implementation of another rooftop solar system on the Varnum Brook Elementary School. The estimate for heating of buildings includes a reduction of \$115,000 and electric utilities are estimated to increase by \$33,400. An additional review will be done to see if there could be further opportunities for savings.

Legal services include a minor increase anticipated for FY21. Contract negotiations will be beginning mid-2021.

Athletics

The FY21 budget includes an increase of \$17,500 in the Officials line to support added game officials i.e ticket sellers for turf-sports, mandated ball-patrol, and contracted athletic trainers/EMT's.

Textbooks, Instructional Materials & Equipment, and Professional Learning

General classroom supplies include an increase of \$10,000 to cover one-time costs of an added photography class.

Special Education & Transportation

The district continues to work with students to find the least restrictive environment. During the 19-20 school year, 5 students have returned to district special education programs from out of district placements. Tuitions for FY2021 are budgeted at \$4,753,000 which is \$23,000 less than in FY2020. We anticipate using \$1,100,000 in Circuit Breaker funds. The district continues to work to streamline costs for both in-district and out-of-district special education transportation. The district went out to bid for special education transportation costs. This resulted in an anticipated savings of \$10,694 in special education transportation for FY21. The district continues to see increases in the McKinney Vento homeless transportation and this remains difficult to predict but is mandated by the federal government. We are budgeting a \$25,000 increase in McKinney Vento homeless transportation.

Technology

The technology budget includes funding to maintain our current device quantities and infrastructure including replacement of any Chromebooks that will no longer be compatible with the latest operating systems and replacement of our oldest mounted projects.

Support Contract Renewals: Network infrastructure and phone systems support contracts and licensing were prepaid as part of the high school building project and last year's phone system upgrades. Funding to maintain licensing and support for these critical systems have been added to the FY21 budget request.

Wireless Infrastructure Upgrade: As we become increasingly dependant on a large number of wireless devices, including BYOD (Bring Your Own Device), we have identified a need to increase the number of wireless access points we are able to install. The Technology budget request includes funding to rewire the portion of the network at all middle and elementary schools that support the district wireless infrastructure. We will be adding higher speed connections for wireless access points in every classroom as well as large common areas

following a pattern similar to what was implemented at the high school. The resulting structure will allow for both current and future expansion needs. Existing wireless access points will be relocated and some additional wireless access points will be added once the wiring is complete. Applications for Erate funding to partially pay for this project have been submitted and the requested budget will be adjusted if more funding than anticipated is awarded.

Transportation

FY21 represents the second year of a three year contract for regular education transportation. The increase in the regular ed transportation line is 2.30%. The FY21 contracted amount was planned to increase by 6.89% but due to the elimination of a bus in Ashby, the overall increase amount was reduced.

The Special Education transportation contract is ending 6/30/2020 and the district went out to bid for these services on December 19th. The bids came in and the district received only one bid. We anticipate a reduction to the Special education transportation line of \$10,694.

As a regional district, we are required to provide a “seat” for all students who live over two miles from their school. What was promised to be a 100% funded program, is now only an average 70% reimbursement from the state for transportation costs for all students greater than 1.5 miles.

This continues to be less than the originally proposed 100%. The current anticipated state transportation reimbursement (aka Chapter 71) is \$1,035,840.

The FY20 budget included \$23,800 to support middle school after school bussing. We are currently evaluating the need for this in FY21 and how best to serve our middle school students and families.

Custodial & Maintenance

The district continues to fund capital repairs to the buildings within the overall budget. The FY2021 budget includes \$250,000 allocated for this purpose. The capital planning committee will be meeting to prioritize the projects for FY2021.

The FY21 budget includes several necessary requests:

- 2.0 FTE custodial /groundskeepers staff (\$80,000 total)

- .2 FTE in increased secretarial help \$13,000
- \$10,000 for a foreman stipend

A custodial position was vacated by a retiree a few years ago and never replaced. Initially, the plan was to utilize several part-time staff to cover this position however this is proving not to be fully filling the needs. The second FTE will be a grounds position at the high school to help support the increase in required maintenance at the new building.

The request includes an increase in the secretary position from a .8 FTE to a 1.0 FTE. The budget increase is estimated at \$13,000.

The foreman stipend will be provided to one or more custodial staff to take on more responsibility and to help oversee the custodial/maintenance staff.

In addition to the staffing increases the budget includes an increase of \$33,000 for Building Maintenance, \$104,000 in security systems for camera and intercom upgrades and \$10,500 in equipment.

