

ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



PROPOSED SUPERINTENDENT'S FY'22 OPERATING BUDGET EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**THE BUILDING PRINCIPALS AND DIRECTORS
OF THE ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Vision Statement

The Ashland Public Schools cultivates the academic and social-emotional growth of each student through a supportive, collaborative, innovative and challenging environment. Students will develop into self-motivated, resilient, life-long learners, who embrace their role as responsible contributors to a global community

Mission Statement

We are committed every minute, every hour, every day, to every student.

District Core Values

Safety:

We believe in providing safe and supportive learning environments and facilities, which address the varied social, emotional, and health needs of all students and staff.

Responsibility:

We believe in the importance of individual and group accountability to make thoughtful, appropriate decisions that produce positive results for all.

Respect:

We believe in the inherent value of all: including oneself, one's peers, and all who are a part of our community and greater global society.

Excellence:

We believe as individuals, schools, and a community in the cultivation of an environment in which each member is supported in achieving his/her greatest potential.

Integrity:

We believe in making decisions that uphold the values of honesty, decency, and sincerity in all of our actions.



February 14, 2021

Dear Ashland School Committee and the Ashland Community,

I am pleased to present you with an Executive Summary of the ***Fiscal Year 2022 (FY'22) Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget***. It is designed to provide you with a broad view of the budget, yet you will find some specific and detailed explanations of certain requests. I hope it is clear and concise; and allows you to fully understand the recommended budget.

The development of the FY'22 budget was certainly interesting this year due to COVID-19, a recession, and the hiring of a new director of finance and operations. I am quite pleased with how the budget has come out, and our process while interesting, did not skip a beat. I would like to thank all of the administrators and especially Director of Finance and Operations Chris Mathieu for the time and effort needed to pull together this document and all supporting documents.

The development of the FY'22 (the 2021-22 School Year) budget began in earnest in November with principals, directors and the entire administrative team conducting a detailed review of staffing, enrollment projections (these numbers are misleading due to COVID-19 and families keeping students' home), needs of individual schools and each budgetary line item. Throughout the process, our administrative team was tasked with providing high level and appropriate services for our students, while keeping our budget tight as we recognize the recession and future costs, such as the newly appropriated Mindess School.

Our administrative team participated in a budgeting workshop with the School Committee on February 8, 2021 to discuss District priorities to ensure the budget aligns with our community's values and our ***Blueprint for Continuous Student Improvement (See Appendix 2)***.

The budget we are presenting to the community calls for an increase of about 3.78% or \$1.3 million dollars over the FY'21 budget. This increase is in alignment with the request and agreements between the school system and our general government. While the district was able to utilize special funding from federal and state grants due to COVID-19, these funds were specified for COVID related spending and will most likely not be available in the future. The district has strategically utilized these funds to invest in better air filtration systems, air purification systems for each classroom, personal protective equipment for faculty and staff, in addition to investing in high quality disinfection products. COVID-19 has changed the way we teach and learn, and future budgets will need to reflect this change.

We do not anticipate a large increase in Chapter 70 funding from the state, due to enrollment becoming stagnant, thus we will rely on one-time funds like school choice and circuit breaker to invest in specialized programming to control special education out-of-district costs, support our youngest students who struggle with literacy and math, and meet State mandates for educating our English Language Learner population. **(See Appendix 3).**

Getting back to a sense of normalcy in our everyday teaching is desired by us all. There will inevitably be learning gaps created by COVID-19, but I promise we will close these gaps in an efficient and effective manner. It may take some time, but we are all dedicated to this important responsibility.

I hope this summary will assist you in fully understanding what is required to operate the Ashland Public Schools. On behalf of the Ashland Public Schools and our entire faculty and staff, I thank the citizens of Ashland for your continued support, as was most evident during the overwhelming show of support for a new Mindess Elementary School.

Be well,

James E. Adams, Superintendent of Schools

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WHAT IS THE FY'22 ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUDGET REQUEST?

As the table below illustrates, the recommended Budget for FY'22 totals \$36,160,660 which represents a 3.78% increase over FY'21.

