

# Melrose Public Schools Superintendent's FY 21 Budget Message January 28, 2020

## INTRODUCTION

The Melrose School Committee is responsible for developing a vision statement and a mission statement for the Melrose Public Schools. In 2017, the Committee voted the following statements to guide the district as it works to become a responsive, adaptive, and progressive school district that prepares all our students for the changing economy and society of their future.

*Vision Statement (voted 6/27/17): Every student will be an engaged, challenged, enriched, and self-directed learner.*

*Mission Statement (voted 6/27/17): The Melrose Public Schools will provide and sustain a thriving and dynamic teaching and learning environment, preparing every student to excel in their authentic life and global citizenship, as supported by an engaged community.*

It is the responsibility of the School Committee "to review and approve budgets for public education in the district." (MGL ch. 71, sec. 37) Setting and approving a yearly budget is one means by which the School Committee communicates its values and visions for the district and advocates for the resources needed to provide students with a high quality and robust educational experience. Subsequently, it is the responsibility of the Superintendent and administrative team to implement and achieve those goals and vision.

## DISTRICT BUDGET PRIORITIES

For the purposes of both short and long term planning, the Melrose School Committee also sets annual/biennial overarching goals to guide our efforts in achieving the district's vision and fulfilling the district's mission. This year, the School Committee included goals to continue and broaden the discussions and communications regarding school finances that took place last year with the override effort. The School Committee also included a goal specific to addressing the increasing social emotional needs of our diverse student population.

For this school year, the Melrose Public Schools district goals include the following:

- The Committee will develop a timeframe and format for providing regularly-scheduled updates on the implementation of funds budgeted for teaching and learning, with a focus on outcomes, between the passage of the final budget and the start of the next budget cycle.
- With the aim of fostering and supporting greater community engagement with our public schools, the Committee will, via any and all available and appropriate means of communication (including but not limited to print media, web site(s), social media, blogs, video and podcasts), provide regular outreach to the Melrose community on topics of import in education.
- The Committee will endeavor to elevate topics around equity, social justice and trauma-informed practices, with the aim of supporting all students while providing opportunities for Committee members and the community at large to engage with each other on such topics, all with an eye toward establishing, protecting, and advancing the social-emotional well-being of each and every student.

We are grateful for the override that passed in April, 2019. The additional monies enabled us to restore positions eliminated over the past three years, add positions critical to support our students growing academic and social emotional needs, and to meet the demands of increasing enrollment. Moreover, the override funds enabled us to negotiate a new teachers' contract with more competitive salaries that recognize the hard work and commitment of our educators. Lastly, the override included monies to replace lost revenue from the Beebe School rental so that we can reclaim the Beebe as a ninth school within the district. Reopening the Beebe will be integral to addressing the growing population, reducing class size, and addressing the long term needs projected in our 2018 demographic studies. *Please see the updated FY20 Budget being presented in tonight's meeting packet.*

**Increasing Enrollment:** As predicted, the Melrose Public Schools continue to grow. The October 1 count for this school year was in line with the two 2018 demographic studies from NESDEC (who also provided the 2015 study) and the Collins Center at UMASS-Boston. As previously noted in last year's narrative, the two studies disagree regarding the extent of the growth. The disagreement lies in their underlying methodology. NESDEC bases their calculation on estimated expected births plus a modified survival rate model; Collins bases their prediction on an average expected birth rate plus a historical survival model. As a result the NESDEC prediction for growth is higher. Using the disparity as a range has proven to be useful for this year. For the October 1 census, we had 3977 Pre K to Post Graduate students. This number will fluctuate over the course of the year as we always have transitions both in and out of the district. As of this writing, the enrollment is at 4002 students with another 52 students in out of district placements.

YEAR	NESDEC	COLLINS	Difference
2018-19	3,945	3,945	0
2019-20	4,040	3,980	-60
2020-21	4,119	4,030	-89
2021-22	4,230	4,111	-119
2022-23	4,319	4,193	-126
2023-24	4,421	4,277	-144
2024-25	4,518	4,351	-167
2025-26	4,601	4,415	-186
2026-27	4,685	4,478	-207
2027-28	4,757	4,535	-222
2028-29	4,795	4,564	-231

The increase in our enrollment has been felt immediately at the elementary schools. Over the past few years, we have also noted the unexpected jumps in enrollment at the high school as students return from other schools or new families move to Melrose. The Collins Center demographic study predicts that the increase in enrollment will roll up through the grade spans over time.