Contingencies & Circuit Breaker

The district plans to utilize circuit breaker funds to support special education tuition costs in FY2021. The total budget for special education tuition costs is estimated at \$4,753,000 - \$3,653,000 will be budgeted from the general fund and \$1,100,000 will be budgeted from circuit breaker revolving funds.

(The 5 year average of \$890,681 has been carried from circuit breaker for unanticipated special education costs)

Excess & Deficiencies CMR 41.06 (E & D)

1. Every regional school district shall maintain an excess and deficiency fund on its books of account. At the end of every fiscal year, any surplus or deficit in the district's general fund shall be closed to the excess and deficiency fund.
2. On or before October 31 of each year, every regional school district shall submit to the Department of Revenue the forms and schedules as the Department of Revenue requires for the purpose of reviewing and certifying the balance in the regional school district's excess and deficiency fund. At the discretion of the Commissioner, the Department

may withhold release of all or some part of the quarterly state school aid for the regional school district if the regional school district has not filed the required forms and schedules by such date.

3. A regional school committee may use all or part of the certified balance in the excess and deficiency fund as a revenue source for its proposed budget. If the certified balance exceeds five percent of the proposed budget, the regional school committee shall use the amount in excess of five percent as a revenue source for its proposed budget.

A recent history of NMRSD use of Excess & Deficiency funds are as follows:

Fiscal Year	Certified E&D	Used to support subsequent budget	
FY14	\$1,516,911	\$250,000	
FY15	\$1,958,782	\$300,000	
FY16	\$2,744,243	\$490,000	
FY17	\$3,035,703	\$1,360,000	
FY18	\$3,172,219	\$1,300,000	Certified excess over 5% is \$450,593
FY19	\$3,000,000 EST	\$1,300,000 EST	Estimated -Not certified

2018 Per Pupil Cost

North Middlesex Regional School District	\$16,047
Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School	\$16,452
Sizer School, A North Central Charter Essential School	\$16,757
Ayer-Shirley	\$14,829
Ashburnham-Westminster	\$12,523
Belchertown	\$13,575
Bellingham	\$15,581
East Bridgewater	\$12,767

East Longmeadow	\$15,312
Foxborough	\$17,326
Groton-Dunstable	\$15,607
Gil-Montague	\$16,552
Grafton	\$12,758
Hampden-Wilbraham	\$15,567
Harvard	\$18,016
Hudson	\$17,109
Littleton	\$15,517
Lunenburg	\$13,828
Mendon-Upton	\$16,344
Norton	\$15,137
Tewksbury	\$17,276
Tyngsborough	\$14,930
Nashoba Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School	\$20,508
Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical High School	\$19,393

It is important to recognize that the higher per-pupil cost for technical high schools is due to the higher cost of running its programs.

State Average Cost **\$16,506**

- NMRSD 2018 per-pupil cost is \$460 per student below the state average.
- The NMRSD is assessed a little over a million dollars for students who opt to attend charter schools. This is a direct offset to the Chapter 70 state funding that is received.

Reductions

FTE	Location	Position	Salary	Rationale
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Revenues

State Revenue

- Federal and State Grants - The district budget includes the Governor's estimates of an increase in Chapter 70 funds of \$35 per student, Chapter 71 (transportation) \$1,035,840 and charter school reimbursement \$67,800. These amounts are set by the state budget process which begins with the Governor's budget released on the 4th Wednesday in January.

District Revenue

- The FY2021 General Fund budget proposal is supported with \$1,300,000 of Excess and Deficiency (E & D) funds. This is the same amount that was utilized in the FY2020 budget. E & D funds are replenished by operations from the prior year and are considered one-time funds. Our goal is to use less E & D money so that our annual budget is sustainable on its own and to eventually utilize E & D money in order to establish a stabilization fund for capital items. The FY19 E&D number has not been certified but is estimated at \$3,000,000.
- The FY2021 General Fund budget proposal is supported with \$489,556 in School Choice revolving funds. This is based on the Governor's estimate release on January 22, 2020. The district currently has 83 Students from 15 Communities choicing into the district. The district utilizes school choice funds to offset health insurance costs. We will recommend that school choice is expanded for FY2021 to help fill out classes that have available space and would not require an additional teacher.

Town Assessments

With the revised NMRSD budget increase of 3.78% budget and the governor's revenue projections, the town assessments are expected to increase by an average of 6.18%.

