



Natick Finance Committee

Pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 3 of the Town of Natick By-Laws, I attest that the attached copy is the approved copy of the minutes for the following Meeting:

**Town of Natick Finance Committee
Education & Learning Subcommittee**

Meeting Date: January 14, 2021

The minutes were approved through the following action:

Motion:	Approval
Made by:	Mr. Scurlock
Seconded by:	Mr. Pope
Vote:	4 – 0 – 0
Date:	February 9, 2021

Respectfully submitted,
Bruce Evans
Clerk
Natick Finance Committee

AGENDA

Public Speak- Any member of the public that wishes to submit any comments for a topic not part of the meeting's agenda may submit those comments to the chair prior to the meeting. Please send such comments via email to jscurlock.fincom@natickma.org prior to the meeting with the phrase "public speak submission" in the subject line. The chair asks that any comments be limited to approximately 4-5 minutes or less reading time and not more than 15 minutes in total time for all residents/taxpayers.

Presentation & Discussion related to the 2022 Natick Public Schools Teaching and Learning Budget Public Comments on a specific agenda item:

- Following the sponsor presentation, the Committee enters into discussion with questions and answers from the sponsor and others as determined by the Chair. This is not a time that residents and taxpayers ask questions or offer comments.
- Upon the completion of the discussion/Q&A period, as determined by the Chair, the committee moves in to citizen comments. The same policy as stated above is used.
- A time not to exceed 4-5 minutes per resident/taxpayer to allow for brief resident/taxpayer comments on topics within the scope of the agenda item before the Committee at that point in time.
- There is no debate or discussion between the resident/taxpayer and the sponsor/presenter or the committee except as determined by the Chair.
- Any question is to be directed to the Chair and only the Chair will decide whether to allow the question or just ask that it be recorded in the minutes.

SUBMITTED BY: Jim Scurlock. Chair, Education and Learning Subcommittee

Attendees:

Education & Learning Subcommittee:

Jim Scurlock, Bruce Evans, David Coffey, Jeff DeLuca, Richard Pope

Natick Public Schools:

Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent, Natick Public Schools

Dr. Peter Gray, Assistant Superintendent, Natick Public Schools

Mr. Tim Luff, Assistant Superintendent, Special Services, Natick Public Schools

Mr. Kirk Downing, Assistant Superintendent, Teaching, Learning & Innovation, Natick Public Schools

Mr. Evans moved to open the meeting, seconded by Mr. DeLuca, voted 5 – 0 – 0

Roll-call vote

Mr. Coffey = yes

Mr. DeLuca = yes

Mr. Evans = yes

Mr. Pope = yes

Mr. Scurlock = yes

Teacher, Learning & Innovation budget

Presenter: Mr. Downing

[Presentation Link](#)

Mr. Downing said that his job is to make sure the teachers have the knowledge, skills and tools to do great work with our kids. Dr. Nolin noted that other districts call this the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment budget, in case you're comparing with other districts,

We developed this budget based on our strategic plan and alignment with the core values of the Natick Public Schools - our strategic objectives are steeped in teaching and learning leadership, innovation, assessment, accountability, and building connections, particularly with our community. We also implement TLI in an educational policy context where we build expert knowledge and skill across the curriculum. The goal is to enable our students to build rigorous learning experiences that match these courses and help students demonstrate thinking skills, community skills and the civic skills that they need to be successful citizens.

Technology is a huge element of our policy context, and that has been quite relevant this past year as we've had to really think about the technology platforms we're using and assess their effectiveness. We also strive to provide high quality instruction and be fair and equitable in how we apply TLI budget.

COVID recovery plan: This area will require some investment in FY22 and beyond. The curriculum hours that are cited in this budget are based on our need this summer to look at our priority standards and current curriculum and rewrite our room not only for next year but future years to ensure that any learning losses students had as a result of the COVID are made up for in future years

Update grades 5-8 literacy curriculum documents (SP 1.5) We anticipate that we will need to replace the books that will be lost during the remote learning period. We have a lot of little readers, and those are expensive, and they build volume over time. So we really need to boost those backups. So we are fresh and ready for brick and mortar school for all kids as well.

