



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

February 5, 2020

To: School Committee
From: Joe Sawyer
Re: Funding of Strategic Priorities in Fiscal Year 2021

Last year, for the Fiscal Year 2020 budget process, we shifted our approach by devising a “status quo” budget that represented the resources necessary to bring existing programming and staff forward, as well as a “strategic priorities” budget that outlined recommended investments in order to achieve the goals in the district’s [2018-2022 Strategic Priorities](#). This change in approach was detailed in a front page article of [last spring's edition of the Shrewsbury School Journal](#) by School Committee Chair, Sandy Fryc.

Current fiscal year

Due to some funding that was ultimately available from the district’s town-appropriated budget, along with other funding from grants and partnerships, several investments were made in the current fiscal year to advance our strategic priorities (outlined on page three of the [FY20 budget book provided to Town Meeting](#) last year). These investments addressed key priorities, including providing sufficient staffing to address enrollment growth; responding to increased student mental and behavioral health needs; and expanding opportunities for connecting students with “real world” learning.

Next fiscal year

Unfortunately, because of a lack of sufficient revenue for town government, there will be less funding available to the School Department than what will be required to fund our status quo budget for next year. Therefore, if the district were to invest any town-appropriated funds in new expenses related to advancing our strategic priorities, it would require commensurate reductions in existing expenses, or alternative funding sources.

As we work through a budget plan for Fiscal Year 2021, our leadership team is examining the impact the new resources that were added in the current year are having on students, and what the consequences might be if any were not continued into next year. Our analysis will consider whether our students will be better served by these recent investments, and whether there are other costs that are not associated with the district’s strategic priorities that should be reduced instead of taking a “last in, first out” approach. These will be difficult decisions, and the ultimate magnitude of the budget gap will be an important factor in this process.

Additionally, as part of the early work of our budget development, members of the District Leadership Team, which consists of all supervisors and curriculum leaders, were invited to submit suggestions for strategic investments for next year. The submissions, which were required to be categorized under one of the four strategic priorities, thoughtfully represented myriad ways in which improvements could be made that would enhance student learning and well-being. Many of these requests were for additional staffing, others were for enhanced technology, and a number were for increased professional development to build educators’ capacity. None of these suggested investments were unreasonable, and most were for resources that currently exist in other high-performing public school districts. As we work through the budget process, it is possible that a very limited number of these suggested investments might be folded into next year’s fiscal plan, but, again, this can only be done if reductions are made elsewhere in the budget.

The following table provides a comparison of strategic investment funding in the town appropriated School Department budgets for FY20 and projected for FY21:

	Fiscal Year 2020 (Budgeted)	Fiscal Year 2021 (Projected)	Difference
School Department appropriated budget	\$66,302,041	\$70,579,913	\$4,277,873
Strategic investments net addition in funding to School Department appropriated budget	\$775,641 1.2% of appropriation	\$0	(\$775,641)
Strategic investments from other sources (not included in town appropriation to School Department)	\$560,000 0.8% if added to appropriation	TBD	TBD

Conclusion

I am proud of the fact that our school district has clear strategic priorities, and these will help guide us in the difficult budget work ahead as difficult choices are made. Reductions in our capacity will inevitably compromise our ability to do the work expected of us, and may result in either the delay or incompleteness of certain goals. Cutbacks will also create stressors on the system that could compromise areas of our program that are currently successful and on solid ground.

I am disappointed that our community does not have the capacity to provide additional funding for excellent strategic ideas that would benefit our students. I am saddened by the fact that we will be reducing resources next year instead of incrementally improving our ability to meet the high level of demands and expectations placed upon our schools. This lack of resources will inevitably compromise our school district's ability to do what we should for our students and our community.