



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

---

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

March 4, 2020

To: School Committee  
From: Joe Sawyer  
Re: Cost Reduction Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2021

Dear School Committee:

As you are aware, there is currently at \$2.9 million gap between the [“status quo” budget I filed in January](#), with a recommendation for a \$70,579,913 School Department appropriation (increase of \$4,277,873, or 6.45%, over the current year) and the [Town Manager’s initial School Department recommendation](#) of \$67,668,322 (increase of \$1,366,281, or 2.06%).

At this evening’s School Committee meeting, I will present a set of recommended cost reductions totaling \$1.7 million, which will reduce the budget gap by more than half. These cost reductions will compromise our schools’ ability to provide the expected level of education to our town’s young people by reducing educational programming, cutting teaching and support personnel, decreasing investments in curriculum materials and staff professional development, and reducing operational capacity.

In creating this plan, the school district’s administrative leadership team considered various cost reduction measures, with the following guidelines in mind:

- 1) Focus on efficiencies in operations first
- 2) Maintain class sizes within School Committee guidelines wherever possible
- 3) Avoid reductions that would compromise the district’s strategic priorities and goals
- 4) Minimize layoffs of staff (such as by using attrition where possible)

I took suggestions from the administrative team that tried to meet these guidelines to the best of their ability, and I determined what cost reductions to recommend to you for your consideration. I’m sure many will not agree with recommendations made here, and I want to be clear that the responsibility for these choices ultimately falls upon me as your superintendent.

It is important that I signal to you, our staff, and the community that it is my opinion that our budget will need to be reduced by *at least* this \$1.7 million amount, given the amount of revenue the town is projected to have available. Unlike in past years, where I have recommended “tiers” of reductions to meet different potential levels of funding as the budget process evolves, I do not foresee any circumstances where enough funding will become available to reduce less than \$1.7 million. Therefore, unless a different option is substituted for something that is recommended here, the slate of reductions listed below would need to take effect, with potentially even more reductions necessary if the remaining \$1.2 million gap can’t be closed by other means.

The table that follows lists the recommended reductions. Other than some operational efficiencies that have been identified, I would prefer that we not have to make any of these reductions, and it is not possible to rank order each item on the list as separate reductions will have differing negative impacts on our educational program and the students we serve that are not appropriate to compare. That said, reductions that are greater in scope and impact on priorities or class size and/or result in the loss of positions are found later in the list.

<b>Recommended cost reduction</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Additional information/potential impact</b>
<b>Operations</b>		
Operational efficiencies	\$16,000	Revised copier lease, vendor change for custodial supplies, etc. No negative impact.
Changes in personnel projections for next school year	\$80,655	Replace known maternity leave with long-term substitute; reduce allowance for salary rate for teacher hires to replace vacancies, which means less flexibility hiring educators with more experience.
Site-based discretionary funding reduced by 3.2%	\$10,000	Less discretionary funding for principals and department directors to utilize for supplies, materials, staff conferences, etc.
Reduce substitute budget	\$44,850	If budgeted amount is not sufficient to cover short- and long-term absences as year evolves, may require limits on number of substitutes provided and require more internal coverage by other staff.
Reduce one bus from transportation program	\$72,000	Examine routing for further efficiencies to reduce the need for one bus. May require longer travel times for students on certain routes.
Reduce funding for technology hardware & software	\$98,000	Defer purchases of some networking equipment and other infrastructure items; end subscription to ThoughtExchange community survey service.
Reduce funding for textbooks & curriculum materials	\$25,000	Some purchases will be deferred instead of acquiring updated books and materials.
Reduce funding for staff professional development	\$100,000	Reduces ability to provide trainers, attend conferences, or provide substitute coverage to free up educators for training; compromises ability to implement new programming; will seek grants and other alternative funding to offset reduction where possible.
<b>Operations reductions subtotal</b>	<b>\$446,505</b>	

<b>Program &amp; Personnel</b>		
Reduce funding available for compensation increases for non-represented administrators (Central Office administrators & principals)	\$31,230	Includes Superintendent's recommendation to freeze his own compensation at the current year's level.
Reduce overtime for Central Office & Information Technology support staff	\$15,000	Some overtime necessary to maintain for school year start up phase; otherwise, timelines for certain reports and services will need to be expanded.
Eliminate position for assistive technology teacher (1.0 FTE)	\$20,000	Teacher resigned prior to start of current year, and district has successfully used a contracted services model to address needs; represents net savings for removing teaching position for FY21 and using contracted services instead.
Reduce summer curriculum per diem work at elementary level	\$11,700	Less availability of curriculum coordinators/instructional coaches to support planning for upcoming school year.
Eliminate remaining elementary level door monitors (1.0 FTE)	\$19,000	Part-time door monitors at Coolidge and Spring Street to be eliminated. Reliance internal coverage for secretaries to monitor doors during school day.
Reduce Transportation, Safety, & Security Coordinator position by 50% (0.5 FTE)	\$30,000	Change work year from year-round to school year schedule, mostly half days except for opening phase of school year; less administrative capacity to respond to needs in these areas, some responsibility shifted to district administrators or other support staff.
Reduce literacy tutor program in grades K-6 by 40% (4.0 FTE)	\$90,000	Reduce positions and/or hours of part-time literacy tutors to save 40% of cost of these supports; will reduce ability to support students who are reading below benchmarks; program will be revamped to serve students with greatest identified needs, regardless of school site, and shift support over the course of the year as needs change. Reductions may be a combination of attrition, reduced hours, and eliminating part time positions.
Reduce instructional aide support at elementary level by 60 hours (20 hours at Floral Street School, 10 hours each	\$50,000	These same 60 hours were added back to the program in FY16. Will result in less adult academic support for students in grades K-4 and less capacity for day-to-day operational