The local and transportation operating assessments calculation as follows:

Total Local Revenue

Ashby 4.33%

Pepperell 5.21%

Townsend 6.88%

- Operating Assessments: The district is projected to receive \$30 per student in increased Chapter 70 funding. This is an increase of only 0.62% in state aid. The share each town is assessed is influenced by both enrollment shifts between the towns and the minimum local contribution requirement. (minimum local contribution uses EQV - Equalized property valuation and the municipal growth factor to determine what each town pays)

The enrollment percentages are based on the Oct 2019 enrollments:

Ashby 11.31%

Pepperell 47.96%

Townsend 40.73%

Ashby decreased by -.20% and Pepperell decreased by -0.44%, Townsend enrollment increased by 0.65%

- Transportation Assessment: Transportation is assessed to the towns based on enrollment and is offset with the cost state aid chapter 71. With the reduction of a bus in Ashby during the FY2020 school year, as well as a new contract for special education transportation. The budget for transportation is anticipated to increase by 3.85%. We will continue to work with the vendors to determine if there are ways to save in this area. The Governor's budget includes 75% reimbursement for students greater than 1.5m from school. This results in an increase in the transportation average assessment of only 1.41%.
- Debt Assessment: The FY2021 Debt Service assessment includes principal and interest payments for two long term bonds and one bond anticipation note (BAN) for the High School project as well as short term borrowing for the accelerated repair program (ARP) at Squannacook Early Childhood Center, Varnum Brook Elementary School, and Hawthorne Brook Middle School. The FY21 Debt budget also includes the bond payment of principal & interest payments for the Nissitissit Middle School refinancing and a bond

will impact the reimbursement amounts that are received by the district. The Student Opportunity Act will allow the district to make additional claims for special education transportation costs. These costs will be phased in over a four year period (FY21-25%, FY22-50%, FY23-75%, FY24-100%). Because this is a new program, the exact details of how this will be implemented have not been released yet.

Revolving Accounts

Preschool Revolving - The district provides preschool services at the Squannacook Early Childhood Center. The district is able to charge typical students fees for participation in the preschool program. These funds are used to support teacher salaries and on occasion, other classroom supplies. These funds will be utilized in FY21 to pay for a 1.0 FTE Teacher and 2.0 FTE Paraprofessionals. Total budget for FY2021 is \$118,777.

Athletic Revolving - The district charges user fees for the students that participate in sports. These user fees are waived for free and reduced students. The fees are used exclusively to support the athletic programs in the district. The district collects approximately \$175K annually in athletic user fees and gate entrance fees. These funds support the cost of transportation as well as supplies, materials and entrance fees for our athletes. In FY2021, we anticipate utilizing \$175,000 in revolving funds.

Marching Band Revolving - The district charges user fees for students that participate in the Marching Band program. These funds are used to support the transportation costs and supplement the materials needed for this program. The user fees received in FY2020 were \$5,600.

Parking Lot Revolving - The district collects a parking fee from students that bring their car to school. The current fee is \$60 per student. The funds that are collected for this purpose are used to pay for the upkeep of the parking lots. The plan for FY21 is to utilize **\$TBD** in parking lot revolving funds.

Building Use Revolving - From time to time, the district leases space to both in-district groups as well as out of district groups. These funds are segregated and used to support building costs. A new policy and rate structure have been implemented by the school committee in FY20. The automation of scheduling and billing of these fees is in the process of being implemented.

The building use revolving account is used to pay overtime costs for custodial services, the facility supervisor and also to pay for building maintenance. The district plans to utilize **\$TBD** in FY2021.

Athletic Turf Rental Revolving - The district separately tracks the revenue generated for the rental of the artificial turf field. The funds received in the turf rental account will be used to offset the costs of the turf lease payment. This is a brand new source of funding for the district and we do not have an estimate on the total amount to be received. As of 12/30/19, we have received \$4,770 in athletic turf rentals and contracts.

Food Services Revolving - The district currently runs a fully self-funded food service program (excluding capital investment). The district has been using an outside Food Service Management company since FY2011. The current contract is with Whitsons Food Service and they have been serving the district since FY2014. The food service contract is a one-year agreement with 4 optional one-year extensions. Should the district extend the contract in FY2021, this will be the final extension of this contract.

- The FY20 food service revolving budget includes expenses of \$1,026,004. The anticipated revenue is \$1,039,827 with a budgeted net income of \$13,823 for the year.
- The district receives approximately 36% of its food service revenue from federal and state reimbursements.
- The program participation rate is just under 40%.
- As of 11/30/2019, the overall free and reduced percentage for the NMRSD is 27%.

