



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

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Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

April 12, 2023

To: School Committee  
From: Joe Sawyer  
Re: Fiscal Year 2024 Town-Appropriated Budget – Final Recommendation

At your meeting on April 12, it is requested that you vote to recommend a Fiscal Year 2024 School Department town-appropriated budget for approval at the Annual Town Meeting in May.

This budget meets the requirements of the watershed fiscal agreement between the School Committee and the Select Board regarding the operational override passed in 2021 by Shrewsbury voters.

Based upon the revenue projections and recommendation from Town Manager Kevin Mizikar, the increase for the School Department appropriation will be 4.75% for FY24, the upper limit of the override agreement. If approved by Town Meeting as the final budget, this will provide \$3,767,651 in new appropriated funds over the current fiscal year, for a bottom-line appropriation of \$83,086,622 for FY24. This will enable all of our current personnel and programs to be appropriately funded for next year with no risk of cuts or layoffs due to lack of funds, which maintains stability for our operations – unlike times in the not-too-distant past when cuts needed to be made in some areas of the school budget in order to cope with ongoing increases in other educational costs.

After presenting an initial budget recommendation in February, the School Committee asked that the district leadership consider ways in which financial support for key district priorities might be included in the final budget recommendation. Because of the high inflation environment, and due to the need to add funding in FY24 for several mandated positions in special education and English language education that were added over the course of this current fiscal year, my initial recommendation included only two new positions: a reading specialist at Sherwood Middle School and an additional science teacher at Shrewsbury High School to increase offerings in the Project Lead the Way engineering and/or biomedical courses that are aligned with career and technical education.

Since February, a draft strategic plan has been presented, cost projections for next year have been refined, planning to address program needs for literacy and career and

technical education has evolved further, and other district needs have been considered. As a result, this final budget recommendation includes additional strategic investments beyond those presented in the initial plan.

Because the 4.75% bottom-line increase has not changed from the original budget plan, additional investments require use of funds in the district's Circuit Breaker reserve account. The School Committee asked that district leadership consider how to balance the desirability of having a strong reserve against the opportunity cost of making key investments in areas of need. This final recommendation maintains a strong reserve balance that is projected to end FY24 at \$2.63 million, representing 75% of the estimated maximum allowable Circuit Breaker reserve. This estimate is far stronger – more than five times greater – than what our district typically carried in the years prior to the 2021 operational override, when the target was \$500,000. Maintaining a strong reserve protects the district against the volatility of potential sharp increases in mandated special education costs or other emergent needs, and can serve as a buffer for future budget pressures. This \$2.63 million projected reserve is \$339,325, or 10%, less than what was estimated in the initial budget plan; that net amount is shifted to the strategic investments listed below to address key needs.

Based upon the draft strategic plan and our leadership team's assessment of areas where additional investments would be warranted, I am recommending the following be included in the FY24 town-appropriated budget:

- Two reading specialists for the grades K-4 level to provide direct service to students requiring reading interventions, supervise and support literacy tutors, and provide coaching and professional development to teachers in the area of literacy. (\$190,000)
- Engaging a literacy/reading consultant's services during the 2023-2024 school year to provide the training and implementation support updated literacy instructional practices and programming in grades PreK-6. (\$50,000)
- Setting aside funds that otherwise would have been used for vocational-technical high school tuition in order to implement additional opportunities for career and technical education that the district is investigating, and that could be implemented over the course of the 2023-2024 school year. Use of these funds could support expanded career pathways programming, coordination of internship or cooperative opportunities with business and industry and/or higher education partners, etc. (\$100,000)
- Contracting with an outside expert organization to perform a safety and security audit of all nine of our school buildings' infrastructure and of district protocols and emergency response practices. (\$77,000)
- Utilizing outside services to assist with student attendance concerns and residency validation (\$25,000)

- Engaging consultant services to ensure strong implementation of the district's new strategic plan, including development of data tracking systems to monitor improvement (\$38,500)

The spreadsheet accompanying this memo illustrates the updated cost projections and these recommended additional strategic investments, and the updated line-item budget plan also reflects these adjustments (both documents provided under separate cover). Should the School Committee agree with my recommendation, I ask that you vote to recommend this Fiscal Year 2024 School Department Appropriated Budget for Town Meeting approval.