*The Center project team's projection indicates that the Elementary schools will feel the impact of enrollment growth for the next 2 to 3 years (FY21-FY22), as existing cohorts in the low three hundreds advance into 4th and 5th grade. The Center's projection shows a leveling off at the elementary level after that time, if the current birth rates and housing growth/turnover rates continue. The Middle School should experience the greatest growth over the next 5-year period (through FY24), as existing cohorts of 253-273 are replaced by cohorts in the low three hundreds. This represents growth of approximately 170 students in this five year period, which would be growth of more than 20%. The High School will be impacted more slowly as the larger cohorts are currently in the Elementary school lower grades. Historical cohort survival indicates that the High School will begin to feel the impact of enrollment pressure in FY25. Historically there has been a significant drop in cohort survival, between 8th and 9th Grades, which has averaged 0.89 in the past five years. It is important to note that this pattern may be changing. In each of the last five years the survival rate has increased by at least 1%.*

Growing enrollment impacts the school budget in five major areas: space, staffing, programs, professional development, and curriculum/technology resources.

**Space Needs:** For several years now, we have been addressing the needs for more space. The space crunch is not just in response to a growing population, but also changes in education as we develop programs to meet both the needs of a diverse student population and the expectations due to changing academic demands and mandates. The district and city have used a combination of large scale projects,

small scale changes/additions, and internal structural and organizational changes to create more space and provide the programmatic spaces needed for special education, English as a second language, related services such as therapies and counseling, academic small groups, and computer based courses.

The Melrose Veterans Memorial Middle School, the Lincoln Elementary School, and the Roosevelt Elementary School were built and/or renovated to accommodate the changes in educational programming and to replace aging buildings in need of extensive repair. Subsequently, due to the increase in enrollment, we have made internal changes to the Lincoln and Roosevelt to accommodate the increase in students. For example, at the Lincoln, music is now in a section of the library and at the Roosevelt, it is in a former teachers' workroom. All our elementary schools have converted technology labs to general education classrooms and moved technology to Chromebook carts for mobility. At the Winthrop, Horace Mann, and Hoover Schools, we have carved out space by dividing up some rooms and converting storage space to small classroom space. In 2017, we added five modular classrooms to the Winthrop and Hoover and renovated part of the Horace Mann to provide additional space at the elementary level. Even so, we had to place two Kindergartens at the Franklin. And at the high school, we have renovated the science labs, the former library and adjacent classrooms (now the Learning Commons and technology/media center) and have subdivided some larger rooms. Nevertheless, for the second year we have 14 teachers sharing rooms at the high school.

With the middle and high schools facing similar challenges to the elementary schools as the enrollment increase moves up thorough the grades, we will need to plan for organizational and physical changes in both buildings to accommodate the increase in students. At the middle school, enrollment and space are intertwined because of the team model. Each team has a set of core content specific teachers (math, English Language Arts, social studies/history, and science; all other subjects are cross team teachers) assigned to a group of students who move together through their classes. This year, because of the override, we were able to restore the team model to each grade level. With larger enrollments expected in the near future we will need to reconfigure the assignments of students and find space for additional teams. It may require split teams again as we had last year. Similarly, as the number of students at the high school increases, we will need more classroom space (and more teachers) so we can fully schedule all students and ensure that everyone has access to the full range of courses required for graduation.

Resolving the physical space needs is not a function of the yearly budget process beyond including the anticipated costs for additional staff and resources. While the School Committee decides the educational program for our schools, the School Building Committee, which is appointed by the Mayor, is charged with exploring options for space solutions and to analyze each option for its feasibility, design, costs, and logistics. The Mayor, City Planner, Director of Public Works, and the Chief Financial Officer consult with the city's School Building Committee to determine proposals that will ultimately be brought to the both the School Committee and the City Council for approval. Currently, the Melrose Public Schools needs both a short term solution for the rising elementary enrollment and a longer term solution not just for the eventual increased enrollment at the secondary level; our facilities as a whole have mechanical, structural, and physical plant projects that need to be addressed in a timely manner so as not to create larger problems in the future. The city's Capital Improvement Committee recently released their report outlining the capital needs for the city, including the schools. The report also includes a history of the projects completed since Fiscal Year 1995. The report can be viewed at <https://www.cityofmelrose.org/office-planning-and-community-development/news/fy2020-capital-improvement-program-report>.