Investment in curriculum and technology tools – we will need to invest in ELA materials in elementary literacy centers

Mandates/Audits to keep our teaching force at the forefront of best research-backed practices (PreK-12). The curriculum recovery work is a mandate that we must do to align with student's needs. The literacy audit K-8 literacy audit findings (SP 1.5) and world language audits (SP 1.6, 1.7) indicate that we not only need new materials but also high quality professional development to get our teachers up to the best current practices. The world language state frameworks are currently under public comment. We have been shifting towards a proficiency model, a different way of world language instruction that's based on developing speakers and listeners and conversational application of languages. This change means that we have a lot of work to do to ensure compliance with this mandate.

We have technology curriculum platforms that we've had to put into play that we should continue:

- Zearn
- Columbia Teachers College digital

Assessment

- Assessment programs are needed for NPS to ensure that NPS is hitting the mark with their curriculum and uses benchmark assessment systems. Renaissance Learning is used to assess performance for grades 4-8 and we're expanding that to include grades K-3, with all the early literacy assessments. We'll also assess our 9th graders who did not meet eighth grade benchmarks and monitor their progress to get them caught up to their classmates.
- We will use to classroom targeted assessment tools (EdgeElastic & Akindi) to build our common assessments or tools that teachers use throughout the course of the semester to ensure that they're hitting their marks and students are hitting the marks of instruction that they're given.
- Support students' preparation for PSAT that will help them enter college.

Budget adjustments for FY 22

Mr. Downing noted that, starting with FY 22, all district-wide professional development will be included into the TLI budget. Individual schools continue to make decisions about their targeted professional development, but it's going to be processed and managed through the TLI office so we can see the totality of our professional development budget and do year-to-year comparisons. Professional development for student services, however, will continue to be in the student services budget. Dr. Nolin pointed out that NPS used to have a district professional development scenario and each building had their bucket as well and we are following the suggestion of the Finance Committee to consolidate it. For remote learning tools for grades 6 to 12, we are using Edgenuity. Edgenuity is also the district's curriculum recovery tool. One of the things COVID has taught us is the need for distance learning will continue and we need to be ready to offer this to our families that need that. So it makes sense for the digital learning office to manage those tools as that office has the expertise to take our teachers in that direction. Dr. Nolin added that curriculum recovery is termed "credit recovery" at the HS and is how high school students who fail courses can remediate that within the school year. Mr. Downing said that they have long used Edgenuity for grades 6 to 12 and are now using it for some gifted and talented extension courses as well as supporting the COVID Remote Learning Academy.

	FY 18 BUDGET	FY 19 BUDGET	FY 20 BUDGET	FY 21 Budget	FY22 Request	Inc/(Dec)
Dues & Memberships	\$29,334	\$29,334	\$40,730	\$20,000	\$43,689	\$23,689
Office Supplies	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$3,000	\$4,200	\$1,200
Prof. Development	\$384,700	\$333,349	\$333,349	\$339,650	\$455,560	\$115,910
Text/Software	\$155,182	\$149,277	\$24,319	\$304,600	\$51,243	(\$253,357)
Instruct Materials	\$517,948	\$265,500	\$329,718	\$380,598	\$370,591	(\$10,007)
Test & Assessment	\$189,900	\$32,427	\$81,767	\$63,500	\$79,900	\$16,400
TOTAL	\$1,277,564	\$810,387	\$810,383	\$1,111,348	\$1,005,183	(\$106,105)

The FY22 TLI budget decreases by \$106,105 from FY21. This is due, in part, to reduction in Title 1 funds from DESE and all digital professional development tools are now in the TLI budget. When digital tools become available we have a process to ensure evaluation of these tools and are often able as a free trial to evaluate their effectiveness. However, sometimes there are some pilot costs involved with these evaluations so we need to keep a small budget for that purpose.

Dues and memberships are increasing by \$23,689 to \$43,689 in FY21. FY21 was an anomaly in that when COVID shut-down occurred, dues and memberships were reduced. The more accurate comparison is the \$40,730 figure in the FY20 budget.

Office Supplies – this is the funding that our communication director uses to deliver services and also includes copy services.

