From: **Courtney Balacco** <cbalacco@framingham.k12.ma.us>
Date: Wed, Feb 25, 2026 at 5:57 PM
Subject: Re: 3/3 meeting
To: Framingham SEPAC <framinghamsepac@gmail.com>
Cc: Lori Bruce <lbruce@framingham.k12.ma.us>, Krista Brother <kbrother@framingham.k12.ma.us>

Dear Members of the Framingham SEPAC,

I apologize that we are just getting back to you this evening. I thought we had sent a follow up to you as well as Ms. Moshe following our meeting last evening, but I am just now realizing that your email was not on the email I sent on behalf of Lori and I. Please accept my sincere apologies.

Below is the information that we shared with Ms. Moshe who followed up with us with some additional questions based on our agenda and discussion when we met.

We look forward to meeting with you all on the 3rd of March and again, thank you for all you do to advocate for and be a voice for students with disabilities and their caregivers in Framingham.

Warm regards,
Courtney

Dear Ms. Moshe,

Thank you as well for your time yesterday and the thoughtful approach you are taking to understanding special education staffing and allocations.

Having to make budget reductions is a painful consideration, and not one that any of us make lightly, or without careful thought. The cuts proposed by our team of leaders across schools and the district represent hard, carefully considered decisions. They are not reductions anyone wants to make, but ultimately have to consider due to the reductions in enrollment we have experienced, and, in some-cases, support necessary programmatic shifts.

Your core concern is how students will continue to receive effective and equitable services given the identified reductions. Indeed, students cannot be reduced to “minutes on a grid”. At the same time, service grids represent legally binding commitments to ensure access. Our responsibility is to align staffing models to deliver those services with fidelity, while also strengthening Tier 1 instruction across all educators who serve students with disabilities (access for students with disabilities is an instructional responsibility of all educators) to allow students access to instruction that enables them to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Special Education staffing allocations are reviewed annually through a districtwide process. We conduct a school by school analysis of the following:

- The total number of students on IEPs;
- Placement type (inclusion, partial inclusion, substantially separate, and the specific staffing requirements of those programs);
- Individual service delivery minutes to be provided by special educators and related service providers;
- Caseload and program ratios for special education staff; and
- Programmatic intensity and classroom configurations.

Furthermore, this review accounts for the fluid nature of special education enrollment. This year, there has been an overall reduction of approximately **114** students receiving special education services as compared to the prior reporting cycle, with decreases seen across inclusion (**8.5%**), partial inclusion (**2.3%**), and substantially separate placements (**2.6%**). In addition, enrollment changes are influenced by students entering special education, exiting eligibility, moving out of the district, or having services adjusted through the team process.

Positions may be added, reduced, or repurposed based on those factors. This is a process that happens annually, but also at times throughout the course of a school year to meet shifting needs due to students moving in or out of the district..

Importantly, in this budget process, no special education positions were reduced in a way that will negatively impact students' access to the legally required supports and services outlined in their IEPs. In fact, students will continue to receive services as outlined in their IEPs; moreover, additional capacity requirements were considered to ensure schools could support future additional needs that may arise. Reductions were made where enrollment has decreased, programs were restructured, or prior overstaffing existed, not in ways that reduce required instructional or related services.

Specific details that pertain to each individual school level reduction may be helpfu,l so we would like to share that as well:

Dunning **1.0 FTE Special Education Aide**	This reduction is a reduction of an additional 1.0 float aide position, which is not required for specific student IEP needs, but remained in place after the position was no longer needed to support an individual student elsewhere. The reduction was made due to an overage in staffing above and beyond the inclusion or substantially separate programming staffing allocations.
Harmony **1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher**	Harmony Grove currently has had a reduction of eight students in Special Education since SY24-25 and currently has approximately 45 students in Special Education. Inclusion Special Education service delivery is provided by Special Educators. Harmony Grove currently has four Special Educators, and two Special Education Assistant Teachers. A common state inclusion ratio for an inclusion Special Educator is one Special Educator per 20-25 students with IEPs. The inclusion ratio for special education services with the proposed reduction remains well under that ratio at 1:15 for Special Educators, and 1:9 inclusive of Special Educators and Special Education Assistant Teachers. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately.