Unfortunately, as of this writing, we will not have the Beebe School for August, 2020. Using past numbers as a guide, I anticipate we will again need 16 Kindergartens. Therefore, we will continue to place Kindergarten students at the Franklin. We will most likely increase the number of Franklin Ks as we are running out of space at the Hoover with the anticipated three class strand in grades one, two, and three next year. Due to the number of available classrooms at Hoover, we will need to reduce their Ks by one and add at least one K to Franklin. This will have a domino effect on K placements throughout the city for 2020-2021.

**Staffing Needs:** The increase in enrollment has also produced a more diverse student body with a range of academic, social emotional, behavior, and medical needs. To fully support our students and to provide the opportunities and access needed for each student's success, we require not only more staff, but a variety of staff. Each year we determine the specifics by analyzing our programs, student data, and

enrollment demographics. We examine student academic and behavioral data, assess program development needs and changes, factor in new state mandates and expectations, and review and revise our short and long term goals for each school and the district.

As we continue to develop more student-centered and personalized instruction, we are evaluating how we can most effectively employ different staff across the grade spans and what additional opportunities and/or supports and/or staff may be needed to help all students achieve personal and academic success. Our goal is threefold: provide equitable and challenging opportunities and comprehensive supports to meet the needs of all students, effectively and efficiently take advantage of our staff's expertise and talents, and increase our capacity to be flexible and adaptable in response to changing demands and expectations. Again, the override advanced this goal in that we were able to return teachers to the middle and high school. Equally important, the override enabled us to add additional specialty staff at the elementary schools to address the increase in enrollment and to return library media science to the elementary schools. We were also able to add assistant principals to the larger elementary schools to support staff and students. We reinstated two 6-12 directors to support social studies/history and science teachers. Both positions are needed to oversee revisions/updates in curriculum and assessment that align with the state frameworks and to develop additional programs responsive to student interests. Lastly, we were able to add two staff at the elementary schools and one at the high school to address growing concerns regarding students' social emotional well-being.

These last additions, while appreciated, have highlighted that we need more social workers across the district. Our students come to us with a range of assets and challenges, including social emotional and behavioral challenges. These challenges often play out in classrooms, play grounds, and hallways. For students to be successful, they need strong, compassionate teachers *and* specialized staff, such as social workers and school counselors, who can support them in building their individual capacity to manage intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. To help our students, we are proposing **adding 3 social workers** for grades K-8 in this budget.

In addition we will need **2 more elementary teachers**. We are currently running 88 classrooms K-5 across the district. We anticipate that next year we will need 90 classrooms. This is due to the current fifth grade, which has only 13 sections moving onto the middle school. All other grades have a range of 14 to 16 classrooms and we are planning for 16 Kindergartens. I would also anticipate an **increase totally 1.0 FTE (full time equivalent) for the specialty subjects (art, music, wellness, digital literacy, and library media)**. Not only do we need sufficient staff to provide specialty instruction to all 90 classes, we also need to schedule the specialty staff so that we meet contractual obligations regarding planning time and traveling between buildings.

**Program Needs:** Recent mandates from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will require some programmatic changes, primarily in social studies/history and computer science. Requirements for teaching civics, including a civics project from each student, and for teaching financial literacy will result in some changes to courses and to the schedule at the middle and high schools. Furthermore, the new expectation that students have course work that includes computational thinking and computer skills as outlined in the state framework for Digital Literacy and Computer Science requires us to rethink our curriculum across content areas and to develop appropriate pathways so students can meet these expectations. At this time, we believe we can manage these changes with current staff for the 2020-2021 school year.

On a larger scale, for the past four years, the Melrose Public Schools has been building a model of personalized learning (also referred to as competency based learning/education) in order to provide a more equitable and engaging academic and personal experience for every student. Please see <https://www.melroseschools.com/district-home/personalized-learning>. Our plan is to create a school system that is responsive, flexible, and adaptable to students' abilities, interests, needs, and backgrounds, as well as responsive and adaptable to the changing expectations in education and society. It is probable that in the future as we achieve greater implementation of personalized learning we will need additional educators across the district. For now, we are first rethinking current staff assignments and schedules as well as course offerings. While it is early in that process (much depends on which courses students select), we anticipate we will **need one more math teacher between the middle and high schools**.

As discussed above in *Staffing*, we have an increase in students who have behavioral health and social emotional challenges. It is our practice to keep our students in their community schools to the best

of our ability to meet their needs. Adding more mental health professionals will help us to do so. In addition, we need to create a behavioral/social emotional classroom for the elementary schools similar to the classrooms we have at the middle and high schools. We will **need 1 special education teacher and 1 special education paraprofessional** for the program.

