



# Shrewsbury School Committee

## Priorities & Guidance for Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Development

### *Draft for Discussion on October 25, 2023*

### Overview

This document provides the community with information about the School Committee's priorities for the Fiscal Year 2025 School Department Budget that will be appropriated by Town Meeting. It is also designed to provide guidance to the Superintendent of Schools and the School Department administration regarding the development of its initial Fiscal Year 2025 School Department Budget proposal.

For FY25, we plan ahead with optimism to implement the priorities in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan that was unanimously approved this past spring. This plan has three major commitments:

- 1) educational excellence,
- 2) the enhanced well-being of all, and
- 3) optimization of resources.

Each of these commitments includes multiple strategic priorities. The district's budget should reflect these priorities and provide the resources required to achieve key action steps to advance them. Some examples include:

- major academic programming initiatives, such as improving literacy instruction in grades PreK-6 and improving access to career and technical education for high school students;
- enhancing our systems of support for students with social, emotional, and behavioral needs; and
- hiring, supporting, and retaining highly qualified and diverse staff.

Other important factors must be considered with regard to resource allocation in FY25. Our district is experiencing a rapidly evolving student population across all levels which presents significant and varied economic impacts. The significant increase in English language learners (63% increase in FY24) and students needing specific educational, social, emotional, and behavioral support requires us to review staffing and program structure to meet these needs. We must anticipate the potential for school-age children continuing to reside in emergency homeless shelters in Shrewsbury. Supporting our homeless population is resource heavy, with transportation, support, and translation costs that will need to be considered in the FY25 budget where costs potentially may not be covered entirely through state funding.

The landscape of federal funding post-pandemic speaks to a 'fiscal cliff' for many U.S. districts with the end of ESSER 3 federal grant money, requiring current funds to be obligated by September 30, 2024. The FY25 budget will need to consider whether and how to replace the district's current ESSER 3 investments allocated for post-pandemic support, such as some personnel costs, the Summer Academy program, and the provision of late bus access for student access to after school extra help and co-curricular programs.

With this context we set forth the following Budget priorities and Guidance for development of the FY25 annual operating budget.

## Priorities

The initial FY25 School Department Budget proposal shall include resources to address each of the following priorities:

1. *Meet commitments as detailed in the March 16, 2021 Override Statement to the Residents of Shrewsbury and agreed upon between the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee*

This compact includes specific commitments towards budget planning transparency, engagement with the community, and limitations on annual budget increases.

2. *Resources for key district needs and priorities included in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan*

- a. To maintain class sizes within School Committee guidelines.
- b. To further advance the literacy initiative in grades PreK-6 by providing necessary curriculum materials and professional development.
- c. To provide support for students with complex educational, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.
- d. To consider initiatives that promote staff well-being that require financial resources.
- e. To allocate required resources to deliver mandated educational services for our English learner population that is growing in size and complexity.
- f. To further develop in-district career and technical education programs at the high school and create partnerships with area businesses for similar types of student experiential learning opportunities, after utilizing available grants and/or philanthropic funding.
- g. To consider what investments will enhance the district's commitment to its core value of equity, particularly with efforts to close achievement and opportunity gaps and ensure that all students have equitable access to high-quality learning experiences.
- h. To consider potential investments in school safety and security enhancements based upon recommendations from the audit conducted in FY24.
- i. To review and determine what costs that are currently supported through the ESSER-3 grant might be shifted to the appropriated budget or other available source.

## **Assumptions & Guidance**

It is assumed that the initial FY25 School Department Budget proposal will:

1. Work within the fiscal guidelines of the override agreement between the School Committee and Select Board.
2. Provide adequate resources to meet all legal mandates required of the school district.
3. Reflect the terms of collective bargaining agreements and other contractual obligations and consider the impact of agreements that will be under negotiation for the coming fiscal year.
4. Provide sufficient resources to maintain a) the existing educational program and b) staffing levels necessary to meet mandates and priorities.
5. Utilize the best available information to project changes in costs (such as tuitions) and revenues (such as state funding through the Chapter 70 and Circuit Breaker programs, grants, etc.).
6. Estimate level funding for all expected federal and state grants and present options regarding potential continuation of programs or services that were previously funded by Covid-related grants that are expiring.
7. Review fee and tuition levels for all programs and make recommendations that consider the School Department's increased costs to operate, while also taking into account the associated financial challenges for families.
8. Examine ways to reduce or shift costs in order to achieve district priorities without requiring additional funding allocations wherever possible.
9. Given space constraints at the secondary schools, the administration should assume no new School Choice seats will be voted by the School Committee for approval.