

Response to Questions from Select Board

Q1. Can you highlight recent changes in the School Budget - high-level topics including adjustments to accommodate pre-override balanced budget for FY21?

(Page 2 in budget book)

The initial budget recommendation from the school department was finalized in December 2019. Since December, the schools have been asked to reduce that initial recommendation by \$814,258. This reduction has come in two separate phases. The initial reduction of \$647,974 was made in February. The initial FY21 budget proposal from the school district included the reinstatement of two curriculum coordinator positions that are needed, yet were eliminated in past years due to budget constraints. Our inability to reinstate these positions leaves us with one staff member (assistant superintendent) as the only individual focused entirely on curriculum and supporting that curriculum. I am not aware of another district with so few supports for such an essential component of schooling. The request for reinstatement of these positions was removed. Three teacher positions were eliminated for FY21 along with an assistant principal position at Grafton High School. These reductions in personnel were paired with reductions in supplies, technology, professional development, utilities, capital, and maintenance. The second reduction, made over the last two months, totaled \$166,284. This reduction was made by eliminating three paraprofessional positions, implementing an administrative pay freeze, eliminating the request for the creation of an elementary-level guidance counselor position, and further reducing technology. We currently have zero counselors at the elementary level. For additional information on the role of counselors and a comparison to local districts, please click on this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bEv9RFKMZa0OmP0IEPWBE65Ip2Dazroe/view?usp=sharing>

Q2. Can you update the committee on recent Chapter 70 Developments and provide a sense of what should we be concerned about?

There are many laws that protect the schools from a devastating decrease. The state needs to meet the foundation aid amount set by the foundation budget calculations. New laws passed as part of the SOA added an additional hold harmless provision. Grafton does have a gap between foundation aid and actual aid of \$536,000 based on current calculations and Ch 70 aid (state aid for schools) could possibly be partially or fully reduced by that amount.

Q3. How much circuit breaker will be used in FY21?

(Budget book pages 43 and 84)

\$900,000

Q4. How much school choice will be spent in FY21?

(Budget book page 82)

\$765,669

Q5. Can you walk us through the new teacher contract?

There are 274 people in the teacher's unit. A one-year contract was negotiated. Teachers receive a 1% COLA increase at the start of FY21 and another 1% increase at the mid-way point of the year. In total, the COLA equates to approximately \$300,000 and that is paired with approximately \$400,000 for steps/lanes. \$100,000 spent on \$30k stipends, \$30k tutoring pay increase, \$20k subs, \$20k sick leave incentive

Q6. How much additional money do you use besides general fund money? Total amount of revolving accounts/other revenue?

What revolving accounts are you using in FY21 and for what?

Budget book pages 74-85

Q7. Can you talk about the technology budget?

The technology budget supports the hardware and software for the district, tech consulting services, and the salaries of the tech staff. Part of the technology budget, approx. \$150,000 per year, is funded by the school choice revolving fund.

On line 2250.50- it looks like close to \$400K is budgeted but in FY19, only \$115K was expended.

Lines 2250.50 and 2250.40 are both dedicated to district technology expenditures and should be looked at together. In FY19, we began accounting differently to these lines. You will see that the monies we underspent for line 2250.50, were overspent for 2250.40.

Q8. Can you talk us through the salary increases for school secretaries? Notation says a 2% increase plus steps and lanes. But the % change looks to be over 7%. Do steps and lanes add that much to the increase or am I not understanding?

There are six school secretaries. These secretaries received a 2% COLA and all received a step increase. The one year contract with secretaries was purposefully designed to help make this position more competitive with area districts.

Q9. Will you add any new positions under article 5 (no override)?

We will add two special education teacher positions for FY21, One is for the expansion of our intensive special needs program into GHS, the other is in grade six and is being added to meet individualized education plan needs.

Q10. Will you add any **new** positions under article 6 (Contingent Budget)?

If the override does pass, we will add one new position. The position would be our first counselor position at the elementary level. The position would be shared between North Street Elementary School and Millbury Street Elementary School.

Covid-10 Related Questions

Q11. Were there any cost savings due to covid? Will that money be turned back or was it reallocated?

We anticipated roughly \$290,000 from FY20 funds will not be expended and will be turned back. When the special education fund was established, turn back monies were to go into the special education stabilization account. Given the challenges at hand, we are hopeful that the town will utilize these monies to help offset Covid-related costs.

Q12. Any plans to use the Special Ed stabilization account?

The special education stabilization account was designed for use when out-of-district costs unexpectedly spike and needs exceed available resources. At this point, we do not know if our out-of-district needs for FY21 will exceed what we had planned for.

Q13. Based on guidance so far from state what will you do to get kids back into the classroom?

Transportation?

Classroom set up?

Remote learning?

Staggered schedules?

The state has yet to release their fall guidance. My expectation is that they will release fairly prescriptive guidance this week and will follow that up with additional guidance later in the summer.

Q14. Any cost estimates to deal with that?

Costs will be dependent on the model that the state utilizes.

Q15. What do you anticipate school choice revenue to be in FY21?

As of now, we have not filled any new seats for FY21. We do anticipate that we will see a decrease in choice revenue in FY21, but at this point we don't have an

estimate. Once the state guidance is released we will be surveying school choice families to gain a sense of their plans for FY21.

Budget book pg 82