Hemenway **1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher**	This position is vacant and has remained vacant since May 2025 and has been unfilled. It is being reduced due to overage in staffing
Potter **1.0 FTE Special Education Assistant**	Potter Road currently has had a reduction of 18 students in Special Education since SY24-25 and currently has approximately 80 students in Special Education. Inclusion Special Education service delivery is provided by Special Educators.Potter Road currently has five Special Educators, and two Special Education Assistant Teachers. A common state inclusion ratio for an inclusion Special Educator is one Special Educator per 20-25 students with IEPs. The inclusion ratio for special education services with the proposed reduction remains well under that ratio at 1:16 for Special Educators, and 1:13 inclusive of Special Educators and Special Education Assistant Teachers. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately.

Stapleton **5.0 FTEs Special Education Assistant** *There are only 5.0 FTE Special Education Assistants proposed at Stapleton **1.0 FTE BCBA**	Stapleton has had a reduction of seven students on IEPs since SY24-25 and currently has approximately 93 students on IEPs (20 of which are substantially separate programming, and 73 of whom are in inclusion). **3.0 FTE Special Education Assistant Teachers** Three of the Special Education Assistant reductions are within the TLC Substantially Separate program. These positions are proposed to be reduced due to an overage of staffing. The current, overall, staff to student ratio within the TLC program is **1:1.2**, and the current Special Educator & Assistant Teacher ratio is **1:1.6.** This ratio indicates overstaffing. These are ratios that exceed those even provided in private special education schools and are not standard nor appropriate in any public school elementary substantially separate program. Within a program such as TLC, the goal is to increase students' independence, and staffing with too many adults can inadvertently create dependence and increase/reinforce behavioral challenges. With these reductions, the substantially separate program classrooms will still be staffed with three teachers/assistant teachers, and will ensure a more appropriate 1:4 teacher/assistant to student educator ratio if filled to max capacity (36 students). With clinical staff and program aides considered, the overall program staffing ratio will remain 1:1.5 based on current enrollment (20 students) and 1:2.8 if filled to max capacity (36 students)

	2.0 FTEs Special Education Assistant Teachers Stapleton also currently has six inclusion Special Education teachers, and two Special Education Assistant Teachers. A common state inclusion ratio for an inclusion Special Educator is one Special Educator per 20-25 students with IEPs. The inclusion ratio for special education services with the proposed reduction remains well under that ratio at 1:12 for Special Educators. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately. **1.0 FTE BCBA** This position was added in the previous two years due to supporting the needs of two TLC students who required BCBA services and provided additional behavioral planning. The historical TLC programmatic model is staffing with two social workers, which is consistent across all three schools with this program model. The BCBA position is a supplemental position that is not required based on the programmatic model, and the work provided by the BCBA has historically been provided by the district BCBA team. BCBA services will shift back to the original model and will continue to be supported by our district BCBA and ABA team. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately.

Fuller **1.0 FTE Special Education Assistant Teacher**	Fuller currently has had a reduction of 16 students in Special Education since SY24-25 and has approximately 131 students in Special Education. Inclusion Special Education service delivery is provided by Special Educators. Fuller currently has 11 Special Educators (five who are programmatic, six who are inclusion), and nine Special Education Assistant Teachers (six are programmatic, and three are inclusion) None of the reductions are being proposed to staff within programmatic, substantially separate program positions. A common state inclusion ratio for an inclusion Special Educator is one Special Educator per 20-25 students with IEPs. The inclusion ratio for special education services with the proposed reduction remains well under that ratio at 1:13 for Special Educators, and 1:9 inclusive of Special Educators and Special Education Assistant Teachers. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately.

FHS **3.0 FTE Special Education Teachers** *There is no BCBA being proposed to be reduced at FHS	FHS currently has had a reduction of 74 students in Special Education since SY24-25 and has approximately 457 students in Special Education. Inclusion Special Education service delivery is provided by Special Educators FHS currently has 41 Special Educators (11 who are programmatic, 30 who are inclusion), and 17 Special Education Assistant Teachers (10 are programmatic, and seven are inclusion) None of the reductions are being proposed to staff within programmatic, substantially separate program positions. A common state inclusion ratio for an inclusion Special Educator is one Special Educator per 20-25 students with IEPs. The inclusion ratio for special education services with the proposed reduction remains well under that ratio at 1:12 for Special Educators, and 1:10 inclusive of Special Educators and Special Education Assistant Teachers. This reduction can be made while ensuring students continue receiving services appropriately.

We are actively working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop an action plan following a root cause analysis that was conducted in the 24-25 SY to address findings from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding a need for improvement and intervention within Special Education. It is important to clarify how staffing decisions intersect with these findings, as it is understandable to wonder how reductions within Special Education would or would not impact current areas of concern and focus for improvement within Special Education.

