



Every Student, Every Day, Every Opportunity

Kari McGann, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

May 1, 2024

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

The severity of our financial state reached a peak yesterday as staff were notified about more budget cuts. Our District reduced more positions to close the budget gap. Reducing positions and programs is never easy. Changes will be felt at every school, even in our libraries, G&T/STEM programs, counseling services, related arts, and special education services.

As published in the May 2, 2024 Board of Education [agenda](#), it is anticipated that the Board will vote on the positions that will be eliminated for the 2024-2025 budget. Thirty-three positions across all schools and in the Central Office will not be filled with an employee. Of the 33 positions, some people resigned or retired, some will be transferred to other areas and, regretfully, some are not able to continue employment with the district. This has been a grueling process for everyone at FRSD, and we have agonized over the decisions that were required to reduce the budget.

Below is a breakdown of the positions that are recommended to be abolished:

- 18 Teachers (areas: special education, core classes, support services, Stretch, and related arts)
- 5 Teacher Assistants
- 2 Media Specialists
- 2 Secretaries
- 2 Technicians
- 2 Lunch Aides
- 1 Child Study Team Member (School Psychologist)
- 1 School Counselor.

Please be mindful that the list above may not directly impact all students. For instance, special education programs were reviewed, and positions were eliminated if they were not needed to meet specific requirements for students' individual education plans next year. Also, although a position has been eliminated, its corresponding program will continue, i.e. Stretch/G&T. **The G&T Stretch program will continue; it is not being abolished.** The program may be structured differently, with the remaining staff delivering instruction in a modified way. In some areas, current staff members will absorb more duties to ensure students receive support and services.

Here are examples:

- Elementary STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) teachers will teach Stretch, also referred to as "Gifted and Talented" instruction. **Elementary students who qualify for G&T programs will receive instruction from a certified teacher, our STEM Specialists.**

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.



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- Media Specialists, also known as school librarians, will rotate to support multiple school libraries instead of a single library. **All students will have access to our school libraries.**
- Support skills and reading recovery will continue in all elementary schools. **Students who are recommended for these services will continue receiving instruction.**
- In some of our schools, more related arts teachers (such as music and physical education) will teach additional courses in their schedules or will be shared between buildings. **Students will have music opportunities and required physical education instruction.**
- Vice Principals will coordinate intervention services, otherwise known as Response to Intervention (RTI). **Students who struggle with early learning will continue to be identified and supported.**

To understand how we got here, let's review how our budget process began:

- Board of Education members were informed of the budget amount to retain current staff, maintain all programs and services, as well as meet contract requirements.
- This amount raised our district budget by 5.1 percent, which was determined to be too high of an increase to taxpayers.
- To reach the approved preliminary budget of \$80.6 million, the District had to cut costs by \$3 million.
- The Board and the District worked together to develop a fiscally responsible plan with as little an impact on students as possible.

To reduce the budget by \$3 million, the following reductions were made:

- Technology items, including computers, licenses to software, and apps on devices
- Professional development, including memberships to professional organizations and attendance at conferences for teachers and administrators
- A change in health care for staff and faculty
- Elimination of non-essential facility upgrades
- Reduction of costs such as subscriptions, apps, licenses, travel, and memberships
- Reduction of supplies and materials, including library, physical education, music, and office supplies
- Staff reductions, as outlined above.

To boost our revenue and resources, the District continues to apply for state, federal, and local grants. Here's what we've secured and/or are pursuing:

- In March, the District applied for the NJ Teacher Climate and Culture Innovation Grant, with a maximum award of \$200,000 to reclaim teacher time and improve school. If awarded, the grant will support a continued partnership with school-based mental health programs.

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- On April 30, the New Jersey HSMC Tri-County STEM Ecosystem received another award of \$27,250 from the New Jersey STEM Pathways Network. This grant will fund a second elementary school STEM laboratory that will be staffed by STEM Specialists.
- By May 31, the District will submit a federal grant to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) and the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools for School-Based Mental Health Services. Effective Schools Solutions, the district's contracted partner for the past three years, is partnering with the District in our application. The estimated range of the award is between \$500,000 and \$3,000,000. If awarded, the District will use this grant for additional guidance counselors and school-based mental health programs.
- The District continues to monitor legislative activity and stay in touch with our legislators. We communicate with our local legislators, Senator Zwicker, Assemblywoman Drulis, and Assemblyman Freiman, to advocate for a fair school funding formula. We also have spoken with Assemblyman Conaway, the Chair of the Health Committee and Assembly Budget Committee, to advocate for federal and state funding to support students' and families' need for mental health support.
- It's important to remember that our expanded preschool program does not impact our budget. The cost of staffing our expanded preschool programs, including the salaries and benefits of preschool teachers, aides, and support staff, is fully covered by the expanded preschool state award our district received this year and will receive next year. Without the preschool expansion award funding, the District's general budget would have needed to maintain the costs for all the salaries and benefits of our preschool teachers, totaling \$927,272.

To help advocate for fair and equitable funding for our school district, contact your local legislators [here](#), and to support the need for budget reformation and additional funds for mental health for students, contact Assembly Conaway [here](#).

We've been working hard to keep our staff, parents and community members informed of these critical budget decisions. In addition to my Talk-A-Latte sessions, staff meetings and PTO conversations, below is a list of previous presentations and letters that are posted on our website:

- [March 13, 2024 - Board of Education/Preliminary Budget Presentation](#)
- [March 15, 2024 - Letter to the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Community](#)
- [April 11, 2024 - Budget At-A-Glance Information Sheet](#)
- [April 22, 2024 - Letter to the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Community](#)
- [May 2, 2024 - Board of Education Meeting/Budget Public Hearing](#) - 7 PM, J.P. Case Middle School. Budget documents will be linked on our website following the meeting.

Sincerely,
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Superintendent of Schools

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