Professional development includes two categories – budget adjustments and renewal costs of the professional development tools that we purchase on a year-to-year basis. The request is an increase of \$115,910 and this is the result primarily of the consolidation of professional development from the digital learning budget as discussed earlier:

- 50,000 increase moved from digital learning budget (NILS)
- \$74,800 shifted from school budgets
- \$9,830 for Diversity and Equity training
- \$25,000 for Middle School ELA workshop training (5th)- based on audit findings
- \$33,630 for World Language proficiency professional development, based on audit findings that indicated this need
- \$71,200 for TLI professional development to support strategic plan is determined throughout the school year. Many of our best professional development providers come to us throughout the year to provide courses that support our strategic plan. For example, our 8th grade teachers participated in some primary source training in November related to launching the civics plan projects and they hadn't announced that plan yet until later in the year due to all the things that were happening.
- Remaining balance are renewal costs for TLI = \$191,100, which breaks down as follows:
 - The Skillful Teacher - \$30,000 (onboarding tool)
 - Tuition reimbursement for teachers and administrators - \$45,000

- Curriculum writing - \$79,200 (anticipate need for increased curriculum writing needs this summer to close gaps due to COVID)
- Open Circle - \$7000 (Social-Emotional learning curriculum at the elementary level)
- Primary Source - \$5000 (social sciences, civics)
- TLI course costs - \$5000
- Marshall Memo - \$400
- Thought Exchange - \$17,000 (Dr. Nolin noted that it is a crowdsourcing platform that allows us to survey people on ideas and gauge community sentiments. Was used extensively during the closure. NPS used it before the KMS override and we may use it if there's any work with the with the Select Board on future potential overrides for the town.)
- Communications department PD - \$2500

Dr. Nolin noted that professional development is provided not only to teachers, but also paraprofessionals, nurses, librarians and others that are not direct teaching faces. Further, it is much more cost-effective to run professional development internally.

Mr. Downing noted that while there aren't major text purchases for this year, we will have large text purchases in future years. There are budget adjustments because Edgenuity shifted to the digital learning budget and we're adding digital tools like:

Zearn (an elementary math teaching tool it's been a high leverage tool for teachers to use in the classroom that keeps kids connected in the remote week, because teachers can tie it to their lessons and it has a lesson arc to it. It includes some video tutorials and illustrates key concepts to encourage academic gains.

Freckle – a practice-based math skills development program

PearDeck an advanced sort of PowerPoint sharing service. So Pear Deck is a tool that teachers can use to share content with students, but also have students participate in interjecting to that content. And it's a digital platform that has been leveraged tightly in the remote environment for our teachers. that will be used primarily in the brick and mortar school, as opposed to a potential Remote Learning Academy type school, although they can be used in both environments. Testing and Assessment will increase by \$16,400 due to an expanded use of Edulastic, expansion of Renaissance Learning as we discussed earlier, and the adjustments in contracts per negotiations. We're looking to renegotiate our contract with Renaissance Learning since we are using more of their products.

Title 1 funding received by the district was cut significantly last year because we fell below the 5% threshold for Tier 2 funding. DESE guidance is due in February on poverty percentage which determines funding tiers funding. Funding formulas are based upon US census data and FY22 budget will be based on the 2020 census, so there is uncertainty here. Dr. Nolin noted that Title 1 is a federal grant that Mr. Downing oversees as the person in charge of teaching and learning. This grant is based on poverty level and is intended to intervene for students with lagging skills and to equalize student learning across subgroups.

Mr. Downing noted that he anticipates the following needs in FY23 and FY24:

FY23 - MS workshop PD grades 5 and 6 (est. \$50k)

FY24 - Elementary math curriculum 6 year contract (est. \$350k-\$400k); MS workshop PD grades 5, 6 and 7 (est \$75k)

Questions from the Committee

Mr. Evans asked for brief descriptions of Zearn, Freckle, and Pear Deck (information incorporated above where their budget impact was discussed).

Dr. Nolin said that Zearn and Freckle replaced TenMarks Math, a product that Amazon created that provide great at-home math practice. The program would analyze how long a student was on a particular topic or what mistake they made. If the student got stuck, they could request help and a video would pop up and explain the concept. Mr. Downing added that another product called myON (reading) that they purchase annually is now also owned by Renaissance Learning. NPS also used Schoolzilla, an add-on to PowerSchool (school information system) that takes what the students are doing in Freckle (math) and myON (high-quality reading practice with unlimited, 24/7 access to thousands of enhanced digital books and age-appropriate news articles) and integrates it with the assessment data that produces a digital dashboard for teachers in PowerSchool. So that in a one-stop shop, they can see math and reading performance and tie it to things like attendance and tardiness so teachers can have datasets disaggregated for them, so they can make instructional decisions. Those data platforms and Renaissance Learning also provide information the teachers on strengths, deficits and recommended activities to address those deficits. Mr. Downing noted that the district has been trying to build this data dashboard notion and Renaissance Learning is figuring out how to do that in the K-8th grade realm. Renaissance learning is one of our best partners and they want to keep a long term relationship with us and are open to renegotiating that contract.