FINAL FY'21 BUDGET	\$34,843,573
PROPOSED FY'22 OUTCOMES/NEEDS BASED BUDGET	\$36,160,660
INCREASE	\$ 1,317,087
INCREASE (%) OVER FY'21	3.78%

FY'22 RECOMMENDATION COMPARED TO PREVIOUS 3 YEARS ACTUAL

Fiscal Year	Total Budget	Dollar Budget Increase	Actual Budget Increase
FY'19	\$30,621,262		
FY'20	\$33,284,474	\$2,664,222	8.70%
FY'21	\$34,843,573	\$1,559,099	4.68%
FY'22 (Recommended)	\$36,160,660	\$1,317,087	3.78%

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR BUDGET CATEGORIES?

The following table breaks down the total budget into seven major categories. As you can see, **salaries** are, by far, the greatest budget driver. Salaries account for 83% of the overall budget, which is consistent with past years.

Major Budget Category	FY'21 Final Budget	Recommended FY'22 Budget	Incremental Change (\$) (Decrease)	Incremental Change (%) (Decrease)
Professional Salaries	\$23,712,554	\$24,870,722	\$1,158,168	4.88%
Clerical Salaries	\$977,147	\$1,014,312	\$37,165	3.80%
Other Salaries	\$3,724,594	\$3,955,854	\$231,260	6.21%
Contracted Services	\$6,761,596	\$6,787,024	\$25,428	.04%
Supply Lines	\$793,118	\$534,338	\$(258,780)	(-32.63%)
Other Expenses	\$985,260	\$1,109,106	\$123,846	12.57%
Revolving Offsets	\$(2,110,696)	\$(2,110,696)	\$0	-
Total	\$34,843,573	\$36,160,660	\$1,317,087	3.78%

Professional and Clerical Salaries, include anticipated steps and lane increases, as well as new requested positions. Currently negotiations are ongoing with our educators, nurses, secretaries, and educational support personnel which will result in adjustments in the future.

Contracted Services is made up of contracts for equipment repair, transportation, maintenance contracts, legal fees, as well as out of district special education costs.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC PRIORITIES BEING ADDRESSED IN THE BUDGET?

The budget presented continues to address the ever-changing needs of our student population. We are asking for an equivalent of 6.5 full-time special education staff in order to meet the needs of the District and our specialized programs. (See Appendix 3) The additional staff will assist the District in meeting our goals as outlined in the *Blueprint for Continuous Student Improvement* (see Appendix 2).

ARE THERE SALARY INCREASES IN THE BUDGET?

Yes, we have accounted for anticipated step and lane increases for FY'22, however the district is currently in contract negotiations with the Ashland Educators Association so the actual impact on the FY'22 budget is not known at this time. We have considered the steps and lane increase that we know are going to take place at this time. The Ashland School Committee and the Ashland Educators Association have contracts with the following Union Units: Ashland Teachers, Ashland Nurses, Ashland Education Support Personnel, and the Ashland Secretaries.

Definitions

A **step increase** is an automatic bump in pay for adding a year of experience in the school district. The steps are outlined in a pre-existing salary scale. A **lane increase** is a raise earned for education coursework. Steps and lanes are nearly uniform in collective bargaining agreements of public employees across the Commonwealth.



WHAT ARE THE CHANGES TO THE BUDGET?

The first step in our annual budget process is to require each building principal and director to review each line item for which they are responsible. This includes analyzing how funds were spent in the previous year, analyzing expected enrollment and class size numbers, as well as reviewing increased needs for special education and English language learners. This was an extremely challenging year to analyze current year expenses due to the pandemic, however administrators took an approach that included reviewing data from more than one year in order to create a responsible budget. Additionally, we have taken in to account known contractual obligations (e.g. special education out of district placement, salaries, and bus transportation).

The chart below shows the progression from the *Final FY'21 Budget to my FY'22 Recommended Budget*. It is the budget “in a nutshell.” The budget below represents the budget requirements of the Ashland Public Schools in order to meet the needs of students.

