

FY25 School Budget Update

By Michael Connelly, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations

The Administration presented it's FY'25 Preliminary School Budget to the North Reading School Committee at this week School Committee meeting on Monday March 11, 2025.

The fiscal year 2025 school recommended budget is like prior years budgets in that it represents a modified level services budget. That means that spending has essentially been the same as the previous year apart from modifications due to shifts in enrollment, contractual salary obligations, operational fixed cost increases, and modest enhancements driven by the District's strategic plan to make continuous improvements to the school department. The fiscal year 2025 recommended budget for the school department is currently \$40,679,524. This represents a 9% or \$3,359,929 increase over fiscal year 2024 and is currently significantly greater than what the Town has available to fund both school and town budgets for fiscal year 2025. The budget gap to achieve the Superintendent's proposed recommended budget as presented on March 11 is \$1,907,396. The budget gap to achieve a level services school budget is currently \$1,200,507.

The Administration and School Committee over the next several weeks hope to continue to work in close collaboration with Town Officials to identify options to close these funding gap to help avoid major budget reductions and support both School and Town needs. Among those options that will be discussed is the possibility of an operating budget override. Such an option has not been done in North Reading since 2005. Many of the decisions to bring the fiscal year 2025 budget into balance will be very difficult ones on the part of the Administration and the School Committee in the coming weeks as we work to find a solution to the large budget gap that exists.

Many cost drivers and challenges drove the fiscal year 2025 budget, which led to the need to make staffing and expense adjustments all netting to a \$3,359,929 increase over the fiscal year 24 appropriation.

These factors can be summarized by the following bulleted points:

- "NRPS 2025: A Strategy for the Future" (Year Five);
- Maintains and adds staff to: (1) maintain educationally sound student/teacher ratios especially at the elementary level; (2) enhance academic support systems to address any areas of learning loss and support early intervention strategies for students struggling in math and literacy (3) maintain adequate health and safety services for all students, staff and the school community (4) address the social, emotional and mental health needs of all students (5) enhance the curriculum leadership model within the district to support all educators in curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies;
- Offering of free universal free day kindergarten for all families
- Contractual obligations with employees and employee unions;
- Continuation of the District 1:1 student device program in grades K thru 12;
- Associated operational costs to properly maintain all five schools and surrounding campuses.

The FY 2025 recommended Preliminary budget includes funding needed to add positions at the elementary schools to account for the increase in enrollment at the Kindergarten and grade one levels to ensure class sizes will remain within recommended guidelines of 18 to 22 students. The below chart includes a cost of \$199,986 to add 2.4 FTE classroom teacher positions to maintain the same class size ratios and support services at each elementary school.

School /Dept.	Position	Amount	Need
Elementary	1.0 FTE Grade Level Teacher	78,176	Enrollment
Batchelder School	0.50 FTE Kindergarten Teacher	39,088	Enrollment
Elementary	0.50 FTE Music, Art, PE/Health	44,777	Enrollment
Hood School	0.4 FTE Special Education Teacher	37,945	Enrollment
Total	2.4 FTE	\$199,986	

The FY 2025 recommended Preliminary Budget includes funding needed to implement a portion of Year Five of the school district's developing strategic plan, "NRPS 2025: A Strategy for the Future." The three major strategy areas of "NRPS 2025" are Student Services; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging; and Teaching and Learning. The budget priorities identified below are directly connected to all three of the major strategy areas and are supported by the work of the Leadership Team on the strategic plan.

The "Modified Level Services" budget includes an increase of 5.6 FTE positions, which are listed as priorities in the strategic vision of the school District. These new positions reflected in the recommended Preliminary Budget include:

School /Dept.	NRPS: 2025 Needs	Amount	NRPS 2025 Strategy
Elementary	0.6 FTE School Adjustment Counselor	52,635	Student Support / Equity
District	1.0 FTE Math Coach	78,176	Teaching & Learning
District	1.0 FTE Literacy Coach	78,176	Teaching & Learning
MS / Elem.	2.0 FTE Academic Interventionist	156,352	Teaching & Learn. / Support
District	1.0 FTE Humanities Coordinator	111,550	Teaching & Learning
Total	5.6 FTE	\$476,889	

The positions previously added and funded by Covid-19 federal relief grants to address needs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic that have been identified as essential services to continue in fiscal year 2025 and are now reflected in the recommended Preliminary Budget include:

School / Department	Position	Grant Offset
Student Services	1.0 FTE Floater Nurse	\$43,000
Technology	1.0 FTE Data Technicians	\$50,000
Student Services	1.0 FTE School Adjustment Counselor Elementary	\$60,000
Student Services	1.0 FTE School Adjustment Counselor Secondary	\$60,000
Total	4.0 FTE	\$213,000

The recommended Preliminary Budget supports the highest of priorities of the strategic plan and results in an expenditure of \$476,889, (in table above) representing an overall increase of 1.3% to the FY 2025 budget request. In addition, the recommended Preliminary budget maintains recommended class sizes and student teacher ratios across the District and continues to address needs heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic. The preliminary budget proposal also includes moving to free universal full day kindergarten for all families next school year.

As we move forward with the budget process both Town and school officials will continue to work in close collaboration to address some of these budgetary challenges. You may review key budget documents on the district website at <https://www.north-reading.k12.ma.us/budget>. You may also follow me on twitter for key budget updates at **@nrpsfinance**.