

Support Article 17: Provide Level Service Funding for Concord Public Schools (CPS) 2024 Budget

In an inflationary environment, our Superintendent has proposed a 4.7% budget increase for Concord Public Schools (K-8), with the support of the School Committee. Unlike the budgets of the previous Superintendent, there are no “slush funds” of money or “administrative fat” to cut or negotiate. Instead, Dr. Hunter has implemented “zero-based budgeting,”* where each teacher and employee itemizes each expense for the year into the appropriate category. This makes the budget completely transparent, and no category gets an automatic percentage increase. We know what the money is used for, and 85% of the CPS expenses are mandated, by legal contracts and Federal/State law.

Dr. Hunter and her team have been careful stewards of the CPS budget and have presented a level-service proposal that maintains current activities in the schools. There are no new programs. They have gone through it carefully, making cuts where they could. In 2022, the average inflation rate was 8%, and Dr. Hunter’s proposal is very thrifty, representing the lowest portion of the town’s budget in 17 years.

The town proposes to spend \$132M in 2024. This includes an increase of 8.67% for the second biggest expense, Town Government (\$34M). This is a significant increase but is in-line with inflation. Why are we asking CPS to limit themselves to a 3.3% increase?

* Zero-Based Budgeting

“Zero-based budgeting requires staff to begin budget development at \$0.00. Every department head and every principal analyzes their internal operations to identify all anticipated costs. Costs are documented and reviewed to ensure alignment with core budgeting principals and district goals.

Other budget methodologies emphasize cost drivers, focusing documentation and analysis on identified financial pressures.

The zero-based process extends the same analysis traditionally reserved for identified cost drivers to all costs, no matter how large or small.”

- FY23 CPS Budget Book

From the Town Manager’s Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (The Town Budget Book, page 4.)

The Total General Fund Budget includes funding for all Town programs and services with the exception of those operations supported by user fees, such as for electricity by the Light Plant and for water by the Water Division. The outline for the budget of \$132,097,792 is presented below

General Fund Budget

	FY23	FY24	Change (FY23 to FY24)	
	Budget	Proposed	Amount	Percent
Town Government	\$31,244,746	\$33,952,235	\$2,707,489	8.67%
Concord Public Schools	\$43,186,745	\$45,197,176	\$2,010,431	4.66%
Concord-Carlisle RSD	\$21,782,979	\$22,302,834	\$519,855	2.39%
Subtotal	\$96,214,470	\$101,452,245	\$5,237,775	5.44%
All Other Accounts ¹	\$29,004,308	\$30,688,771	\$1,684,463	5.80%
Total Budget Plan	\$125,218,778	\$132,141,017	\$6,922,238	5.52%

¹ For FY23, All Other Accounts consists of Group Insurance (\$8,140,471), OPEB (\$1,364,608), Retirement (\$5,049,675), Town and CPS Debt Service (\$4,527,700), Town, CPS, CCRSD Assessed, and MMRSD Assessed Excluded Debt Service (\$7,453,620), Minuteman Vocational School District Assessment (\$1,154,162), Social Security / Medicare (\$989,168), Other Fixed & Mandated Accounts (\$708,168), Other Articles (\$4,500), and Accounts not subject to Appropriation (1,296,899).

Proposed 8.67% increase, yet no mention of cuts.

The FinCom wants this to be cut down to 3.3%.

Historical Concord Public Schools Budget as % of Overall Town Budget Fiscal Years 2007-2024

Fiscal Year	CPS Budget as % of Town Budget
2024	34.20%
2023	34.62%
2022	35.27%
2021	35.22%
2020	34.51%
2019	35.88%
2018	36.14%
2017	36.22%
2016	35.67%
2015	36.18%
2014	35.96%
2013	35.78%
2012	35.52%
2011	36.17%
2010	36.81%
2009	37.18%
2008	38.07%
2007	38.42%

Lowest % of Town budget in 17 years!

Zero-based budgeting begins

Calculation Method

CPS Budget as % of Town Budget = CPS Budget / Total Budget Plan for each Fiscal Year 2007-2024

Data From General Fund Table in Town Budget Books <https://www.concordma.gov/3273/FY2024>.

Possible Cuts Coming

Since 85% of the CPS budget is legally mandated, to get down to the 3.3% increase requested by the FinCom, the potential cuts are as follows:

- Reduction of district sponsored field trips
- Reduction of special education coordinator
- Reduction of 2-4 tutors
- Reduction of technology specialist(s)
- Reduction of K-5 instrumental music
- Reduction of professional development
- Reduction of librarians shared across K-8
- Reduction of transportation within 2 miles

"I believe that the Concord Public School FY24 Budget Plan for a 4.7% increase is warranted and reasonable. A level services budget is an appropriate response to the needs and current economic conditions. I was disappointed that neither the Finance Committee or Select Board has elected to recommend that budget to Town Meeting. I will support the CPS budget at the level recommended by the CPS School Committee at Town Meeting. I was quite moved by the presentation made at the Finance Committee Hearing on March 9...I will be disappointed if this year the boards do not come together. However, I plan to support the School Committee recommendation at Town Meeting. I urge others to do so as well."

- Mark Howell
Concord Select Board Member Elect

Effects of musical education, especially ensemble work

1) Teaching children an instrument teaches them a new language, Music, that has deep ties to both math and literacy. Research supports that children who have an early music education perform better in math and English throughout their educational careers.

2) Ensemble work teaches children to listen carefully, to respond to what is going on around them, and to work together with others. Music is not a team where wins and losses are paramount, and children are pitted against each other to be "the best." It is a deep process of playing a small role in a larger organism that lives, breathes, and thrives on togetherness.

3) Music, music education, and ensemble work has also been shown to help children and adults process emotions and learn to feel. We have a musical culture that has been built over the last decade as 4th and 5th graders experience band and orchestra. This has led to a rich depth of high school players and has elevated our school to high level accolades with multiple students performing in Senior Districts and Allstate, and medals at MICCA. The building of these ensembles takes years of practice, hard work, and support. If we cut ensembles in the 4th and 5th grade, we are hobbling our high school and our students for their entire future.

Source: Elisabeth Winterkorn

Treasurer, Concord Association of Music Parents
(*Drastically* edited for space.)

Unedited letter with links to resources is available at:
<https://www.concordcommunityforgreatschools.com/>)

Cutting staff means immediate impacts on student learning:

- Technology Specialists collaborate on instruction providing students with essential 21st century skills. They also manage the 1:1 laptop program, support MCAS administration, assist teachers and staff, and provide professional development.
- Librarians teach at all levels on Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship. These prepare students to make technological choices that are safe, ethical, and balanced. Librarians also provide reading materials at all levels across a wide range of interests to support a life-long love of reading. They also provide resources for teachers to support various curricula.
- Tutors assist students in all parts of the school day by providing literacy and math support, running small-group instruction, supervising children at lunch and recess, and acting as substitute teachers, when necessary.



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