Budget Action (Reason)	Budget Impact
Start with FY '21 Final Appropriated Budget	\$34,843,573
Increase in Salaries Due to Contractual Obligations (i.e. steps, lanes, cost of living increases) Net of Expected Retirement Savings – Will be adjusted after negotiations are finalized.	935,326
Increase in New Personnel (See Appendix 3)	357,358
Increase in General Transportation	12,338
Increase in Facilities Expenses	60,000
Increase in Curriculum	16,600
Increase due to Technology Upgrades	76,648
Decrease due to anticipated retirement savings	(141,183)
FY '22 Superintendent's Recommended Budget	\$ 36,160,660

Facility increase includes \$36,890 in additional utility cost.

DOES THIS BUDGET CUT/ADD PROGRAMS OR SERVICES?

The current budget as presented does not require the cutting of programs or personnel. However, this budget does continue to invest in our special education programs, and add two district wide positions. (See Appendix 3)

IS ENROLLMENT INCREASING OR DECLINING?

The Ashland Public Schools continues to see a significant increase in student enrollment. Since June 2016, the Ashland Public Schools has seen an increase in 224 students or approximately 8.4%.

This increase places significant stressors on our district, including space, curricular, and staffing needs.

School Year Actual Enrollment for 2016-2021

School Year Actuals	K-12	Diff	%
2016-17	2,565	7	0.0%
2017-18	2,636	71	2.8%
2018-19	2,731	95	3.6%
2019-20	2,782	51	1.9%
<i>Actual 2020-21*</i>	<i>2,692</i>	<i>(90)</i>	<i>(3.2%)</i>

- ** As of February 1, 2021*

School Year	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12	Total
Proj 2020-21	573	630	671	805	2,679
Proj 2021-22	562	632	664	812	2,670
Proj 2022-22	575	587	673	811	2,646
Proj 2022-23	579	571	656	862	2,668
Proj 2023-24	583	560	657	879	2,679
Proj 2024-25	587	573	611	894	2,665

Enrollment Projections for 2021-2025 – NESDEC December 2020

- Note: Reduction in enrollment does not take into consideration COVID-19 families that are currently home schooling or have decided not to register kindergarten students. A previous year reduction in approximately 70 students.

HOW DOES ASHLAND'S PER-PUPIL SPENDING COMPARED WITH OTHER DISTRICTS? MOST RECENT DATA IS FROM 2019

To answer this question, we compared our per pupil spending to **twenty-four** other school districts. The districts are either: a) on the Department of Education's website as being "Like-Districts"; b) members of the ACCEPT Collaborative and/or c) members of the Tri-Valley League which Ashland is a participant. As you can see from the list below, Ashland's spending is below that of the state average and many other high performing districts. **In fact, Ashland ranks 281 out of 322 school districts in Per-Pupil Expenditures.**

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/per-pupil-exp.html>

I believe the chart below shows that Ashland students and residents get a tremendous value for the level of spending.

District	FY '19 Per-Pupil Expenditure	District	FY '19 Per-Pupil Expenditure
Dover-Sherborn	\$20,692	Millis	\$16,192
Burlington	\$20,129	Medfield	\$16,013
Dedham	\$19,503	Mendon-Upton	\$15,552
Westwood	\$18,879	Seekonk	\$15,465
Bedford	\$18,325	Wakefield	\$15,281
Needham	\$17,883	Natick	\$15,193
Ipswich	\$17,464	Medway	\$14,943
Foxborough	\$17,343	Norton	\$14,527
Tewksbury	\$16,825	Chelmsford	\$14,474
State Average	\$16,582	Hopkinton	\$14,472
Marblehead	\$16,541	Ashland	\$13,637
Swampscott	\$16,427	Holliston	\$13,561
Bellingham	\$16,356	Melrose	\$11,771

Once again, the Ashland School District and Ashland High School have been recognized as top performers in the Commonwealth. In 2020, Ashland High School was rated the 33rd best high school by **Boston Magazine**, which looked at 150 high schools in the Metro Boston area. Niche rated Ashland an A for public school rankings and listed the district as the 38th best district out of 219 districts in the Commonwealth.

<https://www.bostonmagazine.com/education/best-public-high-schools-boston-2020-chart/>

<https://www.niche.com/k12/d/ashland-public-schools-ma/>

The **average** per-pupil expenditure for districts on this list is \$15,674

The **median** per-pupil expenditure for districts on this list is \$15,783

The **state-average** per-pupil expenditure is \$16,582

WHY DOES THE SPECIAL EDUCATION BUDGET FLUCTUATE SO MUCH?