The food service program continues to maintain a breakeven program each year. The capital plan in FY20 included the replacement of the dishwasher at HBMS. The Town of Townsend applied for and received a DEP recycling grant of \$20,000 that is earmarked for the replacement of the failed dishwasher at VBES. In addition, the Town of Ashby has been awarded a Green Communities Grant that will upgrade the controls on the Ashby Elementary Freezer. The District works with the food service management company to develop the annual budget for the food service program. The food service budget is in process for FY21 yet, but we are anticipating challenges regarding increasing costs in the area of personnel and the cost of goods while revenues remain flat.

We will be working with the food services management company to develop new programs to encourage participation as the FY2021 budget is developed.

Donations Accounts - Thanks to the generous support of families, our PTO's, and businesses, the district receives donations to support our schools. These funds are used to support programs in those buildings. Donations have been used in past years to support classrooms, provide additional events and make upgrades to the building and playgrounds.

Athletic Donations/Advertising Revolving - Recently, the district has been receiving donations and advertising revenue specifically related to the new turf field. These funds are segregated and used to pay the turf field lease. The total of donations received in FY20 to date is \$25,430. These funds will be used to pay the turf lease payment.

FLLAC Rental Account - The FY21 school year will begin year 4 of a 5-year lease with the FLLAC Collaborative to rent space in the Squannacook Early Childhood Center. The FLLAC Collaborative currently rents the equivalent of 16 classrooms. We plan to use approximately \$55,146 of these funds to support a 1.0 FTE custodian and pay for \$TBD in capital repairs for the SECC building. The FY21 capital plan has not been approved yet but in FY20 the school committee approved projects of \$53,000 for the FY20 capital plan.

Before/After Revolving - The FY21 school year represents year 4 of a 4-year contract with Kidsborough Inc DBA as Four Rowhers to provide before and after school care at the three elementary buildings. The contract allows for an optional 1-year extension. In FY20, the program at Ashby Elementary was combined with the Spaulding School due to low enrollment at the Ashby location. As a part of the agreement, the district receives 10% of the income from this program. These funds have been set up in a revolving fund to support any costs associated with running this program in our schools. We anticipate using \$TBD for FY2021.

Tuition-In Revolving - The district has a number of students that are tuitioned into specific special education programs in the district. These funds are used to support the cost of additional students in our programs. In the past, we have used tuition funds to support salaries for teachers, paraprofessionals and capital purchases including the Gateway van. Presently, there are 3 students tuitioning into district programs. The revolving revenue received in FY2019 was

\$140,000. The district plans to use these funds to pay for a Teacher (1.0 FTE) and Paraprofessional salaries (2.0 FTE) in FY2021.

Revenue Challenges

- The overall revenue projected from state funds is an increase of only 1.19%
- Use of one time funds (i.e E&D) can create structural issues for budgeting in future years
- Transportation reimbursement continues to be less than 100%
- The modest budget increases for the district result in difficult assessments for our member towns

Capital Plans for Schools & Budget Implications

The district has segregated a specific capital budget for FY21 of \$250,000 in the general fund. In addition to the capital repairs funded in the budget, the district will be looking at several larger building repair projects. These include the demolition of the old 1960's wing at Ashby Elementary, Varnum Brook Elementary entrance and cafeteria seating, playground space at Nissitissit Middle School, and the outdated facilities at Hawthorne Brook Middle School. The larger capital improvements typically require a school committee vote to authorize borrowing and can not be supported in the normal capital or operating budget.

G.L. c.71, s.16 G ½ provides for the establishment of stabilization funds by regional school districts. This law was recently amended, by St. 2010, c.188, s.58, to clarify the approvals necessary to make expenditures from these funds. The district does not currently have a separate capital fund or stabilization fund to access in order to address larger capital projects. Without this fund, any larger repair that cannot be accomplished within the district budget would require a borrowing vote by the School Committee and member towns. If a stabilization fund was to be established this would require a vote of the school committee and all three member towns. Nashoba Valley Technical School and the FLLAC Collaborative recently made requests to approve a capital fund.

We continue to work with the towns to implement energy-saving projects through the use of the Green Community State Grant. The Ashby Elementary School received two grants through this program in FY2020. The refrigeration

controls for the freezer will be upgraded as well as the lighting throughout the building. The Hawthorne Brook Middle School gym HVAC upgrades are in progress with an anticipated installation during February 2020 vacation. Without the support of the communities and their commitment to the NM District, these projects would not be possible. The savings in energy is a benefit for all of our communities!

Other Grants

- DEP Municipal recycling grant of \$20,000 for the replacement of the dishwasher at VBES.
- NMRSD received an equipment grant from Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) for \$9,186 to purchase building safety equipment including a Thermographic Camera.
- Footsteps to Brilliance - NMRSD receives grants/donations from the United Way and the Community Foundation for the 5-year lease of Footsteps to Brilliance reading program.

