

April 22, 2024

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

At the March 13 Board of Education meeting, the Board approved the preliminary budget for the 2024-2025 school year. The full presentation is linked [here](#). The 2024-2025 budget totals \$80.6 million, including \$6.1 million in state aid. To prepare the final budget, much work has been done, countless options have been considered and difficult decisions have been made. It's critical that our community is kept informed and involved in our process.

Our District enrolls over 3,200 students in preschool through Grade 8. Our student population comprises various learners from diverse backgrounds, all of whom require and deserve a thorough and high-quality education. Using the 2022-2023 Flemington-Raritan Regional School District [New Jersey School Performance Report](#), here's a breakdown of student subgroups:



- 21.4% of students have a disability;
- 20.7% of students are economically disadvantaged; and
- 8.4% of students speak a language at home other than English.

### **Our Budget Challenges**

For 2024-2025, the District faces a steep deficit to balance the budget after costs have increased in healthcare, transportation, special education, security, pension liabilities, property insurance, and workers' compensation. The District has balanced increasing costs over the past three years and managed the increases while maintaining the contractual obligations for teachers, staff, and administrators. However, as expenses continued to rise, the District could not sustain the continued rising costs without substantially raising taxes on community members. Reductions are needed to narrow the deficit and reduce the impact on the tax levy. To reach the approved preliminary budget of \$80.6 million, the District must cut costs by \$3 million.

A major challenge to any school budget, including Flemington-Raritan's budget, is when a district does not receive enough state aid to cover rising costs. Board of Education members and I advocated for the state to reconsider the school funding formula so that Hunterdon County schools, as a whole, receive a local fair share of school funds. We also asked for legislators to reexamine the statewide school funding formula. The school funding formula is complex and based on property taxes, rateables, and other factors. Find out more [here](#) about local fair share and [here](#) about public school funding.

On March 22, 2024, Board of Education members and I met with Senator Zwicker, Assemblywoman Drulis, and Assemblyman Freiman to enlist their support for additional funding for Hunterdon County and specifically for the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District. On April 16, I met with Assemblyman Conaway, 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. The District continues to monitor legislative activity and stay in touch with our legislators. 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](#).

### **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.

### **Reducing the Impact on Students**

In reviewing all budget accounts and line items, reductions have been made in most areas but with a goal to lessen the impact on students while reaching the \$3 million target. For example, to decrease costs, the District abolished some positions and assigned responsibilities to other positions that hold similar responsibilities. In another example, the District will shift some duties previously assigned to teachers to the vice principals in every building. Other responsibilities previously assigned to a secretary will be reassigned to supervisors, administration, or other secretarial staff.

In addition, the District reviewed special education programming and dissolved or combined programs that would make little to no impact on students. In fact, one current program that supports special education students in a school is not needed next year. This is because the students are either leaving the district or the students' placements are changing. Either way, the district will remain compliant with state codes and mandates. Due to this change, the district is saving the cost of a salaried employee as a result of abolishing the program.

In other cases, the District had to inform teachers and staff members that they could not be renewed for the 2024-2025 school year due to budgetary constraints. These conversations were the most difficult and, of course, caused concern, worry, and sadness for the District and our employees. There have been no easy solutions. To support our exiting Flemington-Raritan Regional School District team members, we are working diligently to assist our highly performing educators, teacher assistants, and staff members in finding a position in another District by providing recommendation letters and helping employees network with colleagues in other districts to help.

### **Steps to Meet the Budget Challenges**

While cuts are inevitable, the District strives to preserve as many positions as possible. One way to achieve this is through attrition, meaning the district can save costs by not filling vacant spots when employees retire. It's also important to note 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. In fact, 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. Instead, the cost of salaries and benefits was moved from our general budget to the preschool award funding. Moreover, the preschool expansion award also fully covers the cost of the Copper Hill preschool playground upgrade, equaling \$77,540. Without the preschool expansion award, the District would not be able to afford this upgrade to our playground facilities. To learn more about expanded preschool, you can find my letter [here](#) and a presentation [here](#).

### **Reductions to Reduce Costs**

We are still calculating the overall savings of our first round of reductions to determine if our efforts to reduce costs and make little to no impact on students equals \$3 million. To date, we have made the following reductions to the budget, and more reductions may be needed to reach \$3 million in cuts:

- 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;
- Supplies and materials, including library, physical education, music, and office supplies;
- Over thirty positions in all of our schools and at the Central Office will not be filled with an employee;
  - Teacher Assistants;
  - Teachers;
  - Central Office Staff Members;
  - Cafeteria Assistants;

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- Outsourced Personnel, including speech and language teacher, Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and a School Psychologist
- Close to thirty employees received an assignment of additional responsibilities at their current salaries; and
- A reduction or possible elimination of contracted support personnel provided through Effective School Solutions at J.P. Case Middle School, Reading-Fleming Intermediate School, and Robert Hunter Elementary School.

### **Prioritizing Security, Small Class Sizes, and Maintaining Facilities**

Despite the difficult decisions, the 2024-2025 budget still achieves the following:

- Maintains small class sizes as recommended in [District Regulation 2312](#);
- Keeps our student-teacher ratio below the state average;
- Preserves security measures, including all six Class III Officers.
- Continues to expand preschool;
- Honors salary raises as designated in contracts;
- Covers the cost of bussing increases; and
- Addresses essential building upkeep.

The public hearing on the final budget will be held at the Board of Education meeting on [May 2](#) at 7 PM at J.P. Case Middle School. Budget documents will be linked on our website following the meeting.

*For more budget details, facts, and figures, scan this QR code:*



Although the fiscal challenges we face this budget season seem to take “center stage,” it is the great achievements of our students, the passion of our teachers, the dedication of our staff and the support of our families and community that deserve the spotlight. Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our school district and student success. I am so very honored to be a part of this outstanding school district.

Sincerely,  
Kari McGann, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

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