Special Education is, without a doubt, the most unpredictable of all school department budget items. The reason is that each year the number, nature and level of service for students with special needs, as defined in the student's Individualized Education Program, or "IEP" can change dramatically. As it relates to budget requests, it is important to note that as students' needs change, the budget must also change. This interdependent relationship between a) mandated services, b) student needs, and c) school budgets means that forecasting Special Education expenses is a difficult, if not impossible, challenge for school administrators throughout Massachusetts.

Further complicating the equation is that schools must rely on state (Circuit Breaker) and federal (PL94-142 grant) funding to offset Special Education costs. Funding levels at the federal level are historically stable; however, the state's Circuit Breaker has been subject to major funding fluctuations since its inception.

In-District vs. Out-of-District

The Ashland Public Schools is committed to educating **ALL** of our students In-District. We believe that when at all possible, students are better served being with their peers in an inclusionary setting. Students of all levels benefit from one another and it reinforces our beliefs that every child can learn and that every child is valued for their uniqueness and gifts they bring to the schools. However, there are times when the District cannot meet the needs of a child and a placement outside of the Ashland Public Schools is warranted.

Because of our belief that ALL students belong in the District, we have created numerous programs over the past three years to meet the needs of our unique learners. Another benefit to keeping our students in District is we've been able to reduce our out of district costs.

Serving students In-District, allows us to better control the quality of programming, keep our students in their community and enables us to avoid costly tuition for Out-of-District schools and related transportation costs (which are also legally mandated and not reimbursed). From a budgetary standpoint, what that means is we must periodically add personnel and related program costs to avoid higher-cost options. This is exactly what our budget proposes again this year. It is a combination of a **cost-avoidance** and a **cost-savings** exercise.

INCREASE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION OUT-OF-DISTRICT STUDENTS AND COST

YEAR	STUDENTS	COST	\$ INCREASE (DECREASE)	% INCREASE (DECREASE)
2015-2016	45	\$2,269,472	\$(68,321)	(2.92)
2016-2017	38	\$2,286,109	\$16,637	0.07
2017-2018	35	\$2,795,950	\$509,841	22.30
2018-2019	35	\$2,800,300	\$4,350	0.02
2019-2020	36	\$3,268,142	\$467,842	16.71
2020-2021	36	\$3,624,421	\$356,058	10.89
2021-2022 ANTICIPATED	36	\$3,624,400	(\$221)	0.00

AVERAGE PER PUPIL COST FOR AN OUT OF DISTRICT STUDENT: \$100,672 BEFORE TRANSPORTATION

**Special Education Circuit Breaker Reimbursement Formula
Out of District Placement (ODP)**

Circuit Breaker Funding Formula (Example from 2021)

The reimbursement for ODP is calculated using the following formula as an example:

Ashland's Eligible ODP costs: \$3,089,583

Subtract Foundation Amount: \$1,547,264 (4xs foundation rate of \$11,722 multiplied by 33.0 students)

Eligible Claim \$1,542,319

State Reimbursement % 75.22% (This number varies year to year)

Total Reimbursement \$ 1,160,197

Transportation for these students costs approximately \$882,764

Cost to APS after Circuit Breaker Reimbursement: \$1,929,386 or \$58,466 per pupil.

HOW DOES THE ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS UTILIZE REVOLVING ACCOUNTS?

Revolving Funds allow the district to raise revenues from a specific service and use those revenues, without further appropriation, to support the service. These funds are specifically allocated to offsetting General Operating Expense. There are a number of revolving funds including, but not limited to:

Special Education Circuit Breaker - Partial reimbursement by the state to school districts to assist in offsetting the cost of educating students outside of the district. *(See Formula Calculation on Page 12).*

School Choice - Revenue received for students enrolled in Ashland Public Schools from other MA Districts. Revenue can be used for any purpose specific to education.

Building Rental - Fees received for use of Ashland Public School Facilities can only be used to offset building and maintenance expenses.

Transportation - Fees received for students who are not required by law to be transported. Only students in Grades K-6 and who live greater than 2.0 miles from their school are entitled to free transportation.

International Tuition - Revenue received for international students enrolled in the Ashland Public Schools through an agreed upon contract as set forth by the Ashland School Committee. Revenue is used to offset salaries of counseling staff and English Language Learner educators.

During the FY'22 budget process, the Ashland Public Schools applied \$2,110,696 of revolving accounts towards the general fund operating budget including salaries. See **Appendix 1** to see how APS will utilize these funds over the next two years.

General Fund Offsets	FY '21	FY'22	Increase (Decrease)
Special Education Circuit Breaker**	\$990,811	\$1,160,197	\$169,386
School Choice	\$475,885	\$500,000	24,115
Building Rental	\$165,000	\$150,499	(\$14,501)
Transportation Fees	\$354,000	\$300,000	(\$54,000)
International Tuition	\$125,000	\$-	(\$125,000)
Total	\$2,110,696	\$2,110,696	\$0

Note: If the total General Fund Offsets decrease from one year to the next, as is the case this year, the decrease must be added to the current year's budget in order to fund accounts that were previously offset by a revolving fund.

**** - See Calculation on Page 12**

In addition to the General Fund Revolving Accounts. Fees are charged for participation in athletics as well as to attend the Ashland Pre-School. These funds are not part of the general operating budget but are used to offset expenses occurring in athletics and preschool.

Athletics - Athletic user fees and gate receipts are used to offset the cost of the athletic program.

Pre-School - Tuition fees for typically-developing students are used to offset program costs.

IS THIS THE FINAL FY '22 BUDGET?

The presentation of the Superintendent's Recommended Budget is just one step in the budget process. Over the next few months **March 4, 2021**. The School Committee always reserves the right to make changes, modifications, additions, etc. to the budget to meet the best interests of our students. It is important to know that the School Committee does not work in isolation. During the budget process, School Committee works collaboratively with administration, the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to see how the district's requests fit into the overall Town budget.

As stated at the beginning of this Executive Summary, the budget I am presenting to the School Committee has been completed with great thought and consideration not only for the Town's finances, but for the absolute needs of the students of Ashland.

The entire line-by-line item detail of the proposed budget can be found here:

<http://www.ashland.k12.ma.us/budget-information>.



Are there needs that are going unfunded?

What's missing from the budget requests?

Absolutely – there are legitimate and justifiable needs that are not included in the Superintendent's Recommended Budget. I am cognizant to the fact that we have finite resources and it is my responsibility to present a reasonable and sustainable budget to Ashland residents. However, I believe it is important to articulate the district's needs regardless of the fiscal climate, so that when resources do become available there are no surprises. In short, it is important to acknowledge that simply because *a need goes unfunded, does not mean the need has gone away*. Some areas in which an investment will need to be made as determined by the administrative team includes and in no particular order of priority:

- **Teaching Staff Due to Enrollment at AMS - \$448,000**
- **District-Wide Non-Salary Needs – Up to \$700,000**
 - Operations and Maintenance supplies, materials, equipment, and contract services required to adequately maintain our buildings. – Has been level funded the past 10 years with only a small increase in the FY'21 budget.
 - Increases to instructional supply, equipment, and textbook budgets – Less reliance on School Choice Funding
 - Furniture and Equipment Replacement or elimination of fees (e.g. Athletics, School Bus, PreK, etc.)
- **District-Wide Literacy and Math Coaching Positions - \$170,000**
 - Specialists who provide direct support to teachers
 - Provide direct service and intervention strategies to students

Appendix 1
Projected Use Revolving Account Use for Operating Expenses
Fiscal Years 2021-2022

Fiscal Year 2021

School Year 2020-2021	Anticipated July 1, 2020 Beginning Balance	FY '21 Anticipated Revenues	FY '21 Anticipated Expenditures	FY '21 Projected Ending Balance	FY '22 Anticipated Budget Offsets
Circuit Breaker	\$972,353	\$1,160,197	\$990,811	\$1,141,739	\$1,160,197
Bldg Rental	\$422,144	\$23,000	\$165,000	\$280,144	\$150,499
International Tuition	\$162,775	\$0	\$125,000	\$37,775	\$-
School Bus Revolving	\$473,903	\$57,000	\$354,000	\$176,903	\$300,000
School Choice	\$1,353,225	\$345,165	\$475,885	\$1,222,505	\$500,000
	\$3,384,400	\$1,585,362	\$2,110,696	\$2,859,066	\$2,110,696

