



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

March 30, 2022

To: School Committee
Re: Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2023 Fees & Tuitions

At your last meeting, Mr. Collins presented information regarding fees and tuitions that families pay for various services, programs, or activities that are optional in some manner. At that time, I indicated that I would be making my recommendations for adjustments for your March 30 meeting, and this memorandum contains these recommendations. Please refer to [the materials from your March 16 meeting](#) for additional information regarding these fees and tuition.

The School Committee has long lamented the unfortunately reality that our district is a “high fee district” due to decisions over the past two decades to generate revenue where possible in order to offset costs and avoid making cuts to personnel and programming that otherwise would have been necessary due to lack of financial resources, especially due to the structural deficit created by Proposition 2 ½.

For this year, the opening of the new Beal School and the successful operational override and the agreement between the School Committee and Board of Selectmen made a major strategic goal possible, which was to offer universal access to tuition-free, full-day kindergarten, allowing Shrewsbury to join the vast majority of districts across the state and reducing a barrier to learning for families whose financial circumstances made access to full-day K challenging. For this coming year, I propose that the School Committee take action to remove another barrier to students participating fully in the educational experience by eliminating the activity fee for middle and high school students.

The activity fee, which is projected to bring in \$106,000 in revenue that would offset the cost of providing various co-curricular activities to students, including clubs, drama and musical theater, academic teams (Speech & Debate, Robotics, Quiz Team, etc.), and myriad other experiences that take place outside of the academic program. These activities connect students to meaningful experiences and build relationships with fellow students and adult mentors. The benefits of participating in activities outside of the regular school day have long been well-documented as beneficial to students, and has been [cited](#) as “one of the few interventions that benefit low -status, disadvantaged students—those less well served by traditional educational programs—as much as or more than their more advantaged peers.” In more recent research, participation in activities [has been found](#) to be associated positively with students’ mental health and well-being and with a reduction in “screen time” on devices.

Given the ongoing mental health and well-being crisis our students are experiencing, I believe it makes sense to reduce barriers to participating in co-curricular activities where we can, especially for students whose families' financial means may cause them not to participate, and the elimination of the activity fee would accomplish this. Because the budget projection enables the district to shift the \$106,000 in costs that otherwise would be borne by the activity fee to the appropriated budget without making reductions elsewhere, this change is affordable for the district.

A secondary benefit to eliminating the fee is providing a measure of relief to families of students in grades 5-12 who would otherwise pay the activity fee, often in addition to transportation, music lesson, and athletic fees, in an environment where inflation is high and the investment in our schools and other town services has been stabilized due to the increase in local property tax as a result of the override. Given this fiscal environment, and given that increases to fees and tuition are not required to maintain educational staff and programming next year, my recommendation for Fiscal Year 2023 is to hold the transportation fee, athletics fees, music lesson fees, and preschool tuition at the same level as the current fiscal year, while eliminating the activity fee.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.