

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF BROOKLINE
OFFICE OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

Town Hall, 5th Floor, 333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445

Telephone: 617-730-2430 Fax: 617-730-2601
www.brookline.k12.ma.us



Julie Schreiner-Oldham, Chair
Suzanne Federspiel, Vice Chair
Sharon Abramowitz
Helen Charlupski
Susan Wolf Ditkoff
Jennifer Monopoli
David A. Pearlman
Barbara Scotto

May 29, 2020

Dear Brookline School Community:

We are writing today to share with you information that concerns our whole school community. Due to the COVID-19-induced budget crisis in the Town of Brookline, and our contractual obligations with the Brookline Educators Union (BEU) to provide notices of layoff by May 30, the Public Schools of Brookline has no choice but to provide layoff notices to some of our valued teachers and staff. We know that each notice represents an individual or family's financial security thrown into question, and we know the worry and fear that these notices are creating for all of our educators, staff, and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the revenues and budget of the Town of Brookline. Restaurant taxes have declined, parking meters have been suspended, and commercial revenue to the Town of Brookline has fallen precipitously since March. The impact on the town's fiscal year 2021 budget is projected to be a gap of \$12.8 million dollars.

On Friday, May 15, the Brookline School Committee was notified at a public Town-School Partnership meeting that the Public Schools of Brookline should plan to reduce its budget for FY 2021 year by \$6,300,000. This is a 5.3% reduction from the budget that the School Committee had previously voted for FY 2021 for which the School Committee had planned to seek funding from Town Meeting this spring. The \$6.3 million reduction means that the PSB will have less funding for schools in FY 2021 than it had in FY 2020. The Town has made and will also continue to make cuts as well.

The School Committee is required to present a proposed budget to the Town's Advisory Committee before Town Meeting and to seek appropriation of the proposed budget at the annual Town Meeting on June 23, 2020. Over the past two weeks, the PSB administration and the School Committee have worked closely together to identify ways to close this budget deficit under these extraordinary conditions.

At present, we do not have clear direction or guidance regarding whether school buildings will reopen in the fall or what those conditions may require in terms of staffing, supplies and materials, and services. We have had less than 14 days to identify reductions to our budget for next year. We believe that we may be able to address many of these questions prior to the start of the next academic year, but we need more time to put a high-quality educational plan into place that will ensure the health and safety of all of our students and staff.

This is the progress that we have made thus far in proposed budget reductions not related to faculty:

- more than \$1.5 million at central administration and district-wide leadership
- \$1.37 million in reductions to “Services” and “Other” budgets
- \$31,000 in capital reductions

Because 86.8% of our total budget is personnel costs, it is impossible to make \$6.3 million in reductions that do not impact our staff.

There are other paths forward that are being considered and implemented by districts across the state and country facing a similar financial crisis as a result of COVID-19. These include, but are not limited to, funding from the state and federal government, an override, pay cuts across the district, freezing steps and lanes, and furloughs. Many of these paths require negotiations and agreement from unions.

Furthermore, the Brookline School Committee is committed to continuing to work on all pathways to receive additional funds to support our budget needs. We are aggressively seeking additional funds from all levels of government including state and federal funds. We are vigorously advocating to the Town of Brookline to increase the allocation that we receive from Town revenues.

The Brookline School Committee looks forward to having productive conversations with the unions representing our administrators, faculty, and staff about ways that we can partner together to decrease the impact of budget cuts on our staff. The Committee is committed to maintaining as many of our employees to the greatest extent possible.

The accelerated pace of this process has created challenges. We are saddened and disappointed at finding our district in this situation, and we are doing all we can to bring the district through a difficult time.

We also regret that rumors and misinformation are circulating that are causing fear and anxiety to our families, educators, and community members. Here are the facts:

- The budgeting process is ongoing and no programs have been cut.
- BEEP has not been eliminated.
- Music, arts, library, health, and world language have not been eliminated.
- The PSB will continue to meet its obligations to our students with special education needs and our English language learners.

We are committed to our educators and staff, and we are doing all we can to find a path forward under these difficult circumstances.

We are committed to a transparent public process and invite all of our school community members to a public meeting on June 4 at 6:00 p.m. on the school budget. Information about how to participate in this meeting will be posted on our meeting calendar, available [here](#).

To all of those who receive a layoff notice today, please know that we value your service, dedication, and tremendous spirit. We value your role in the life of our community. We are deeply saddened that we had to provide these layoff notices today. It is our deep hope that this measure is temporary, and we hope that we will be able to recall our staff and be back at full capacity by the start of the next school year.

Sincerely,



Julie Schreiner-Oldham
School Committee Chair



Suzanne Federspiel
School Committee Vice-Chair

On Behalf of the Finance Subcommittee of the Brookline School Committee