Members asked about the scope of equity training, given that it seems like a very small portion of the TLI budget. Mr. Downing said that it is a 12-hour course – six hours in the spring, divided into three 2-hour sessions. The FY22 budget cover the six hours of that training module. The focus of the training focuses on recognizing microaggressions when they happen and how can we best equip teachers to help students when those moments happen in a way that is empathetic and understanding, but also helps everyone move forward. The goal is to build those skill sets and tools to provide safety to students so that our students can go to adults for help. Dr. Nolin added that this is the next component that extends the more introductory trainings that we have had already provided to staff that is also included in our new staff onboarding. We provide training around an equity lens, and recognizing one's own bias. They also take a course on multicultural material selection to ensure that book sets are diverse enough and ensuring that stories in your classroom, posters, math examples, science texts reflect our student body. So that's a second module that they get through our, our onboarding class, as well as a class around adapting curriculum and understanding to LGBTQ plus students and understanding their family's needs and how your classroom may be arranged to be inclusive to those all of the types of students that come to our classrooms, students of different genders, identity, etc. So all those trainings come as a matter of our onboarding, as our obligation as a public school to make sure that we are not discriminating against students. Mr. Brand on the School Committee is our Policy Vice Chair and he and I will be convening the subcommittee to also look at a microaggressions policy for the district. So if we're going to be doing that, we need to do the professional development that goes along with a such a policy, just as we have an anti-bullying policy within the system that requires the same type of training.

Mr. Scurlock noted that, nationwide, there are some frightening statistics as to how students have fallen behind this past year and asked what measurements will be used to determine what needs to be done to make sure that our students don't fall behind. Dr. Nolin said NPS executed a social-

emotional survey to families, staff and students this year. We won't have all that data by the time we get through budget season because the student data will take a little while to get, but that will inform that piece on the trauma that you have spoken of and speaks directly to our goal to and our strategic plan around social-emotional learning. Mr. Downing added that NPS is planning vacation and summer camps to address this issue. Yesterday, we released a memo to faculty and staff that included a data set that showed some deficits appearing (most notably in the content area of math) which suggests that we need to focus resources on helping to remediate this deficit. Last summer, we received a \$36,000 grant for weekend vacation and summer learning. It's given to us and \$12,000 buckets, so I can use \$24,000 of that grant now in weekend and vacation learning. We are going to provide math boot camps during February and April vacation weeks this year for students in grades 2 – 11, as well as a writing boot camp for students in 9th-10th grade because we recognize that particularly in that high school trajectory of writing, that we really need to stay focused on helping students develop those vital writing skills and articulation skills that they need as they rise through their high school years. These will be workshop-style sessions. It also can be a referral situation where a student needs an extra boost because they're showing a tendency of falling behind. During the April boot camp, working with the teachers who will look at their data sets to identify students that need that real boost to pass their courses and meet expectations by the end of the term to limit the number of students that would need to enter into the course recovery mode.

Mr. Scurlock asked why the cost of dues and memberships went up significantly. Mr. Downing said that in FY19, dues and memberships were around \$40,000. In FY21, we reduced this line item as we were negotiating budgets and then COVID hit and these programs were not required. For FY22, this gets back to the FY19 level - \$43,006 89.

Mr. Scurlock asked for information that where money was transferred from one budget to another within the NPS budget to provide information that clearly identifies the item that was removed from one budget and add it to another budget.

Mr. Linehan asked for clarification on the proportion of spending on world language, math, and English Language. Mr. Downing said that the world language budget is due to the significant instructional shift into proficiency model of world language instruction. It takes quite a bit of training to move teachers away from that notion of “conjugate the verb” to educating a student to be a conversational speaker in that language. It also encompasses both middle school and the high school. Dr. Nolin added that world language is a core subject and a high school graduation requirement so the spend is commensurate with other mandatory courses.

Dr. Nolin noted that NPS has created a transparency page that you will see tonight at the full Finance Committee meeting later tonight that includes every presentation we make, every document in the database that we've made for the Finance Committee over the years, all of our contracts, a list of our expenses, and union contracts, so you can go to one website to get all this information and research.

Mr. Evans moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pope, voted 4 – 0 – 0

Roll-call vote

Mr. DeLuca = yes

Mr. Evans = yes

Mr. Pope = yes

Mr. Scurlock = yes

Meeting adjourned 6:07 PM