



NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1330 Highland Avenue
Needham, MA 02492

May 1, 2021

Dear Town Meeting Members,

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has been profound. For much of the current school year, the Needham Public Schools employed a hybrid learning model in which the majority of students attended school for in-person instruction only 40% of the time, learning remotely for the remainder. In early March, we began expanding in-person instruction, and we have successfully transitioned all of our elementary and middle school students to full in-person learning. Needham High School students begin a staggered transition to full in-person instruction on May 3rd. In addition, families with health & safety concerns have been able to access a fully remote program (our Remote Learning Academy) throughout the entire year. Our students, families, teachers and staff have performed well through myriad challenges this school year, and it is against this backdrop that the Needham School Committee invites you to consider its FY22 operating budget request (School Year 2021-2022).

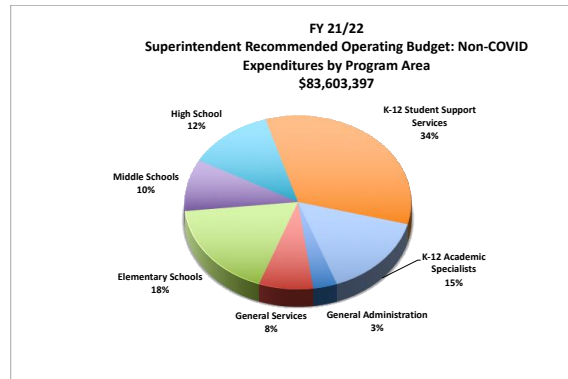
In consultation with the Town Manager and Town of Needham Finance Committee, we are presenting the FY22 operating budget request with two components: a traditional (non-pandemic) budget and a COVID supplemental budget.

Budget Request	Amount	Increase over Current Year
Traditional Budget	\$83,603,397	\$2,868,308 (3.6%)
COVID Supplemental Request	\$3,210,199	
Total Operating Budget Request	\$86,813,596	\$6,078,507 (7.5%)

Guidance for school operations from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, as well as federal and state agencies, continues to change. Due to this and continued general uncertainty related to the pandemic, the Finance Committee has recommended school COVID-related expenses be presented as a separate warrant article in FY22, likely at Fall Special Town Meeting, when more information about needs and available federal and state funding is known.

Traditional Budget Request

Our traditional budget request of \$83.6 million provides the resources needed for existing contractual staff obligations, enrollment growth, special education needs, and the District’s [Portrait of a Needham Graduate](#) Five-Year Strategic Plan.



This budget is based on the following critical assumptions for the school year beginning in September:

- The Needham Public Schools will resume full in-person learning for all students, preschool through high school. There will be only modest health & safety requirements such as masking and enhanced cleaning, and no physical distancing requirements.
- We will not be required to offer a separate fully remote option for all families. All students must attend school in person unless there is a documented medical need.
- Modest cost of living adjustments are provided for school staff, including teachers, administrators, instructional assistants and clerical workers, as contractually required per their respective collective bargaining agreements.
- Non-salary accounts are level funded. All budget increases beyond level funding are highlighted below and in the following pages.

The majority of our requested budget increase is for contractual salary increases for teachers and staff and other Level Service Requests. These represent the resources required to bring existing and mandated programs, contracts, and staffing levels into the new fiscal year. Level Service Requests are comprised of three primary areas:

- **Contractual Salary Increases:** Negotiated contracts for all existing employees account for \$1.5 million (51%) of the total requested increase. Needham provides reasonable yet competitive salaries that enable us to recruit, support and retain our talented faculty and staff.
- **Enrollment, Class Size & Program Support:** Our enrollment decreased by 221 students in FY21 largely due to COVID-19. In FY22, the traditional budget request is based on a projected enrollment of 5,641 students, an increase of 155 students. This budget adds a total of 1.05 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) classroom and specialist teachers, including 0.4 FTE for a Pollard Math Specialist and 0.45 FTE for part-time teachers at NHS.
- **Special Education & Student Support Services:** Increases in the number of students eligible for special education services, special education tuition and other mandated service costs account for \$450,692 (16%) of the new funds requested. Of this amount, \$283,642 is for additional special education out of district tuition costs. Additionally, we are seeking 1.25 FTE new special education and counseling staff and 4.0 FTE teaching assistant and administrative support positions.

We are requesting a very modest amount—\$263,443 (9%)—for Program Improvements to create, enhance, improve or expand programs. These requests will allow us to expand our elementary assistant

principal positions, create a K-8 social studies curriculum leadership role, and add incremental high school specialists.

