

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 staff members are pleased that, with the assistance of local town officials, the budget for the 2018 – 2019 school was passed by all six member towns during the regular annual town meetings. This allows for a much better work flow over the summer in preparing for the upcoming school year rather than spending time developing new budgets for reconsideration by the towns. It was certainly a much different atmosphere at each annual town meeting this year, including having elected officials from other towns there to support the district's budget request.

This marks an important, and ongoing, change in collaboration with member towns that started with the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) study of the district two years ago. This study and its' results (which may be found on the district's website) outlined some potential areas of change. In addition to looking at needs in the district (such as the potential to add new, shared administrative positions) the study also suggested a more collaborative method of developing the budget and a series of 'facilitated' discussions between district stakeholders.

The budget recommendation was put into place with joint budget sessions between school committee and town officials throughout the past year that we will continue as we begin developing the FY'20 budget in September. It was a very informative process as all participants were able to see the budget being put together, questions were answered regarding specific line items, and a much greater understanding of how the budget supports students was gained by all.

Facilitated discussions also occurred throughout the year, beginning with some difficult questions and sharing of financial information between the school and towns, but quickly settled into a process focusing on some important core items such as the need to stabilize town assessments over time. This resulted in a collaborative effort to develop the regional amendment that the towns passed this year, an alternative assessment method whereby all towns would see an identical percentage increase in their assessments rather than the significant swings of prior years. Those involved in this process (town officials, school committee members and administrators) all agreed to continue the process for the coming year and started this process on June 14 with a long and productive discussion with Representative Smitty Pignatelli. Upcoming issues include developing more updates to the regional agreement for the towns to ratify; building state support for small, rural school districts; and seeking state help with sustaining the initial successes in improving and growing collaboration within the district.

I concur with what was expressed several times over the course of our annual town meetings: as a unified entity, our six member towns and the school district have a much better chance of gaining state support to sustain both the towns and our school district. We've finally gained the attention of the state and our successes are being noticed. From potential shared positions, to our economic development coordinator; from state funding for IT improvements to the developing broadband connectivity; and from facilitated meetings to

an unusual approval to amend just one article in the regional agreement, we've shown that we can work together and make changes successfully.

As we move forward in building upon this collaborative framework I look forward to even more stories of success. From growing the school district (for example, the implementation of full-day preschool) to growing local businesses and even considering a new turnpike exit, we are a collection of entities on the move to improve ourselves, our towns, and our opportunities.

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