

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

12 Littleville Road Huntington, MA 01050

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Superintendent's Corner

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The school committee, in conjunction with town officials, is making progress on establishing the school budget for the 2019-2020 school year. This process began in the fall with principals reviewing their needs in each school and other administrators looking at what was needed to meet student needs. Central office staff reviewed these requests and created an initial expenditure budget. Presentations on the needs of the district were then given to school committee members and town officials in November and December and the initial budget increase was projected to be 3.8%. This increase included items requested by the towns, namely continuing our full-day preschool and initiating an early childhood vocational program for the high school.

Town officials indicated that this level of increase, if passed onto the town assessments, would not be supported at annual town meetings. Over the ensuing weeks the district received several updates in area of health insurance and potential retirees. After reviewing these with the administrative team, a line item budget was presented to the committee and town officials that increased the budget by only 2.2%. While this budget does not fund some needed items - such as the OPEB trust and stabilization funds for transportation, capital items and special education - it does continue to include programs town officials indicated were 'investments' (the full-day preschool and the new vocational program). Realistically, we won't know what impact a 2.2% increase in the budget will have on town assessments until we know with some degree of certainty the level of revenue we'll be getting from the Commonwealth (the first indication will be the Governor's Budget later this month).

The line item budget was presented to the committee and town officials in a new, electronic format that allows them to drill down to specific items, provide questions and comments during the review, and shows much information that was much harder to find in the prior format. Once this line item budget has been reviewed by school committee members and town officials, and is reviewed at the January 23rd school committee meeting, it will be updated and made available for anyone to review.

This is the next logical step in providing up-to-date information, in significant detail, to the public in an easy to understand way that increases the district's transparency around budget development. As we move forward and use this online system from the very beginning of the budget process, even more information will be available for anyone who is interested in seeing the minutia that comprises the budget.

Next steps in the process after making the line item budget public is to wait for the state to finalize educational aid, hold a public budget hearing on March 6, have the school committee adopt the budget, and then move to town approval. This year will mark only the second time that the committee will look at adopting town assessments under the new, equalized increase method (as discussed at 2018 town meetings, this would increase every town's prior year's assessment by the same percentage thereby creating a more stable, more predictable and more equitable assessment than in years past).

It also looks as though it may be possible to bring forward a newly revised regional agreement for consideration this spring that has been worked on by the MARS-facilitated discussion group for over a year, although to some extent that will be dependent upon legal and DESE review. In any case, town and school officials, working with the school committee, have made much progress this year.

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