Fiscal Year 2022

School Year 2021-2022	Anticipated July 1, 2021 Beginning Balance	FY '22 Anticipated Revenues	FY '22 Anticipated Expenditures	FY '22 Projected Ending Balance	FY '23 Anticipated Budget Offsets
Circuit Breaker	\$1,141,739	\$1,160,197	\$1,160,197	\$1,141,739	\$1,160,197
Bldg Rental	\$280,144	\$150,450	\$150,499	\$280,095	\$150,499
International Tuition	\$37,775	\$0	\$0	\$37,775	\$-
School Bus Revolving	\$176,903	\$270,000	\$300,000	\$146,903	\$300,000
School Choice	\$1,222,505	\$400,000	\$500,000	\$1,122,505	\$500,000
	\$2,859,066	\$1,980,647	\$2,110,696	\$2,729,017	\$2,110,696

Appendix 2

Ashland Public Schools Blueprint for Continuous Student Improvement



The Ashland Public Schools is a forward thinking district that cultivates the academic and social-emotional growth of each student through a supportive, collaborative, innovative and challenging environment. Students will develop into self-motivated, resilient, life-long learners, who embrace their role as responsible contributors to a global community.

Improvement Priorities

Cultivate Well-Being of All: We will ensure student, faculty, and staff well-being by teaching strategies, skills, and competencies necessary to maintain and support social-emotional health.	Promote Academic Excellence: We will improve achievement for all students by providing individualized, equitable, and challenging opportunities in an environment that fosters growth and skill acquisition for each student.
Engage Students, Families and Community as Partners in Learning: We will continuously model a district environment based on collaboration, respect, and open lines of communication through partnerships with students, caregivers, community members, businesses, community-based organizations, and educational institutions.	Champion Educator Excellence: We will attract, develop, and retain highly qualified, passionate educators who are committed to the vision of the Ashland Public Schools.

We are committed every minute, every hour, every day, to every student.

Appendix 3

FY'22 Proposed Additional Personnel

Budget Requests:

- 1.0 FTE BCBA District Wide** - Special education is consistently having to contract out to the ACCEPT Collaborative for BCBA services for AMS, AHS, and the Pittaway School. This position will reduce the need to contract out these services.
- .50 FTE Occupational Therapist** – Special education has had to contract out OT services throughout the year and this will make an employee full-time to meet service delivery needs and conduct assessments.
- 4.0 FTE ABA Paraprofessionals** – Three ABA paraprofessionals are needed at Warren and one at Mindess to meet the ever-growing need for sub-separate autistic students moving through the elementary schools.
- 1.0 FTE Language Based Teacher- Mindess** - Special Educator with specific knowledge/training in explicit reading instruction (for example, Wilson or Orton Gillingham) to provide small group and individual instruction to an ever growing and identified group of elementary students with specific language-based learning disabilities who are not progressing within the inclusion model.
- 1.0 FTE District K-5 Literacy Coach** – The Literacy Coach collaborates with classroom teachers to provide learning experiences in literacy to students, guided by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, district standards and requirements. The coach will provide instructional leadership, teacher professional development and instructional coaching support to faculty and staff. Additionally, the coach will work directly with teachers to provide classroom and small group instruction, collaborative and one-on-one support while focusing on enhancing a teachers' ability to provide targeted instruction that builds students' sense of engagement in the ownership of learning. Collaborates with principals to ensure a cohesive, rigorous academic program that engages all students.
- 1.0 FTE District Communication and Grant Specialist** – The Communication and Grant Specialist is responsible for oversight and management of internal and external communications for the Ashland Public Schools, to ensure that APS families, students, staff, partners, and community members are informed about the district's events, activities, priorities, policies and practices. Additional duties include planning and writing grant proposals to government, foundation, corporate or private grant makers. Works with the Assistant Superintendent executing current grants and oversees Ashland Education Foundation grant accounts.