COVID Supplemental Budget Request

Our COVID Supplemental Budget Request of \$3.2 million reflects the additional costs of operating schools during a pandemic. The COVID request is based on the following assumptions:

- Physical distancing requirements remain in place and we must operate more class sections with fewer students in each. We are also required to offer a fully remote option for all families who request this (similar to the Remote Learning Academy offered during the current school year).
- Over 25 additional FTEs are required, including 17.0 FTE for the Remote Learning Academy, general education teachers, and administrators, and 9.0 FTE special education teachers and teaching assistants.
- We must fund additional classroom materials, PPE, cleaning and sanitizing supplies, and tent rental.
- Operating funds are needed to cover anticipated deficits in preschool, yellow bus transportation, athletics and nutrition services due to lower revenues and/or higher operating costs.

Given the ongoing fluidity of the pandemic, the evolving nature of operational guidance for public schools, and the reality that no vaccine is currently approved for children under 16 years of age, our COVID Supplemental budget request will continue to be refined in the coming months. At the time of this message, we anticipate the aforementioned COVID Supplemental Budget Request is a worst case scenario, however, it is likely components of this budget request will be needed next year.

School Capital Requests for FY22

Annually, the School Committee requests funds for technology and equipment replacement needs as part of the Town's Capital Improvement Budget. This year, we are requesting replacement funds as follows: \$479,650 for school technology, \$102,838 for vehicles and \$61,264 for copiers; all of these requests have been recommended for Tier I funding by the Town Manager. An additional \$25,000 has been requested for school furniture replacement, however, this has been recommended for Tier II funding.

Additionally, we are requesting facility-related capital funds as follows:

- \$213,100 to convert the Broadmeadow technology room to regular classroom space
- \$280,000 to conduct a feasibility study of near-term maintenance projects required at the Pollard Middle School such that any work is consistent with a future Pollard renovation project as voted upon by the School Committee as part of the recently completed School Master Plan
- \$60,000 to conduct a needs assessment of auditorium theatrical sound and lighting.

With the support of Town Meeting, The School Committee is also hoping to secure design funds this coming fall for a new school administration building/historic renovation project at the current Emery Grover site on Highland Avenue. As Town Meeting is aware, the existing Emery Grover building has well-documented mechanical and structural challenges, is undersized and unsafe, and presents significant usage challenge for the critical work of our District leadership and administrative staff.

Challenges, Opportunities and Gratitude

Even in the face of a global pandemic, Needham's students, teachers and staff have continued to develop and exemplify the competencies outlined in our vision for the [Portrait of a Needham Graduate](#). Our students have excelled in their academic, extracurricular and service pursuits, our staff has developed new skills in remote teaching and learning, and we have maintained strong school communities able to respond to the many challenges brought on by the pandemic.

In particular, the School Committee would like to acknowledge our outstanding partnerships with the Town's Public Health Department, Building Design & Construction Department and the Building Maintenance Division of the Public Works Department, guided by the leadership of Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. Some highlights of this work include:

- Beginning last summer and continuing throughout the year, the Town has performed extensive maintenance work on the ventilation systems in all of our school buildings, which has been critical in allowing us to keep our schools open. We have also benefitted from increased custodial staff in our school buildings. This increased attention to building repairs and maintenance was necessary due to the pandemic and corrected certain building issues that had been deferred. Post-pandemic, improved attention to routine and preventative maintenance and repairs must be sustained.
- Public Health Department nurses have assisted school nursing and other staff with extensive contract tracing, as well as family education and support in understanding and managing over 287 COVID cases in our schools.

In addition to these important partnerships over the last year, the School Committee continues to be grateful for the support of the Select Board, Finance Committee and the other Town Boards, Committees and community organizations who work with us for the benefit of Needham's students and school system.

Looking ahead, the School Committee has several priorities, including the following:

- **Emery Grover Renovation Project:** As mentioned, we hope to embark on an historic renovation and expansion of the school administration building at the current Emery Grover site on Highland Avenue.
- **School Master Plan Capital Projects:** This spring, Dore + Whittier completed a [School Master Plan](#) under the direction of the Permanent Public Building Committee. The goal of this study was to understand facility and programming needs at our elementary and middle school buildings. Both the Mitchell Elementary School and the Pollard Middle School will require significant capital projects in the coming years to address building and programming deficiencies.
- **Equity Work:** For many years, the Needham Public Schools has been engaged in diversity, equity and inclusion work and becoming an anti-racist District. Race equity is a key component of this work, however, it also includes diversity across multiple dimensions, including ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, religion, country of origin, socio-economic status and ability. This critical work is ongoing, and we encourage Town Meeting members to learn more about our efforts in this area by visiting our [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion website](#).

Finally, as we begin to resume school instruction and activities in our "new normal," we know everyone

– students, families, staff and the broader Needham community – has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. We are committed to addressing the academic needs of our students, as well as their social emotional and mental health needs, along with those of the adults who support them in our schools and at home. We look forward to your continued partnership in support of Needham’s young people and respectfully ask for Town Meeting’s support of our operating budget as proposed. Please reach out to me or other members of the School Committee should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Longo Carter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrea Longo Carter ('21)
Chair, Needham School Committee 2020-2021