Our findings encompassed four primary areas of concern: preschool inclusion rate, high school graduation rate, findings of non-compliance, and grade 4 and grade 8 academic outcomes in math and literacy (MCAS) for students with disabilities.

Our root cause analysis process, and action plan, have centered around actions to improve these outcomes that should not be impacted by the proposed reductions.

Preschool inclusion rate:

We are placing students in substantially separate settings at much higher rates than the state average. This finding reinforced our commitment to preserving staffing at the PreK level to increase inclusive opportunities earlier on, and improve long-term academic and behavioral outcomes by ensuring that students have inclusive special education experiences earlier. No PreK reductions were recommended for FY 27.

High school completion/graduation rate:

While connected to special education service delivery, these outcomes are largely reflective of the overall academic experience of students with disabilities. From a Special Education lens this includes the general education academic experiences of our students with disabilities, and access to those academic experiences through high-quality, Tier-1 instruction, ensuring meaningful access to high-quality, standards-aligned core instruction. While special education positions were reduced at the high school, the student to special educator ratios are appropriate based on current but also future enrollment increases, should they occur. Through our district's instructional priority, we hope to see improvements in this outcome indicator with continued investment in standards-aligned instruction provided by all FHS educators.

Our work with the high school leadership team has been focused on “the 9th grade experience,” as 9th grade outcomes are a significant predictor of high school completion. The team has taken a close look at several key data points, including Term 1 failures, attendance data, retention rates, and classroom observation data. The school is working with Sarah Ottow/Confianza with a focus on Tier 1 instructional strategies, language supports, and student engagement.

Grade 4 & 8 literacy and math outcomes (MCAS):

Our district instructional prioritization plan, developed in partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, supports math and reading achievement through targeted curriculum adoptions, grant funding, and strategic professional partnerships.

Math

As part of our push to provide high quality instructional materials (HQIM) in all classrooms, the district adopted the Amplify math curriculum for grades K-8 this year, and has provided professional development for all educators. Additionally, to ensure successful implementation, the district is providing "train the trainer" support for math coaches through The New Teacher Project (TNTP) and utilizing an "Amplify Transformers" team of teachers across several schools.

Reading and Literacy

Elementary educators are receiving additional training through TNTP on evidence based literacy practices. The district has also invited teachers to participate in targeted coaching from TNTP using the "Good to Great" model to elevate practices in our core literacy programs.

Language Development (in Math and Reading/Literacy)

Across all grades and content areas, the district has identified the following instructional priority: *All educators will create and deliver targeted lessons that leverage high-quality instructional materials and are tailored to the student profiles of emergent bilinguals, specifically those who are dually identified. Educators will align language objectives with the key forms, functions, and features (WIDA English Language Development Framework 2020) of the content standards, ensuring that students have the support needed to access and master grade-level expectations by making their thinking visible.* Through this priority, the district intertwines language development (which is critical for all students, but particularly multilingual learners and dually identified students) with mastery of grade-level content. Our focus right now is on ensuring all educators intentionally plan their lessons with language-rich tasks that provide students with frequent and meaningful opportunities to express their thinking, utilize academic language, and deepen their comprehension of core concepts. This work with principals, coaches, and educators, directly targets equity gaps to eliminate barriers to academic participation for all students.

Findings of non-compliance (DESE PRS - Problem Resolution System):

These relate primarily to procedural and administrative requirements, such as timeline and regulatory adherence by school based administrators, school based Special Education administrators, and documentation. They are not driven by staffing, but by systems and process improvements, which are actively being addressed.

In summary:

Thank you again for your thoughtful questions and your commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities are supported well across our schools. Core educational and special education services will continue to be delivered appropriately and equitably, despite the challenges of such a substantial decline in enrollment and budget reductions. Staffing decisions and proposed reductions were made through a school by school review of service requirements, caseloads, enrollment changes, and program configurations, with no reductions directly or negatively impacting students IEP service delivery.

In this context, equitable means staffing schools based on student enrollment, IEP service needs and legal requirements, as well as program models at each school. . We will continue to monitor enrollment, service delivery, and student needs closely and continue to make adjustments as needed across schools to ensure schools remain equitably and appropriately staffed and students continue to receive the supports necessary to access instruction and thrive.

Sincerely,

Lori Bruce, Director of Special Education

Courtney Balacco, Executive Director of Student Supports