



March 12, 2024

Dear Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Parents, Staff and Community Members,

Budget season is in full swing and key conversations across the district are focused on school funding. I met with Board of Education committees, administration, teacher’s union leadership, Central Office staff, and PTO leaders to discuss budget progress and planning. It is important to share this update with parents, residents and the entire community so that all stakeholders are informed of budget considerations, challenges and cost to taxpayers.

Our school budget is made up mostly by local taxes combined with state and federal aid, grants and other funds to cover salaries, classroom materials, facility upgrades, bussing, extracurricular activities and more. To develop our budget, we monitor current spending, analyze anticipated expenses and allocate funds carefully to support district goals and provide for every student, every day at every opportunity.

For 2024-2025, we’re facing a steep deficit. Retaining current staff, maintaining all programs and services, as well as meeting all contract requirements raised our district budget by 5.1 percent, which was determined to be too high of an increase to taxpayers. To decrease the amount of funds to be raised by taxpayers, the budget needed to be reduced by close to \$3 million. Balancing the budget is a complex task and fiscal choices are often difficult. Every decision can impact the way we deliver instruction to our 3,200 students in PreK through Grade 8.

We have a tough task ahead of us as we aim to cut \$3 million to close the budget gap and reduce the tax levy. Here’s a breakdown of the budget and how costs have risen in each category:

Salaries - 36% of the budget

First and foremost, we are a district made up of dedicated, skilled and nurturing faculty and staff members who care deeply about children. Our district employs nearly 675 teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, media specialists, maintenance crew, technicians, nurses, school counselors, secretaries, aides and contracted providers such as our custodians and food service workers. We also share costs for our bus drivers. District salary contracts for teachers and administrators increase each year, 3.25% and 3%, respectively, for the 2024-2025 school year. We planned for this increase with long-range budgeting.

Benefits - 16% of the budget

Our staff are offered health benefit programs by contract. Health insurance costs have skyrocketed, up 18 percent from last year. To reduce costs, the District has proposed changing healthcare providers. Benefits include medical, dental, prescription, workers compensation, pension, social security, tuition reimbursement, and additional benefits. Insurance costs are soaring!

Special Education - 23% of the budget

Special education costs are rising too. This includes support for in-district students and tuition for students who attend school out-of-district for more specialized care and services. Flemington-Raritan is committed to providing the least restrictive learning environment for students who receive special education services.

Strategic Goals:

Goal Area #1: The District will provide a comprehensive and rigorous educational experience that connects and expands students’ knowledge while engaging and empowering all learners to synthesize and apply their skills and understandings in meaningful ways.

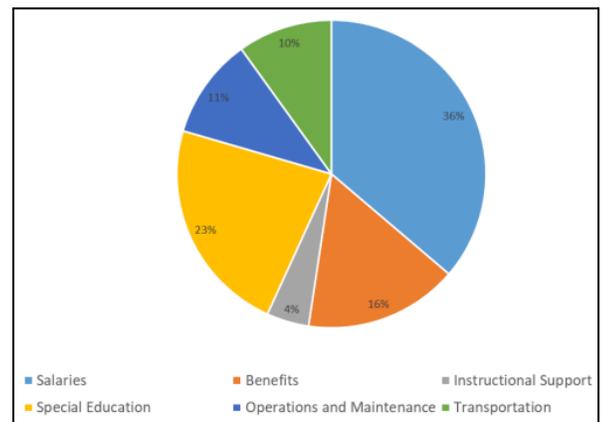
Goal Area #2: Develop a continuation of a multi-tiered system of support within the district to target the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.

Goal Area #3: The district will create opportunities to foster unity between the community and the school district in order to strengthen partnerships and develop a shared responsibility for student success.

Goal Area #4: Create an enticing and competitive work environment to attract and retain high-quality candidates representative of students’ diverse backgrounds in the Flemington Raritan Regional School District community.

Goal Area #5: Ensure the finance and facilities needs are budgeted to upkeep and meet the needs of the growing district.

Where does all the money go?



The majority of our costs are fixed costs with about 4% in discretionary funds.



Transportation - 10% of the budget

Transportation is a critical service that the District is required to provide to the majority of students. Costs include bussing for regular and special education students to and from school, athletics, and non-public student aid in lieu of transportation. We have prepared for an increase in bussing costs of 5.9 percent. Some routes increased by 30 percent.

Other Expenses

The budget includes additional costs such as instructional support (4%); operations and maintenance (11%); and other expenses such as pension liabilities, property insurance and workers' compensation, all of which are higher amounts than last year. Even the cost of keeping our exceptional Class III Officers in each school has risen.

Grants, State Aid & Other Funding

The District applies for federal and state grants to assist in funding, such as the [Preschool Expansion Award](#); High Impact Tutoring; Sustainability; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); and others. For the second year in a row, the District received funding to support high-quality preschool education but this funding can *only* be used to pay for preschool services and preschool costs. We also receive state aid. For 2024-2025, our District will receive just over \$6 million, up \$549,199 from last year. This aid includes preschool expansion funding and assists with costs for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 8 students. While grants and aid boost revenue and help offset costs, these monies fall short in balancing the budget. In addition, some funding our district has been receiving has ended, such as the Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief portion of COVID-10 relief laws.

Priorities & Considerations

We use our district's five-year [strategic plan](#) and annual [district goals](#) as a framework for budget planning. We remain committed to fostering academic success; providing rigorous learning in small class sizes; supporting social, emotional and mental health; engaging the community; recruiting and retaining staff; and adhering to a long-range plan to maintain our facilities but we must do this in a fiscally responsible manner. All of the programs, people and services we have in place for children are vital and valued. But they all come at a cost. Cuts need to be made and tough budget decisions may have a ripple effect. Cutting supplies and materials, subscriptions, apps, professional development, travel, and other software can make a dent, but these measures alone likely will not resolve the deficit. We will be required to reduce the number of employees to reach the tentative budget to be approved for the 2024-2025 school year. At this time we are planning for a reduction of around 25 positions. We recognize the significance of eliminating positions, a decision that will not be taken lightly. As we work to reduce the budget, every option for cost savings and its impact will be considered and evaluated.

Information & Feedback

Our District remains committed to communication, transparency, collaboration, and fiscal accountability. I look forward to sharing more details as the budget is finalized. Below are several opportunities to learn more:

- [March 13](#) - Preliminary Budget Presentation/Board of Education Meeting - 7 PM, J.P. Case
The budget presentation will be linked on our website following the meeting.
- [April 10](#) - Dr. McGann's Talk-a-Latte Session focused on the 2024-2025 budget - 6 PM, Robert Hunter
- [May 2](#) - Budget Public Hearing/Board of Education Meeting - 7 PM, J.P. Case
The budget documents will be linked on our website following the meeting.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our school district and student success.

Sincerely,

Kari McGann, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

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