

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

12 Littleville Road Huntington, MA 01050

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Superintendent's Corner

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Gateway's Public Hearing for the 2019 – 2020 budget was rather quiet with slightly lower attendance than in prior years. I hope this is due to the fact that the budget process was extensive this year with significant attendance over the past several months by town officials, was collaborative with much input from all attending, and that the information was shared with everyone (using an interactive, online line item budget). I was glad to see that every town was represented by an elected official (school committee, finance committee, selectboard) and that we even had a town administrator present for the meeting.

Perhaps due to the small increase in the budget, a 1.97% increase in town assessments to each town over last year's assessments, and the level of collaboration, there were few questions at the Hearing. There were also no calls to reduce the budget or assessments. In fact, there was even a comment regarding the district potentially coming back to the towns for additional money if anticipated state revenues fall short of expectations that would lead to reductions in services.

The school committee should vote on adopting the FY'20 budget at their regularly scheduled meeting on March 13. The other choice they must make is whether to use the alternative assessment in FY'20; this essentially levels assessment increases across all towns based upon the overall assessment increase and the amount towns paid for the current year. This will be the second year that this new assessment methodology can be used and it is delivering on the promise of leveling out assessment increases, allowing towns to accurately plan for budgeting purposes, and reducing the anxiety about changes in student populations between towns. As the towns move forward with enhancing economic opportunities and as our towns become more enticing for people to move here, the ability to attract young families without a direct spike in any one town's assessment increase should prove very beneficial.

I'm also hopeful that the revised draft of the Gateway Regional School District's regional agreement will be approved by the school committee to be sent to the towns for ratification at this year's annual town meetings. As with the budget, the edited version is the result of months of work by town officials, school committee members and school administrators working with the assistance of three consultants from the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS). This collaborative effort has focused on revising the agreement to overcome shortcomings that have become evident over many years and is the first step to a regular review of any potential changes that may need to be made to the agreement over time. Once accepted by the school committee and vetted by town legal counsel, the revised draft will be shared with everyone for their personal review before town meetings begin.

I'm excited to see the changes being implemented across the district and our member towns to plan for economic growth, bettering the school system, sharing services, and cooperatively looking to the future.

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