Conclusion

The FY2020 spending proposal for NMRSD represents our effort to continue a strong educational agenda in a challenging fiscal environment, continued examination of our priorities and beliefs, and at a time when we are contending with the costs of serving our students and families at a level that NMRSD demands of its public school system.

This plan is focused on our Vision, Mission, and Core Values, along with the long-established priorities and policy drivers of this system:

- Classroom teachers and class sizes are important.
- Professional learning and program evaluation are critical elements of a successful organization.
- Serving NM students within the NMRSD is best for families and our schools.
- Our 3-tiered level model best facilitates the academic program and community that NM families are looking for in their school system.
- Teachers matter

- Equity does not mean equal . . . some of our students require more of our teachers and services than others in order to meet rigorous standards.
- Quality early education programming is an integral part of a public school system.
- Technology is an important component of a quality teaching and learning environment.
- An agile central administration is necessary to serve a complex school population.

Most importantly, this FY2021 proposal is designed to allow us to address key needs in the classroom, in-classroom support, in special education, and in technology during the coming year while continuing to work toward long-term solutions to the financial implications of our growing capital improvement list.

We look forward to the opportunity to provide elected officials, appointed representatives, and the community with further explanation of these important proposals over the coming months.

District Curriculum and Instruction

North Middlesex continues to think outside of traditional methods and practices to provide educators with curriculum and professional development opportunities that enhance their teaching practices within a limited budget, which include:

- North Middlesex teacher/curriculum leaders continue to support the development and implementation of curriculum resources and district assessments, as well as, pilot and recommend evidence-based curriculum materials.
- North Middlesex teacher/curriculum leaders continue to lead the state in organizing cross-district curriculum opportunities bringing together 25+ districts and over 100 educators to collaborate around the state frameworks and effective teaching practices.
- North Middlesex continues to look for additional funding through the state and private entities. With the adoption of new science and social studies standards, the district has worked with I2Stem, Project Lead the Way (PLTW), and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to apply for additional grants to bolster teacher knowledge and curriculum materials.

- North Middlesex successfully held a second, full-day targeted professional development, in conjunction with Lunenburg, run by teachers from both districts on election day to enhance instructional practices.
- Teachers across the district continue to enhance their curricula, assessment methods, and instructional practices to ensure students are engaging with rigorous, meaningful activities through the identified district delayed starts, early release days and additional faculty/professional meetings.
- North Middlesex has been working with SERESC delving deep into social and emotional competencies, focusing on Responsible Decision-Making, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills. Each building has created a Social Emotional Learning team to help lead the work for teacher and student understanding in these areas. This multi-year partnership will help align expectations and skillsets for a successful student experience.
- The district continues to support understanding how inquiry around data collection can efficiently and effectively increase student learning through the school-based data leadership team meetings and trainings focusing on common assessments.
- The district is fortunate to have a supportive community that has helped sponsor all aspects of our students' lives, including areas such as trauma, acceptance, equity, and diversity.
- The district is looking at creative funding sources to help support teachers and administrators with additional stipended positions in the four main content areas of ELA, math, science and social studies.

Special Education

- As we have done in past years, district special education paraprofessionals participated in a series of trainings related to providing supports for our students.
- Our district mental health team (school counselors, psychologists, behavior analysts) participated in a series of trainings designed to support our students needing therapeutic supports and intervention. These trainings included topics such as suicidal ideations and interventions, assisting students with trauma, and homeless/foster care services for students.

- The district implemented the SBIRT Screening Tool (Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment) implemented by middle/high school nurses.
- The district continues to utilize and subscribe to Project Interface mental health referral service. This service is available to the district community as well as all three member towns.
- NM is one of 40 districts in the state who meet monthly for trainings, collaborate and discuss current mental health topics/trends.
- The district is piloting the SHAPE tool (School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System).
- NMRSD continues to provide OUTSTANDING support to its students with disabilities across the district. This is evidenced by the wide range of students we support throughout the year. This is further evidenced by the fact the district returned 5 students from out of district (private school) placements at the start of and during this school year.

Technology

- The district website and mass communication systems were replaced with updated solutions and designs
- All computers at AES & SMS were replaced with updated models.
- 60 Student Chromebooks added to each middle school, VBES, and SMS. 30 student Chromebooks added to AES.
- 21 new mounted interactive projectors with soundbars have been installed in district classrooms. All district classrooms identified as benefiting from a mounted interactive projector now have one in place. In addition, 8 of the oldest mounted interactive projectors in the district were replaced. These projectors were all at NMS and they were more than 10 years old.