The rise in mental health and behavioral needs combined with the increase in enrollment has resulted in requests for more evaluations and for more counseling services. In particular, the caseloads at the high school and middle school have risen to unmanageable levels. In order to reallocate responsibilities and meet the additional demands for academic testing and cognitive testing, we **need 1.0 Special Education teacher at the secondary level** to provide sufficient staff for assessments and services.

Another Special Education need is additional FTEs in the related services for speech/language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and for a board certified behavior analyst. School districts are mandated by state and federal law to provide students from age 3 to graduation from high school or until age twenty-two. Moreover, districts must also service students who do not attend Melrose Public Schools, but are residents of Melrose. When we factor in all the students eligible for services, we have increased from 609 students last year to 632 students this year.

As stated previously, our goal is to keep our special education students in-district. To do that we need to provide more extensive services for some students than a moderate or mild special education student may require. These students require more related service staff to provide a wider array of services as required by their individual IEPs. As a result of the increase in students to be serviced and the extent of the services needed, we are estimating that we will **need an additional 1.0 FTE spread among the occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy related services providers and an additional 1.0 BCBA.**

When special education students cannot be adequately serviced in our schools, we are required to place the students in programs run either by collaboratives or private special education schools (766 schools). Last year, we had 43 students in out of district placements. In recent years, as the city has grown, we have experienced more “move in” out-of-district (OOD) placements when students from other towns move to Melrose and are already placed out of district. It is our responsibility to assume payment for those placements within the guidelines of state and federal regulations. As a result, our number of students in out of district placements has risen to 50 students with a significant impact on the budget. Increases to out-of-district tuition for collaboratives and private special education schools have yet to be finalized. However, based on past experience, we are planning for a **5% increase in OOD tuition.**

Out-of-district placements also require transportation to schools scattered throughout the North Shore and Metro Boston area. Transportation costs have skyrocketed. This current year, we budgeted OOD transportation at \$486,994 and are currently tracking at \$979,528. Therefore, we have **budgeted special education transportation for \$1,000,000 for FY21.** The good news is the Student Opportunity Act will enable districts to submit special education transportation costs for circuit breaker reimbursement. This will be phased in, but next year 25% of our costs can be submitted for reimbursement at the circuit breaker percentage. Please remember that the circuit breaker reimbursement percentage varies from year to year as it is dependent upon the state budget. We will budget this number conservatively as we do all circuit breaker reimbursements.

**Professional Development Needs:** In order to have a well trained staff who are knowledgeable regarding not only the most current and best practices for teaching and learning but who can also be responsive and supportive to our students’ individual needs, we need to provide high quality and relevant professional development. Melrose Public Schools has developed a professional culture of self-reflection, continuous learning, and growth mindset, based in our goals, assessment of student and staff needs, and changes in the education field. Not only have we provided training in content area, best instructional practices, including technology, and effective assessment, we have also provided training in social emotional learning, Positive Behavior Intervention and Strategies, restorative justice, Universal Design for Learning, cultural awareness, and trauma responsiveness. It is not just that the field of education is changing rapidly in our technology and information driven environment. It is also that after 25 years of Education Reform we understand that it is equally, if not more important, for education to address the whole child and not just the academics.

Each year we develop a strategy overview that builds on our success with the previous year’s goals and objectives. In planning the yearly strategy overview we look at student outcomes, solicit staff

feedback, and factor in changing educational needs and priorities to plan relevant and applicable professional development for all staff. Our professional development includes an array of opportunities provided by our own staff; professional, educational, and community partners, including universities, professional associations, and conferences; local and regional experts; and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Professional development takes place in school, after school, over vacations, in person, at outside sites, and even via technology.

One of the most effective professional development practices is the use of job embedded coaching. Coaching by expert teachers and administrators is one of the more impactful methods by which we can influence the integration and effectiveness of new educational practices by teachers who are implementing these changes, adaptations, or new models in content and instruction. At the elementary level, we have two instructional coaches, a social emotional learning specialist, digital literacy specialists, library media specialists, a half time personalized learning specialist, and a UDL coach (shared with other districts) that are strengthening our classroom based implementation of identified best practices. At the secondary level, adding the two content directors enables all our content directors now to spend more time coaching teachers in updated content and personalized learning strategies. The secondary level also has two library media specialists and an academic facilitator who support educators in adopting best practices for personalized learning. However, as we add new staff, either through turnover or addition, and who have not participated in previous trainings, we realize that we need to increase our support for educators new to Melrose so that they can be as effective as our more seasoned staff. To support the new staff and to further the implementation of personalized learning, we would like to **add 1 academic facilitator or personalized learning coach** to the secondary campus.

