

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding FY20 Mt Abraham Unified School District Budget

Budget

Q: How will my local school budget be voted on now that we are consolidated?

A: The funding for all of our schools: Beeman, Bristol, Monkton, Mt Abraham, New Haven, Starksboro and the Supervisory Union are now combined onto a single ballot which residents will vote on by Australian ballot on Tuesday March 5th at their local polling places. Voted ballots will be brought to a central location and co-mingled (all town ballots mixed together) prior to being counted.

Q: How much is the budget increasing by and why?

A: FY20 total expenses are \$1,918,701 higher than FY19 total expenses. FY20 revenue is \$491,146 more than FY19 revenue. FY20 net education spending (expenses - revenue) is \$1,427,556 more than FY19. The FY20 spending per equalized pupil is 8.17% higher than the FY19 spending per equalized pupil. The number of equalized pupils in FY20 of 1,475.75 is a reduction of 34.39 from FY19.

Q: Tell me more about this Budget?

A: This budget focuses on improving the Academic, Social & Emotional outcomes, our ENDS (goals) for students. It ensures equity in both Opportunities & Outcomes for students. This budget reinforces the use of resources wisely to build sustainable systems in our schools and work to address issues of equity, across PreK - 12. It maintains safe and efficient facilities, that will support learning and instruction. This budget will allow us to identify and achieve efficiencies as we move forward. This budget maintains the same level of staffing as the current year, and includes normal yearly increases in salaries, health insurance, and other costs due to inflation. There is also an increase in intensive needs special education expenses.

Q: With so many things to spend money on, how did you choose what to include in this budget?

A: This budget considers both community and staff priorities, and continues work underway from the previous budget year. The Board conducted a community forum in October and collected feedback by survey through the fall. Community priorities included: allocating resources to ensure success for all students across the district, creating cost savings through our unification, investing in teachers, and investing in our schools. In addition, the Superintendent collected feedback from staff to identify Strategic Plan priorities, including expertise in learning and social, emotional and physical development. Without increasing spending, this budget focuses resources on these priorities identified by the community and our staff.

Capital Reserve Fund

Q: Why is the board recommending that we create a Capital Reserve Fund?

A: The fund balance (surplus) from FY18 was larger than usual, over \$1.5 million. If we apply that whole amount to the current budget, it will create a significant shortfall next year, when we expect to have a more typical fund balance. Using the whole fund balance this year could lead

to budget cuts or a big jump in tax rates next year. Instead, the Board recommends placing a portion of the large fund balance in a Capital Reserve Fund. This fund can be used in the future to help pay for unforeseen expenses or facilities needs.

Q: How would a capital reserve fund work?

A: Capital reserve funds allow schools to save for major expenses, both planned and unplanned. The capital reserve fund can only be used with voter approval. The Board would present any proposed project to the community and it would be subject to community vote. Major building projects or purchases (e.g., a new boiler, if one were needed) could be funded using a capital reserve.

Class Sizes and Coaching

Q: How did last year’s staff cuts affect class sizes across the district?

A: The FY19 budget, which was approved last year, cut approximately 16 teacher and staff positions across the district. This staff reduction has led to slightly larger average class sizes. These class sizes remain within State guidelines and MAUSD policy. Grade 3-4 classes are slightly large on average, and high school classes are slightly small on average. At the high school level, further staff reductions could mean eliminating programs.

	FY 18	FY 19	Optimal Average Range	Maximum Average
K-2 (K-6 for FY18)	16.87	17.12	14-18	20
3-4		19.09	14-18	Grade 3 = 20 Grade 4 = 25
5-6		19.0	14-20	25
7-8		17.5	14-22	25
9-12 (7-12 for FY18) (English, Math, Science, Social Studies)	18.11	17.5	18-22	English - 100 per teacher Others - 150 per teacher

Q: What information can you share about the coaching model and how it is working?

A: Instructional coaches have been working with teachers to improve tier 1 instruction across our schools. Tier 1 means instruction for all students. For example, coaches are working with teachers to increase student engagement, use small groups for learning, and differentiate instruction for struggling students. Coaches also support larger scale professional development

experiences for teachers, administrators and support staff during faculty meetings, early release days, inservice, at meetings and/or during planning time.

Here is one teacher's feedback about their work with one of the coaches. "I contacted her and within two weeks she met with me three times and also observed my teaching three times. She prepared three excellent observation reports and, most valuable to me, had concrete, small-step, achievable suggestions for improving engagement in my courses. It is very hard to coach peers in any environment but she does so with clear communication and timely suggestions while making me feel valued and supported."

Renovation, Construction and Bond Votes

Q: How will facilities issues and/or renovation projects be approached now that we are one district?

A: The needs across the consolidated district will be assessed and the most urgent brought forward for action independent of location. We have created a 5 year capital improvement plan that will help us meet both the immediate needs and the ones we can predict in an organized, sustainable way. The MAUSD board is committed to a plan of maintaining our buildings efficiently and effectively in order to prevent costly repairs. We are launching a community engagement initiative that will help the board gather community input on many issues, including next steps for our facilities.

Q: How does budgeting for facilities issues through the operating budget rather than a bond affect my taxes?

A: Since the community has not supported a bond to address the many facilities needs, the Board includes \$1M for capital improvements in our annual operating budget. If we were to pass a bond to address the facilities maintenance and improvements needed, this \$1M expense could be redirected into the yearly bond repayment. The state currently has a waiver system that allows bond payments to be removed from the education spending per equalized pupil, which would help lower taxes due to our annual budget. Addressing facilities needs through a bond would also allow us to take on larger maintenance and improvement projects than cannot be handled through the annual operating budget.

The Annual Meeting for the Mt. Abraham Unified School District (MAUSD) is February 26, 2019 at 6:00pm, in the large cafeteria at Mt. Abraham Union Middle/High School. Please plan on attending this important meeting to get your budget questions answered.