at Beal, Coolidge, Paton, & Spring Street Schools (2.0 FTE)		support in those schools. Reductions may be a combination of attrition, reduced hours, and eliminating part time positions.
Eliminate academic tutor position at Oak Middle School (1.0 FTE)	\$25,000	Reduces academic support for students in grades 7 & 8. Another position for staff member will be available through attrition elsewhere.
Do not fill open position due to leave of absence for Grade 3 teacher at Floral Street School (1.0 FTE)	\$61,981	Class size increases but remains within School Committee guidelines (projected average of 23.3 students per class); does not affect a specific staff member due to leave of absence
Do not fill open positions due to retirement of math teacher, physics teacher, and Spanish teacher at SHS (3.0 FTE)	\$194,250	Five fewer class sections, resulting in slightly higher class sizes and/or fewer course offerings (depending on ongoing course selection process). Does not affect specific staff members due to attrition. Note: Savings between veteran educator salary and replacement salary was already reflected in initial budget projection, further reduction eliminates replacement cost.
Do not fill open position due to resignation of drama teacher at Oak Middle School (1.0 FTE)	\$91,379	Drama will not be part of allied arts programming at Oak next year; position currently filled by long-term substitute.
Reduce size of preschool program by closing Wesleyan Terrace site & reduce aide allotment per classroom (7.3 FTE)	\$162,735	Reduce number of classrooms for Parker Road Preschool from 8 to 7, which reduces 1.0 FTE teacher and 2.0 FTE aides (requires reconfiguration of 1 space at Parker Road currently used for occupational & physical therapy); reduction of aide/classroom ratio from 1.5 FTE to 1.0 FTE per class, resulting in an additional 4.3 FTE reduction of aide positions. Given level of turnover/attrition in paraprofessional positions, hope is that no aide layoffs will be necessary. Transfer opportunity available for teacher affected.
Eliminate one Grade 5 two-teacher team at Sherwood Middle School (2.0 FTE)	\$115,159	Projection will increase class size to average of 25.5 students (1.5 above guidelines), similar to Grade 6 next year. Transfer opportunities available to teachers affected subject to licensure.
Eliminate advanced math coach positions at Sherwood Middle School & Oak Middle School (2.0 FTE)	\$152,762	Reduces opportunities for students with advanced math performance and for support for classroom math teachers to provide enrichment. Transfer opportunities available to teachers affected subject to licensure.

Eliminate Grade 6 foreign language program at Sherwood Middle School (2.8 FTE)	\$184,658	Delays students' study of Spanish, French, & Mandarin by one year. Requires revamping of schedule at Sherwood that affects educator collaboration periods. Eliminates 2.5 FTE teaching positions and reduces a 1.0 FTE position to 0.7 FTE. Transfer opportunities currently not available.
<b>Program &amp; Personnel reductions subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,254,854</b>	
<b>Total FTE eliminated from budget plan</b>	<b>28.6 FTE</b>	
<b>Total Recommended Cost Reductions</b>	<b>\$1,701,359</b>	Remaining budget gap after reductions: \$1,198,641

Based on cost-cutting measures in the current fiscal year (freeze on conferences; targeted reductions in discretionary spending; etc.), we expect to end FY20 with approximately an additional \$300,000 in surplus funds that can be applied to FY21 through Circuit Breaker.

Additionally, we expect rate increases in fees charged to families for transportation, athletics, activities, and music lessons to offset approximately \$55,500 of additional costs.

Combined with this reduction plan, the total mitigation from the School Department stands at approximately \$2,056,859, leaving a remaining budget gap of \$854,732.

It is my hope that the remaining budget gap can be closed without further reductions to the school district's budget by more revenue becoming available. However, additional reductions are a possibility that the leadership team will begin to plan for. The coming weeks will be important as the Town Manager updates his revenue and cost projections, including the projected cost of the town's share of health insurance premiums for town employees.

While this plan has tried to limit negative impacts on students, I am deeply troubled that next year we will not offer as much programming and support for student learning as we do currently, and I am deeply sorry that many hardworking, skillful, dedicated members of our staff are being negatively affected by our difficult financial situation. I continue to be committed to working with the School Committee, town officials, and state officials to try to resolve the structural funding dilemma our community continues to face, as it is compromising the quality of public education in Shrewsbury.