**Curriculum/Technology Resources:** Five years ago the city and schools conducted a technology audit. At that time, the goal was to achieve a 2 (student):1(device) ratio. In order to meet that goal the city and schools agreed that the city would lease the required number of chrome books for five years. Leasing would also provide us with the ability to roll over the lease for new updated equipment in the future. The schools agreed to fund software, repairs, and other technology needs such as the projectors for the SMARTboards. The proposed 2:1 ratio has since been impacted by the enrollment increase. The PTOs at our elementary schools have been purchasing additional Chrome books so that we have the sufficient equipment for our students, especially now that MCAS must be completed online. At the middle and high schools, we introduced BYOD (bring your own device) two years ago, and this year, conducted a pilot program, primarily for grades six and nine but open to all, to help families purchase chrome books. This program continues to evolve. Based on a recent survey, approximately 53% of high school freshman bring a device to school daily. Another (approximate) 17% freshmen bring a device some days. We anticipate that this program will continue to grow over time and in the near future most students in grades 6 to 12 will be bringing a personal device to school. Those students who do not will have access to school devices.

Balancing the role of technology in education can be delicate as we do not want technology to replace the role of a good teacher in our children's education. However, we also recognize that when used correctly, technology is a powerful tool for learning, personalization, and accessibility. The override provided us with \$200,000 to fund increases in licensing software, to replace some equipment, and repairs. Similarly, it provided us with \$200,000 for curriculum materials that are needed for changes/updates to curriculum, replacing consumable materials, and increases to meet growing enrollment. We are asking for a **2% increase** in these lines to meet next year's anticipated needs with enrollment, replacement, changes, and additions.

**Summary:** In November, 2019, the legislature passed and the Governor approved the *Student Opportunity Act*. Please see the resources at the following links:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.masbo.org/resource/resmgr/docs\\_misc/student\\_opportunity\\_act\\_bill.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.masbo.org/resource/resmgr/docs_misc/student_opportunity_act_bill.pdf)  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.masbo.org/resource/resmgr/docs\\_misc/student\\_opportunity\\_act\\_fact.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.masbo.org/resource/resmgr/docs_misc/student_opportunity_act_fact.pdf)

The purpose of the act was to address the budget deficiencies in the state's educational funding formula, twenty five years after the Education Reform Act of 1993 created the original formula. While the primary beneficiaries of the revised formula are districts with a high percentage of low-income students, all districts will see some increase in state funding.

At the end of this month, DESE will provide districts with guidance and a template for submitting the district's plans for any additional funds. Unfortunately, we have a very short window in which to

develop and document that plan as it is due to DESE by April 1, 2020. Districts will be asked, “to outline a small number of bold commitments to improve the performance of student subgroups over three years.” (Commissioner’s newsletter, January 8, 2020) Given the needs we have discussed in this narrative, I would recommend that the district plan to use any additional funds to support the social emotional and behavioral needs of our students.

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, we received preliminary “cherry” sheets with estimated school and municipal funding. As you know, final numbers are typically not available until late June/early July. However, using the preliminary numbers as a guide, our **net** Chapter 70 will be approximately \$692,621 vs last year’s net Chapter 70 of \$94,909. As a point of reference, the requests for additional staff in this narrative total approximately \$730,053. This is estimate only for staff and does not include the additional funds needed for contractual agreements or increases in special education tuition and transportation or increases in materials and technology.

Our plan is to present to the School Committee on February 11th a draft FY21 budget that should be able to incorporate the increases from the FY20 budget (override budget), the requests as outlined in this document, and the estimated state funding increases due to the Student Opportunity Act. The draft FY21 budget will use the FY20 override budget as the starting point in building the FY21 budget. The FY20 override budget includes funding for restored/additional positions, additional curriculum and technology resources, and contractual increases. It also includes the funds voted to rectify the structural deficit that existed in past budgets as well as replacement monies for the loss of the Beebe School lease. The objective of the FY21 budget is to continue to add the resources - staffing, curriculum, technology, professional development - we have identified as critical to developing a first rate and progressive school system that is student centered, provides equity and opportunity for all, and values our committed and talented staff

Finally, this is my last budget narrative. Over the years, we have steadily built a progressive and strong school district as a result of hard work, tough choices, and our dedicated staff and community. I am proud of what we have accomplished together. I know that we have laid a foundation that will enable the Melrose Public Schools, its staff, students, parents, and School Committee to continue growing and flourishing for many years.