

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Superintendent's Corner

February 25, 2019

The Public Hearing on the 2019- 2020 school year budget will be held on March 6, at 7 p.m. in the Gateway Performing Arts Center. This is the second year that budget development has been done with town officials playing an important role in all of the discussions. I feel that this has improved the budget process, allowed town officials to participate and provide suggestions, and resulted in a budget that is better understood by all involved. As mentioned in earlier columns, this is also the first year that the line item budget has been available to the public through “ClearGov”, which allows everyone the opportunity to delve into the budget in detail that has never been available before. We’ve gotten positive feedback on this format and you can find the link to this site on the district’s website (www.grsd.org) on the yellow ‘Quicklink’ buttons to the left.

Since we started working on the budget, we’ve continuously updated it with better and more accurate numbers on various costs such as insurance; as a result, our cost increase is just under two percent. The revenue side of the budget is much more difficult to predict and plan for as we currently only have the Governor’s House One budget. Under the Governor’s budget, we would receive less from the state, resulting in a 3.8% increase in assessments to the towns. We are hopeful, and planning for, an increase in state revenue based upon the House and Senate budget process. In part, this hope is based upon much work being done on three specific areas. First, the Small and Rural Schools Coalition is again asking for rural school aid and Senator Hinds has introduced legislation to include a ‘rurality’ factor in Chapter 70 funding in the state budget. We encourage local residents to contact their legislators to support this bill SD2292. Senator Hinds has also proposed to increase rural school aid next year to \$9 million, an increase from the \$1.5 million allocated to rural school aid in the current fiscal year; this is also important to support through the budget process. Second, we’re hoping that the legislature will fund regional school transportation at a higher level than the Governor given the history of this line item over the years. The third and final area that we’re hoping to make progress on is having the state provide \$1.1 million in aid to Gateway to cover payments to MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Assistance) for their recoupment of costs for the closing of schools in the district.

In order to make the assessments better fit the financial needs of the towns, the school committee is looking at putting this additional aid into the budget. In doing so, town assessments would be a level 1.9% increase across all of the towns over this year. While this makes the assessments more palatable to the towns, it also puts the district at risk because Gateway will be forced to cut if the additional funds don’t become available. This would be disappointing in a year when we’ve had town officials ask what else we’d like to see in the budget due to the small increase in expenditures, while at the same time being very supportive of the investment this budget makes in moving our students forward.

We’ve suggested this option for this year because the funding picture for education is very fluid with competing budget suggestions from the executive and legislative branches of state government. Given this uncertainty, it’s likely that we won’t have any solid idea of what Gateway will get in state educational aid until late June--well after the towns have all held their annual town meetings. Knowing that our expenditure budget is well supported by town officials, we thought it best to factor in that additional state aid during the budget process, rather than after town meetings are over. While no-one wants to see the budget cut later on if this aid doesn’t come through—and much may rely on the willingness of area residents to call their legislators—both town and school committee officials seem to be supportive of anticipating state aid for the FY’20 budget.

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