

To: Town Council
Amherst School Committee
Amherst Pelham Regional School Committee

Fr: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager

Cc: Doug Slaughter, Acting Superintendent of Schools
Sandy Pooler, Holly Drake, Jennifer LaFountain, Town Finance Team

Dt: DATE

Re: School Fiscal Sustainability Working Group

Background

The Amherst Public Schools and Amherst Pelham Regional Schools have communicated significant financial challenges in future budget years. The issues identified by School leaders are significant and require a robust solution that considers all options. Growing partly out of the pandemic and the infusion of temporary grant funds, these challenges need to be addressed to maintain the high-quality school system that all Amherst residents expect and deserve.

To address these challenges, I propose a working group comprised primarily of Town and School officials, Town and School staff with subject-matter expertise (finance, human resources, facilities), and outside experts drawing on the knowledge held in our local higher education institutions to dig into the cost drivers and the core issues and to develop recommendations for consideration by the Town and School policymakers. The group will look at funding levels, operational efficiencies, facility planning, and other areas that impact the fiscal sustainability of the schools both in the coming year and beyond.

Future Considerations

In my budget presentation on May 6th, I listed this initiative as a strategy to support School and Town officials in your discussions about these financial challenges.

In the coming weeks, I will work with the President of the Town Council and Chair of the School Committee to form the working group and parameters for its work. The group will submit its recommendations to the Superintendent and Town Manager no later than December 31, 2024. Upon receiving recommendations, the Superintendent and I will mutually assemble a series of options for further consideration and discussion with the School Committee and Town Council.

My number one goal for this working group to preserve the high-quality educational experience valued highly by the residents of Amherst. I look forward to meeting this challenge head on and building upon the long history of collaborative problem solving that has served the Town well.
