



Franklin Public Schools

*Office of the Superintendent
355 East Central Street; Suite 3
Franklin, Massachusetts 02038
Phone: 508-553-4819*

October 2, 2019

Dear Franklin Community:

This letter is the first “State of the Schools” letter I plan to issue. Each year, as the school year gets under way, as Superintendent of Schools, I will communicate about the major matters of the Franklin Public Schools.

District Focus Areas and Strategy for Improvement

We kicked off the 2019-2020 school year with all faculty and staff gathering together on opening day. As Superintendent, I shared remarks emphasizing the importance of **developing relationships** with students and **getting to know each child and family**. This effort supports the District’s focus on personalized learning and cultural proficiency, as outlined in our [District’s Strategy for Improvement](#).

Administrators and educators initiated various activities and projects to uncover more about the students in front of them, as well as their families. We believe this investment will pay dividends over time, in both the development of social-emotional and academic skills, and towards building more **empathetic and caring** school communities.

This work also supports our **VISIONING** effort [Portrait of A Graduate](#). Throughout last spring, we engaged educators, community members, students, and families in the process of identifying the essential skills students will need for their futures in a modern, technologically, globally interdependent world. We are excited to unveil a draft community consensus later this fall for further feedback and refinement.

FY 20 Budget Update

We closed the 2018-2019 school year with an approved budget of \$64,600,00, a budget that was \$1,365,000 above FY 19, representing a 2.16% increase. This budget involved the reduction of \$2.2 million from the Superintendent’s Recommended Budget. The recommended budget included strategic investments in areas such as middle school counseling and additional classroom teachers at FHS to reduce class size, which we were not ultimately able to support.

The budget process involved reduction in services, a reduction in teaching positions, and an increase to activity, athletic, and bus fees. We post the iterations of our budget on our website and those resources can be found here:

<https://www.franklinps.net/district/budget-information/pages/current-budget>

“Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice”
Equal Opportunity Employer

Over the summer, the State finalized its FY 20 budget, which was more favorable to Franklin than original budget projections forecast. The Town Council then approved an additional appropriation of \$102,500 to place our current FY 20 budget at \$64,702,500, or a 2.32% increase. An additional appropriation may be finalized this fall, but still leaves the schools short of the recommended budget.

Throughout the FY 20 budget development process, I forecast concerns about the development of the FY 21 budget. Maintenance of effort for Franklin Public Schools will require approximately \$3 million as a result of our major budget drivers: competitive salaries required to recruit and retain a talented faculty and staff; rising healthcare costs; rising costs of out of district special education tuition; and higher demand for services, despite enrollment decreases.

The State Legislature recently issued a new proposed education funding bill, the Student Opportunity Act. While this will likely bring additional State support to Franklin, our initial analysis does not suggest that it will cover the entire cost required to maintain level service, much less invest in key areas of school improvement.

I encourage the community to remain apprised of not only financial information but also the excellent educational outcomes of the Franklin Public Schools. (Please see the last item [“Connect with Us”](#) on how you can do so).

Davis Thayer Elementary School Closing Study

Taking action following my recommendation (see [memo to the School Committee](#)), Davis Thayer Elementary School was authorized for further analysis through a closing study as prescribed by School Committee [Policy FCB - Retirement of Facilities](#). The rationale for a closing study includes:

- 1) the age and design of the facility;
- 2) decreased enrollment across the district; and
- 3) economic efficiency.

Although preliminary enrollment projections are available, the District will be obtaining more detailed and thoroughly analyzed demographic details and enrollment projections. Additionally, the District will be examining the Davis Thayer facility and space utilization/availability across the district.

Updates related to this study will be shared at regular intervals at School Committee meetings and directly with the DT community, at least on a monthly basis. The prospect of closing a school can be an emotional matter; the District is committed to engage in this study with the greatest of care towards students, families, and staff.

School Start Times Update

Last spring, the School Start Times Advisory Committee completed its charge, which was to study and put forward a recommendation to the School Committee related to adjusting School Start Times across the district. This team of educators and community members recommended changed start times so that middle and high school adolescents would be going to school later in the day, consistent with their natural, biological sleep patterns. The report of the Advisory Committee gained great attention and numerous stakeholders came forward sharing both their support and their concerns about proposed time changes.

During the 2019-2020 year, the District will be focusing on furthering the conversation about Start Times with the community, but will be pausing the analysis of different start times scenarios. Instead, the District has planned several education events designed to highlight the importance of sleep and factors that contribute to students' sleep patterns. These events include:

1. **Social Media Education Night** with a Panel of Speakers to include Mental Health Counselor, School Administration, Pediatrician, and Student Representative: October 21, 2019 at Franklin High School (6:30 PM)
2. **Sleep Education Night** with Dr. Judith Owens, Director of Pediatric Sleep Disorders at Boston Children's Hospital: November 19, 2019 at Franklin High School (6:30 PM)

Additionally, the District is implementing and monitoring new Homework Guidelines (found in [School Handbooks](#)), which are designed to make sure that homework is purposeful and balanced.

We also will be exploring the prospect of piloting a late start on a half-day at Franklin High School. This is proposed to occur in the spring (after inclement weather season).

We will be measuring students' self-reporting of sleep at the end of the school year in order to monitor progress of these efforts. Additional information can be found in this [Update Presentation](#) from September 24, 2019.

Connect with Us!

The fourth District Improvement Goal is "Effective Two-Way Communication to Support Student Learning". As such, we are developing our efforts to engage with the community. We encourage you to explore this [Infographic](#), which explains the ways in which we keep families, staff, and the community informed. I want to specifically point out [e-mail list-servs](#) you can opt-into in order to receive periodic updates from the School Committee and Franklin Public School District.

Education of Franklin's children is of paramount concern to families and the community. I feel the weight of that responsibility each and every day; we aim to do our best in service to the social, emotional, and academic development of our students. We are proud of our accomplishments and strive each day to make sure that students' experiences are preparing

them for their futures. Franklin is a wonderful and supportive community and it is my honor to serve as your Superintendent.

Sincerely,

Sara E. Ahern

Sara E. Ahern, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools