

This is a Q&A Document folks from Town Council Can use to ask questions or gain clarifications. I have listed the questions that came from our Joint meeting on Dec. 5, 2023 with as detailed answers as possible. Please list any additional questions or additional information you would like below at any time between now and our workshop meeting with Town Council planned for April 23 and up until May 14's vote. We will be sure to provide answers to help inform the process as we go.

- [Questions from December, 2023](#)
- [Questions from April, 2024](#)

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## Questions from December, 2023

1. **Question:** In what ways does the school department think about staffing that maximizes state funding to support these positions?

**Answer:** The state's Essential Programs and Services (EPS) School Funding formula funds schools for staffing positions for teachers at the following ratios:

- PreK-K = 15:1
- Gr. 1-5 = 17:1
- Gr. 6-8 = 17:1
- Gr. 9-12 = 16:1

Our current ratios at Grades PreK - 5 are 19:1, our current 6-8 ratios are 24:1 and our current ratios at 9-12 are 16:1

The chart below shows that we are the highest percentage of EPS funding for staffing across all of Cumberland County at 94% (and we are the top 5 in the state) because our staffing ratios are over what EPS allows, we MAXIMIZE the funding provided by the state of Maine far better than any other district in Cumberland County.

School System	Oct. 1 Enrollment	EPS PreK-K	EPS Gr. 1-5	EPS Gr. 6-8	EPS Gr. 9-12	EPS Total	Actual Total	% EPS
Gorham	2731	14.57	62.97	37.18	51.34	166.06	177	94%
Cape Elizabeth	1508	7.2	30.47	20.09	33	90.76	114	80%
Scarborough	2884	13.77	63.32	40.29	56.91	174.29	214.3	81%
South Portland	3071	17.97	61.85	40.18	60.84	180.84	214.5	84%
Portland	6436	46.9	136.18	82.18	126.91	392.16	483.6	81%
Freeport (RSU 5)	2066	16.3	43.53	25.68	37.94	123.44	156.5	79%
Yarmouth	1679	9.2	33.97	23.21	33.66	100.03	128.6	78%
Falmouth	1987	8.77	41.82	27.18	43.31	121.08	161.4	75%
Brunswick	2363	17.8	50.74	29.71	46.31	144.55	176.6	82%
Windham (RSU 14)	3133	18.7	69.21	41	60	188.91	211	89%
Gray/NG (RSU 15)	1824	14.63	36.26	21.94	37.28	110.12	123.1	89%
Cumberland (RSU 51)	2152	14.13	49.74	27.68	37.44	128.98	173.8	74%
Westbrook	2329.5	13.83	51.82	32.5	43.03	141.19	173.6	81%

Also, different types of positions are funded differently by the state of Maine. For example, special education staff are subsidized at a higher rate than regular education

staff. So, when we look at how we categorize some positions like our Instructional Strategists, we make sure the emphasis of these positions are in special education so that they are categorized under special education and therefore costs are reimbursed at a higher rate than if we left them in regular instruction lines.

Bottom line is that we think about this A LOT and whenever we have to consider positions, we work to make sure that these positions are gaining the maximum dollars allotted by EPS. This is why a position such as Rhonda Warren's position in my office is so important. She is the one that reports all staffing to MDOE through NEO and makes sure that how they are reported provides the highest possible reimbursement rates from the state.

2. **Question:** How are staffing positions reimbursed by the State of Maine through state subsidy?

**Answer:** Staff positions that are within the defined EPS staffing ratios are funded using the following matrix. This matrix is based on 3 year state average costs for the staff listed. Please note that if a position is outside of an approved EPS position (for example: Social Workers are not considered "essential") then these positions are not calculated for reimbursement via the EPS funding formula and are therefore NOT part of this matrix. This rule also applies for staffing that may be above the approved ratios found within EPS (for example: EPS only funds classroom teachers, allied arts teachers are not funded).

**SALARY MATRIX for Teachers, Guidance/Social Workers, and Librarians**

Years of Experience	Education Category				
	BA only	BA+15 BA+30	MA or MA+15	MA+30 or CAS	Doctorate
<1	1.00	1.07	1.16	1.28	1.28
1-5	1.05	1.12	1.21	1.33	1.33
6-10	1.17	1.25	1.33	1.45	1.45
11-15	1.34	1.42	1.50	1.62	1.62
16-20	1.49	1.57	1.65	1.77	1.77
21-25	1.61	1.69	1.77	1.89	1.89
26-30	1.67	1.75	1.83	1.95	1.95
31+	1.71	1.78	1.87	1.99	1.99

CLASSROOM TEACHER  
LITERACY SPECIALIST  
LONG TERM SUBSTITUTE TEACHER  
TITLE I TEACHER  
ENGLISH LEARNER TEACHER  
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER  
DIRECTOR OF GUIDANCE  
GUIDANCE COUNSELOR  
LIBRARIAN/MEDIA SPECIALIST

Years of Experience	Education Category				
	BA only	BA+15 BA+30	MA or MA+15	MA+30 or CAS	Doctorate
<1	40,000	42,800	46,400	51,200	51,200
1-5	42,000	44,800	48,400	53,200	53,200
6-10	46,800	50,000	53,200	58,000	58,000
11-15	53,600	56,800	60,000	64,800	64,800
16-20	59,600	62,800	66,000	70,800	70,800
21-25	64,400	67,600	70,800	75,600	75,600
26-30	66,800	70,000	73,200	78,000	78,000
31+	68,400	71,200	74,800	79,600	79,600

### SALARY MATRIX for Education Technicians and Library Technicians/Media Assistants

Years of Experience	Tech I	Tech II	Tech III	Media Tech I	Media Tech II	Media Tech III
<1	0.83	1.00	1.16	0.83	1.00	1.16
1-5	0.98	1.15	1.31	0.98	1.15	1.31
6-10	1.12	1.29	1.44	1.12	1.29	1.44
11-15	1.21	1.37	1.53	1.21	1.37	1.53
16+	1.25	1.41	1.57	1.25	1.41	1.57

ED TECH I  
ED TECH II  
ED TECH III  
ED TECH I - LIBRARY/MEDIA  
ED TECH II - LIBRARY/MEDIA  
ED TECH III - LIBRARY/MEDIA

Base Salary for Matrix

Education Technician II with zero experience

Years of Experience	Tech I	Tech II	Tech III	Media Tech I	Media Tech II	Media Tech III
<1	15,777	19,008	22,049	15,777	19,008	22,049
1-5	18,628	21,859	24,900	18,628	21,859	24,900
6-10	21,289	24,520	27,372	21,289	24,520	27,372
11-15	23,000	26,041	29,082	23,000	26,041	29,082
16+	23,760	26,801	29,843	23,760	26,801	29,843

### SALARY MATRIX for School Administrators

State-wide Average Salary 94,448

PRINCIPAL  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL  
TEACHING PRINCIPAL

Actual FTEs:

	School Enrollment	School Enrollment							
		1 to 124	125 to 174	175 to 249	250 to 349	350 to 499	500 to 699	700 to 999	1000+
1. A. Principals	Ratio:	.88	.92	.96	1.01	1.05	1.11	1.18	1.24
	FTE	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Salary	83,114	86,892	90,670	95,392	99,170	104,837	111,449	117,116
1. B. Asst. Principals	Ratio:	.70	.73	.78	.83	.87	.93	.99	1.06
	FTE	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Salary	66,114	68,947	73,669	78,392	82,170	87,837	93,504	100,115

### SALARY MATRIX for Clerical staff

Years of Experience	Secretaries Salary Factor	Secretaries Salary
<1	1.00	30,241
1-5	1.08	32,660
6-10	1.18	35,684
11-15	1.27	38,406
16+	1.30	39,313

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/SECRETARY  
School Level Administrative Asst./Secretaries only

Secretaries	Years of Experience				
	<1	1-5	6-10	11-15	16+
FTE	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Salary	30,241	32,660	35,684	38,406	39,313

### SALARY MATRIX for Health staff

State-wide Average Salary 58,302

Years of Experience	Health Salary Factor	Health Salary
<1	0.85	49,557
1-5	0.93	54,221
6-10	0.94	54,804
11-15	1.06	61,800
16+	1.11	64,715

NURSE

Health	Years of Experience				
	<1	1-5	6-10	11-15	16+
FTE	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Salary	49,557	54,221	54,804	61,800	64,715

3. **Question:** What are some of the key requirements (Federal and state statutes) of schools today that perhaps older community members may not understand and how do these requirements translate into increased costs for the school?

**Answer:** The required roles of public schools has increased tremendously over the past 20-30 years with our nation's public schools being asked to do more and more each year to support our communities. What I am listing below are FIVE of the largest and most expensive state and federal mandates associated with public school programming that are likely very different than what older citizens in our community may have experienced

- Special Education (Governed by FAPE - at Federal Level)
- Multi Lingual Learners (Governed by Lau Plans - at Federal Level)
- Homeless Students (Governed by McKinney Vento - at Federal Level)
- 504/Medical Needs of students (to include mental health - Governed by Disability Law at Federal Level)
- School Safety (Gun Free Schools Act at Fed. Level, State Statute, Title 20-A)

Let's learn a little more about each and share some data that might assist in understanding requirements for these items and how they contribute to increasing costs...

Special Education - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first introduced in 1975 and has expanded significantly since then. This law requires public schools to provide free and appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities. Additionally, the IDEA mandates that education for students with disabilities take place in the least restrictive environment. This law has expanded tremendously in the last 20 years while funding has not kept pace. Schools have to invest in additional staff, training, resources, and infrastructure to provide these mandated services to an increasing population. Assistive technologies, speech therapy, physical therapy, psychological services, and transportation costs have all soared. Both costs and total numbers of students being served has increased significantly. For example, at the national level, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in 2000-2001 about 13.8% of all public school students received special education services under IDEA. In the 2019-2020 school year that number increased to 15.2% of all public school students. In raw numbers during that same time period, about 6.7 million public school students received special education services. By 2019-20 that number had risen to 7.3 million students. An increase of about 600,000 students over those 20 years.

In Gorham, these trends are similar. Our special ed. Population has increased by 83 students over the past 5 years, increasing in percentage of total population from just over 12% to now just under 16%. Our populations are still far lower than the state averages. During this same time period, our costs for special education have risen by over 38%. Our autism population has more than doubled.

Multi-Lingual Learners - The two main federal laws that govern multilingual services in public education are:

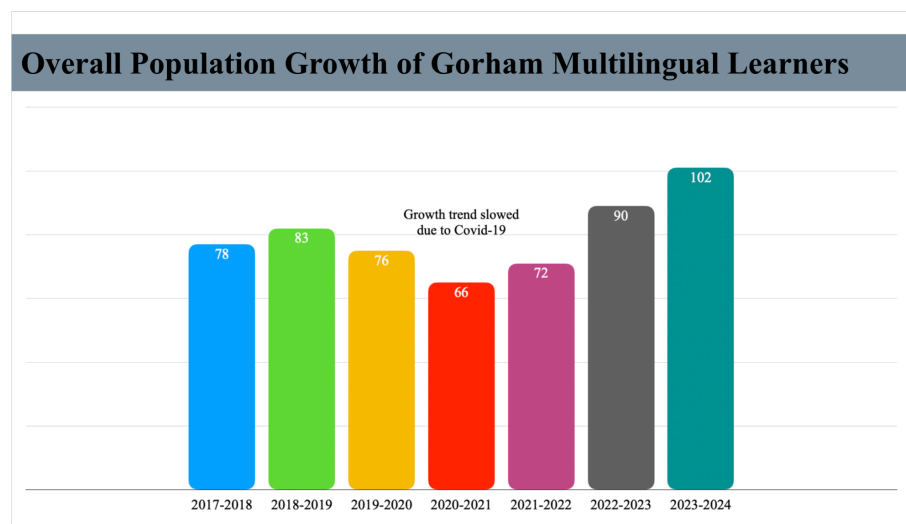
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. This law requires schools to provide adequate language assistance services so that multilingual students can meaningfully participate in education programs.
- Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 which requires public schools to “take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.”

These two laws, coupled with the results of the landmark Supreme Court case of 1974 *Lau vs. Nichols* make it clear that public schools have an obligation to provide programming such as English as a Second Language instruction, multilingual parent outreach and translation services. Failure to adequately support multilingual students is considered a denial of equal educational opportunity and violation of civil rights.

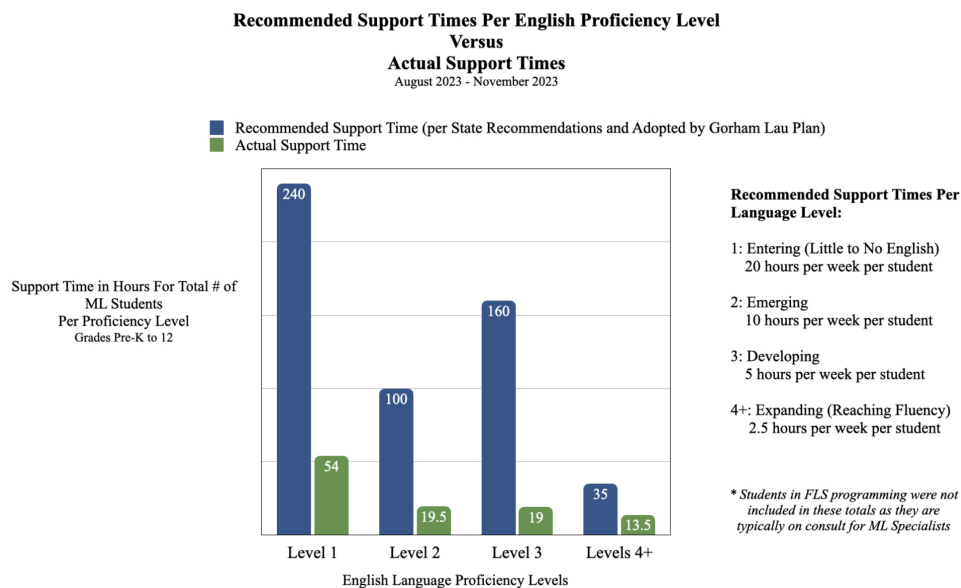
Over the past 20 years, public schools across the country have seen a major increase in their Multilingual learner (ML) student populations resulting in substantially higher costs. Schools must hire ML teachers and translate documents into student’s home languages. School must develop specialized curricula and assessments and provide interpretation services to families.

On 2000-2001 NCES reports that the total ML population in the US was 3.8 million students, making up about 8.1% of total enrollments. In 2019-20 that number had grown to 5 million making up 10.2% of total enrollments. That is an increase of over 1.2 million ML students across the country.

In Gorham, over the past 5 years we have seen an overall increase in our ML population going from a total of 76 ML students across grades K-12 to now an overall total of 102 ML students.



While this total increase is not hugely significant in overall numbers, what is important to note is the TYPE of ML students and families we are now working with vs. what we have experienced in the past. In the past, Gorham's ML students and families have been families who have been in the US for a while. In the ML world, the level of language acquisition need for students is measured according to levels 1-5. Level 5 students can speak and write english and just need a little monitoring for services. Levels 1&2 often have very little english background at all and require much higher levels of service. The growth we have seen in Gorham has been in these levels 1&2 ML students. So while we have grown just a little in overall population - the need for levels of service has significantly increased. With our 3 total ML staff...we are not meeting required service times as can be seen in the chart below (blue is required by our Lau plan, green is what we can deliver with current staffing).



Homeless Students - The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1987 and re-authorized in 2015. This law requires schools to provide transportation, free meals, and other services to homeless youth. Schools must also work to quickly remove barriers to homeless students enrollments with the goal of reducing transitions from school to school for homeless youth. The laws require that homeless youth (whenever possible) remain enrolled in their school even if they move outside of residency lines.

What does this mean? For example - we have homeless students enrolled in the Gorham Schools that may actually (at least for now) live temporarily in places like Lewiston or Poland or perhaps Biddeford and it is our responsibility to transport students from these locations to our schools to attend. We do this either by sending vans, or perhaps working with the resident districts to split costs so that the resident district transports to a specific location where we can then pick up, or perhaps we pay families directly to transport their child. We've even gone so far as to utilize taxis or uber

services when needed. As you can imagine, this can become a costly endeavor, especially as numbers of homeless youth increase across the country and here in Maine.

Estimates show that between 2015-16 and 2018-19 the overall homeless population in the US grew by 15% from 1.3 million to 1.38 million. In Gorham our homeless population can vary significantly but it too has grown from as few as 6 homeless students in 2015-16 to as many as 12 homeless students today.

504/Medical Needs of Students: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is separate from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, Section 504 works together with IDEA to protect students with disabilities in school settings. Section 504 ensures that student's civil rights are protected in regards to their medical needs. 504 wasn't really "a thing" in public schools until about 20 years ago - but generally it prevents discrimination based on specific medical conditions like diabetes, for example. Students with 504 plans often have specific health needs that are outlined in their plans that schools are required to provide services for in order to make sure students are able to access their public education. For example, our schools are often required to provide monitoring of student glucose levels throughout the day to prevent student blood sugars from getting too high or too low and requiring them to leave school for medical care. We literally have students with blood sugar monitors feeding their data directly into our school nurses who monitor these student's needs throughout the day. The numbers of students with diabetes in our schools (as just one example of medical needs) has increased significantly over the past several years. Across the US the number of diabetic youth has increased from 200,000 in 2002 to 244,000 in 2019.

Gorham's numbers have increased similarly. In 2018-2019 we had a total of 132 students receiving 504 services (not all medical, but a large percentage are). So far in this school year we have a total of 160 students receiving 504 services. That is an increase of 28 students or 21%. Again, this is just total numbers - this does not address the also increasing level of service need for these qualifying students.

In addition to our increase in student medical needs (like diabetic students), we have also seen a significant increase in medical needs of students ranging from things like severe food allergies to the provision of feeding tubes for students in highly specialized classrooms and most things in between. If folks think of our nurses clinics and think all they are doing is handing out bandaids and tylenol - well - that is not what public school nursing clinics look like anymore. Yeah, they still have the bandaids but they are required to do far more than ever!

Tack on requirements for schools to monitor new vaccination status requirements for students, and requirements to conduct vision and hearing screenings along with spinal screenings along with the need for nurses to monitor for student and staff illness to report potential outbreaks of disease, and I hope you can get a sense of how our



responsibilities and costs have increased over time in this area. And none of this includes another large area of increasing needs with our students over the past several years in the area of mental health.

Since 2018 we have seen a 2% increase (from 5-7%) in the numbers of students qualifying for special education services due to emotional disabilities. We have also seen a significant increase in service times for our social workers and guidance counselors across all schools during this same time period.

**School Safety** - Our schools must focus on safety far more than they did 20+ years ago. It was the early 90's when Columbine occurred and since then the trajectory for increasing needs in schools for safety has continued to rise at a significant pace. Currently we have to plan for just about every possible contingency in our schools. We have had to invest significant funds in making sure our schools are safe by closing all exterior doors, implementing video surveillance and buzzer systems to make sure individuals can't just walk into our schools while students are present. We have had to invest significant dollars in cameras and security features. Our district's schools now have well over 250 cameras in our 5 schools and another 100 in our school buses. All these systems must be monitored and kept up to date with software, which costs money. We also have invested in needed communications systems such as our Lynx system that allows us to more effectively communicate with one another and first responders in any emergency situation. Finally, we have had to invest significant time and money in training and support services. We have trained all staff in ALICE protocols and have developed a way to onboard any new staff in this training. We have also increased our SRO presence in schools from 2 when I first came in 2015 to 3 officers now.

We have also had to invest in training systems for how to assess the levels of threats that may be out there. We have trained teams at each school that work closely with district administration and local first responders to assess levels of threat for various instances and then make recommendations for appropriate responses.

These are all things that schools 30 years ago did not have to be concerned about. Today, these are very real concerns in our schools and ones we must appropriately plan for in order to ensure the safety of our students and staff at all times in our schools.

Since I have been here in 2015 the Gorham Schools has had to deal directly with the following threats:

- Bomb Threats
- Threats to bring guns into schools
- We have had 2 circumstances of guns actually being brought into school (one was a very real looking pellet gun).
- Threats of active shooters in the community

Social media has magnified these concerns and we are dealing with far more threats to



our student's safety than we have ever had to in the past. We continue to focus on making sure safety is our top priority - but there are costs involved that certainly weren't there 30 years ago.

I realize this was a long response...but I hope that this points out what I know to be the truth...over the past 20 years more and more has been asked of our public schools that are not directly related to Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic...whether this is "good" or "bad" is not mine to say - however - these increased responsibilities in meeting the needs of our students and families come at an increased cost. I like to share this poster with folks as an example of what I am referring to here...but please realize this poster only goes to 2000...since then - the trendline you see in dark blue has continued to increase. Without addressing this issue - it will be hard to address how we could reduce overall costs to operate public schools.



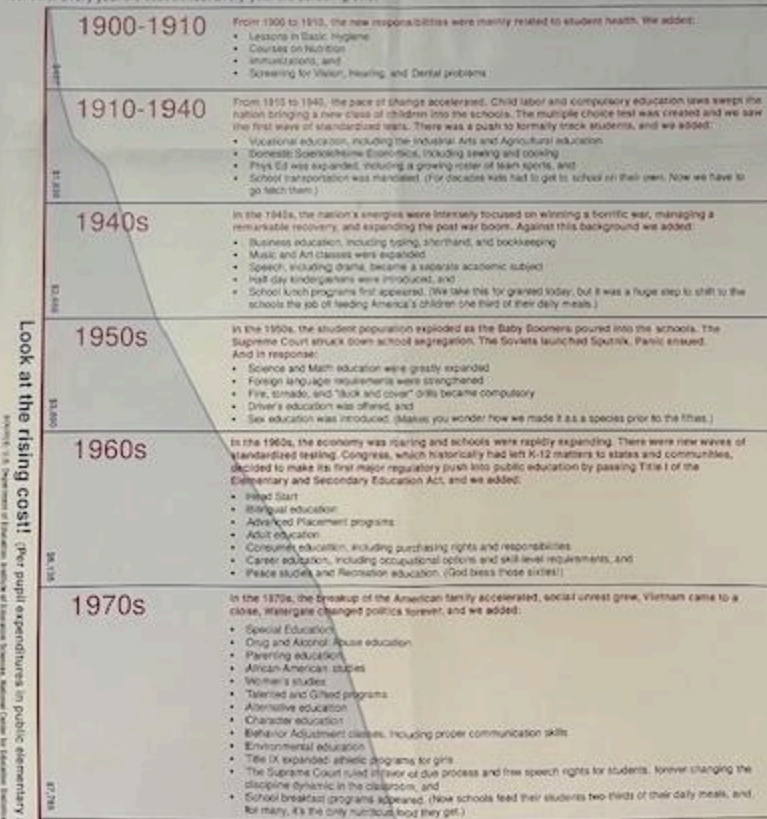
# Look What We're Doing to Our Schools

(Vollmer's List)

This is a story about America and America's public schools. Specifically, it's a story about how we, as a society, have changed what we ask our schools to do **and** how much these changes have cost. Read vertically, the story answers the question, "Why don't these schools just teach the basics?" Viewed horizontally, the story answers the question, "Where does all the money go?" Once upon a time the mandate was simple: Help us teach our children. Not any more.

America's first schools appeared in the early 1640s. They were designed to teach young people — originally white boys — basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, while cultivating those values that served the emerging American democracy. During the 1700s, some civics, history, science, and geography were added, but the curriculum remained focused for 150 years. The founders of these schools assumed that families and churches bore the major responsibility for raising a child.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, waves of immigration and changed attitudes toward educating girls and minorities brought many more children into the classroom. America's leaders saw public schools as the logical place to sort and socialize these young people according to the needs of the industrial age. It was at this time, that we began to shift non-academic duties to the schools. The trend has accelerated ever since. Every year we add to the mountain of social, medical, and psychological responsibilities that we have dumped upon our schools. Every year the cost climbs. Every year the burden grows.



<p>for many, it's the only nutritious food they get.)</p> <p>1980s</p> <p>In the 1980s, the floodgates blew open as global competition began to change the U.S. economy forcing millions of women to leave home and enter the workforce. This dramatically altered a home-school partnership that existed for centuries. There was a huge new wave of standardized testing. A daunting tech revolution changed the workplace and introduced new technologies into the classroom, and we added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keyboarding and Computer education</li> <li>• Sexual Abuse Prevention education</li> <li>• Stranger/danger education</li> <li>• Antismoking education</li> <li>• Abstinence education</li> <li>• Teen Pregnancy Awareness programs</li> <li>• Teen Parenting programs</li> <li>• Global education</li> <li>• English as a Second Language instruction</li> <li>• Multicultural education</li> <li>• Nonsexist education</li> <li>• Hispanic Heritage education</li> <li>• International Baccalaureate programs</li> <li>• Jump Start, Early Start, Even Start, Prime Start</li> <li>• Full-day Kindergarten</li> <li>• Preschool programs for children at risk</li> <li>• After-school programs for children of working parents</li> <li>• Expanded Health and Psychological services, and</li> <li>• Child abuse monitoring became a legal requirement for all teachers.</li> </ul>	<p>1990s</p> <p>In the 1990s, public schools found themselves caught in the emotional crossfire of a growing culture war. The school reform movement shifted into high gear and collided with the spread of technology. The World Wide Web was born. Generation X was replaced by Generation Y. Educators found themselves under tremendous pressure to change, and we added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer Labs and Internet instruction</li> <li>• Tech Prep</li> <li>• School To Work programs</li> <li>• Distance learning</li> <li>• Homeless education and its effects on children</li> <li>• HIV/AIDS education</li> <li>• Death education</li> <li>• America 2000 initiatives</li> <li>• Goals 2000 initiatives</li> <li>• Bicycle Safety, Gun Safety, and Water Safety instruction</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution classes</li> <li>• Service Learning programs</li> <li>• Asian-American studies</li> <li>• Annual CPR training</li> <li>• Technical Adequacy Assessment</li> <li>• Dropout Prevention programs</li> <li>• Anti-Gang initiatives</li> <li>• Inclusion and Mainstreaming requirements, and</li> <li>• The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act greatly expanded the scope of Special Education.</li> </ul>
<p>2000s</p> <p>Which brings us to the first decades of the twenty-first century, where educators, politicians, business leaders, and bureaucrats, driven to respond to the pressures presented by (1) a rapidly changing, increasingly complex society, (2) a challenging knowledge-based economy, and (3) an increasingly literate global workforce, have added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Child Left Behind</li> <li>• Bullying Prevention programs</li> <li>• Elevator and Escalator Safety instruction</li> <li>• Body Mass Index evaluation (Obesity Monitoring)</li> <li>• Eating Disorder counseling</li> <li>• Suicide Awareness programs</li> <li>• Sexual Abuse Prevention programs</li> <li>• Media Literacy training</li> <li>• Expanded Early Childhood Writ Around programs</li> <li>• Financial Literacy development</li> <li>• Intruder Lockdown training</li> <li>• Health and Wellness programs</li> <li>• External offender training</li> <li>• Leadership training</li> <li>• Contextual learning development</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial skill development</li> <li>• Credit renewal programs</li> <li>• Military education</li> <li>• Data-based decision making</li> <li>• Accelerated graduation requirements</li> <li>• On-line learning requirements</li> <li>• Race To The Top</li> <li>• The Common Core</li> <li>• S.T.E.M. programs</li> <li>• Allergic reaction monitoring</li> <li>• Critical Incident training (terror, chemical, natural disaster, active shooter)</li> <li>• Summer breakfast and lunch programs</li> <li>• Weekend backpack programs (Food for thought)</li> <li>• Anti-harassment programs (gender, race, religion, national origin)</li> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Internet safety</li> <li>• Date rape</li> <li>• Organ donor awareness</li> <li>• Texting and Social Media Etiquette</li> <li>• The Abandoned Newborn Protection Act</li> <li>• Child trafficking</li> <li>• Domestic violence</li> <li>• Job interview preparation</li> <li>• Marijuana safety (second hand smoke)</li> <li>• Cyber bullying</li> <li>• Capital education</li> <li>• Extended sibling protection, and</li> </ul>	

P.S. this poster is hanging in my office - feel free to stop by and see it anytime. You can learn more about the "Blueberry Story" as well (which is where this comes from) by [CLICKING HERE](#).

4. **Question:** If our budgets are higher and higher, how is it that our administrators and staff feel like they have less and less resources?

**Answer:** Because in essence - they do. This gets back to the previous question. It is easy to feel like you don't have the appropriate tools and resources to deal with the needs when the needs continue to increase and the funding provided to support meeting those needs does not increase at the same rate that the needs increase at.

I would also add that the work we have done over the past several years to BEGIN to address our facilities needs has also not helped. It seems that even though the Town Council and others agree that we need to do more to meet these needs, when we do get a referendum passed and when we have to increase our expenditure budgets to pay for these needed bonds, folks are somehow thinking that we should be able to reduce our programming services to students in a corresponding fashion to keep overall costs down. This creates a very dangerous spiral - one in which our schools are almost being “punished” for working to meet our facilities needs by having to take programming away from students at a time when their needs are also increasing significantly.

**5. Question: How do we continue to invest in meeting facilities needs?**

**Answer:** There is no question that we need to continue to focus on meeting these ever growing needs. The best way to do this is to treat these needs separately from our daily operational and programming needs for students. What would be most beneficial would be the creation of a Capital reserve fund that \$ could be placed into each year by both the School and the Town that would offset costs for bonds and other capital expenditures moving forward so that addressing these needs DOES NOT take away from meeting our daily operational and programming needs for children.

A separate fund was created by the School Committee three years ago, but since that time we have been unable to put funding towards this fund as we have been scraping by just to meet our operational and programming needs.

Looking at ways to set aside funds in this account as a whole community (not just the schools) would be an excellent way to move forward.

Follow our Ten year Capital needs plan & actually fund needed projects!

**6. Question: What adjustments are the schools making to position ourselves for short term, mid term, and long term success?**

I am going to answer this question in TWO ways. One focused on programmatic success. This is success based upon STUDENT SUCCESS. In other words - what is the purpose of our schools and how do we measure that success?

The second response will be more geared towards financial success, which I am assuming is where this question really comes from.

**Programmatic Success:** The best way to understand what we believe to be our overall “purpose” and how we measure that success is to look at three core documents for the School Department. Our Mission/Vision, Our Strategic Plan, and our Metrics For Success. Each are linked below:

- [Gorham Schools Mission/Vision and Core Beliefs About Learning](#)
- [Gorham Schools Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)
- [Gorham Schools Metrics For Success](#)

Each year we measure our success using the annual State of the Schools Report delivered to the Gorham School Committee in June/July of each year. I've linked in the previous 3 years State of the Schools Reports for reference below.

- [2020-2021 State of Schools Report](#)
- [2021-2022 State of Schools Report](#)
- [2022-2023 State of Schools Report](#)

For the cliff notes version of our focus points for programmatic success - here are the top few each each category for short, mid and long term...but please know the details in the documents linked above are what really provide our continued short, mid, and long term focus areas...

Short Term Programmatic Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to maintain smaller class sizes at Pre K - Gr. 2 levels.</li> <li>• Strengthen RTI &amp; 504 Programs in order to reduce #'s going into special education programs.</li> <li>• Embed authentic learning opportunities across Pre K- 12 curriculum (Aspire Gorham)</li> <li>• Emphasize Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Continue to strengthen training in implementation of new math curriculum.</li> </ul>
Mid Term Programmatic Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Universal Pre K program (public &amp; private partnerships) &amp; Strengthen Early Childhood Community partnerships in order to strengthen early childhood success.</li> <li>• Increase internships, apprenticeships, Co-ops, CTE attendance, ELO's and other types of authentic learning experiences in the "real world" for all students, with specific emphasis on "Exposure" at Grade Pk-5, "Exploration" at grades 6-10, and "Experience" at grades 11 &amp; 12.</li> <li>• Continue to build community partnerships for this purpose.</li> <li>• Emphasize Code of Conduct</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen training in literacy instruction.</li> </ul>
Long Term Programmatic Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to increase community partnerships &amp; programs to ensure that students at grades 11 &amp; 12 are able to have “one foot” in our schools and “one foot” OUTSIDE of our schools participating in meaningful learning experiences connected to their Future Stories.</li> <li>• Emphasize Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Strengthen technology systems &amp; training in areas related to A.I.</li> <li>• Ensuring equity of access to all curriculum.</li> </ul>

Financial Success: Here our overall focus is on maintaining high quality staff, without which we know ALL of our programming for students would suffer and we would be unable to meet our programmatic goals. In addition to this focus, we are will continue to work to strengthen support programming that may cost more in the short term, but save dollars in long term (i.e. Pre K, RTI, Multilingual, etc.). We also need to continue to focus on addressing our facilities needs and over the long term seek to find additional revenues to help offset increasing costs for services.

Cliff Notes version is below:

Short Term Financial Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing facilities needs.</li> <li>• Begin adding additional revenue streams such as Pre K programming, CDS billing services, state agency revenues, and tuition revenues.</li> <li>• Strengthen collaborations with neighboring districts via GSEA to reduce overall costs in areas that are possible.</li> <li>• Begin to strengthen existing, and build new pipelines for educators to enter our system.</li> <li>• Hire HR Director to strengthen recruitment and retention programs across all staff.</li> <li>• Work with Town of Gorham to develop long term fiscal sustainability plan for entire community.</li> </ul>
Mid Term Financial Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing facilities needs. Position</li> </ul>



	<p>ourselves for at least 1 state approved capital construction project (either Pre K - 5 school or HS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move to Maine Care Billing to add an additional revenue stream</li> <li>• Strengthen shared programming via GSEA.</li> <li>• Position ourselves as the “Best Place to Work in Maine”.</li> <li>• Work with HR director to strengthen ongoing PD and training systems.</li> <li>• Work to remain competitive with neighboring markets.</li> <li>• Continue pipeline development</li> </ul>
Long Term Financial Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing facilities needs. Consider 2nd capital construction project - state funded? Local?</li> <li>• Strong partnerships with GSEA in areas such as special education, Pre K programming, Professional Development consortia, Transportation, shared staffing, etc.</li> </ul>

7. **Question:** What are some small, medium and large scale improvements we can make to decrease costs?

**Answer:** 80% of our budget is in staffing. All data from comparisons to surrounding school systems and state level data indicates that we are NOT overstaffed and in fact already do “more with less” than our neighboring school districts. We are the 2nd lowest in all of Cumberland County in per pupil costs. Additionally, as noted in the EPS funding formula statement above, we are getting the highest state funding available to us compared to our surrounding districts - in essence, we are doing the best with the folks we have and working at the maximum level of efficiency possible, based on the state funding model. I do not believe there is a lot of “fat” to trim...however, that doesn’t mean we can’t constantly strive to do better and to think more creatively. I think the chart above outlines many of the ideas we have to increase revenue streams and to prevent significant increased costs in areas like staffing due to transitions. But to directly answer your question - here’s some of the things we are thinking about in each category for reducing costs.

Small Things To Reduce Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain existing partnerships with Town of Gorham.</li> <li>• Create capital reserve account &amp; ask town to assist in funding</li> </ul>
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	<p>annually.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on health and wellness of staff to reduce costs in health insurance.</li> <li>• Streamline CO processes for purchasing and payment of items and personnel via new MUNIS implementation.</li> </ul>
Medium Things to Reduce Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to maintain existing HQ staff to avoid onboarding, training and other transition costs for new staff.</li> <li>• Continue focus on solar projects to reduce energy costs and increase revenues.</li> <li>• Seek to do more bids for services with Town of Gorham (i.e. photocopiers or fuel purchases, etc.)</li> </ul>
Large Things to Reduce Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase partnerships with GSEA schools to do more joint purchasing and more joint programming together. Things like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Special Education services</li> <li>- Alternative Education Services</li> <li>- Transportation Services</li> <li>- Business office Services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consolidate buildings via capital construction project. I.e. combine Narr. and Village Schools into one.</li> </ul>

8. **Question:** If we don't get an approved capital project from the state - then what?

**Answer:** Then we will need to keep “limping” along with our temporary “band-aid” fixes with modular expansion as the primary means of addressing increasing space needs at the Pk-5 and high school levels.

9. **Question:** Are there ways we can better support CIPS projects as a town?

**Answer:** Yes, I think that if we find a way to jointly fund on an annual basis monies for our capital reserve account, these could then be used to offset costs for CIPS projects. I also think that if the town made a commitment to increase our CIPS budget in our local school budget in one year to \$1 Million and we made a commitment to hold that funding steady each year moving forward that would be a huge help!

Minimally - it would be great if the Town DID NOT treat the CIPS budget as something that is part of the overall increase in expenditure budgets. In other words - when looking at our annual budget and its impact - remove the CIPS funding from that calculation and make sure it is treated separately from daily operations and programming expenses.

Overall, we have to find a way to remove these needed funds from our annual conversations about budget increases in operations and programming. If we constantly “pit” these needs against the needs of programming for children...programming for children will always win and CIPS funding will continue to be set aside.

**10. Question: What do you see as the big ticket items (cost wise) coming in our future that we need to be aware of?**

**Answer:** Several things come to mind - these are in no particular order...

- Legislative Costs - Every year for the past 10 years now, it seems we have had significant legislation pass through Augusta that is costing us more and more money. Recent Earned Paid Leave Laws and FMLA laws are just two examples that come to mind that have had and will continue to have significant impacts on our costs. Other examples are Dangerous Student laws, Special Education laws like recent ones focused on restraint and seclusion, or Title IX laws and Civil Rights laws passed at Federal and state levels that add significant administrative burdens to our schools that all cost time and money. I joke each year - but I’m actually kinda serious - I think the best thing we could do as a country (federal, state and local levels) is that if we want to pass a new law - we have to identify 2 to come off the books!
- General costs for staffing - as pipelines get weaker and weaker to bring quality staff into the education profession, costs will continue to soar to BOTH keep the individuals we need to keep AND to pay for the transition costs associated with people coming into and then leaving our systems. Whether it is the need to increase salaries to remain competitive in the regional markets or whether it is the costs associated with hiring, onboarding and training of new staff. These costs are going to do nothing but go up.
- Facilities needs - we’ve talked about this A LOT - so no news to anyone (I hope). In the next 20 years we will need TWO capital building projects. One will be a new Pre K - 5 School and another will be a new High School. We have positioned ourselves as well as we can for future state funding...but I suspect the likelihood is high that only one of these two will be funded via the state. We also have our “regular” building needs in maintaining the five buildings we currently have and keeping them operational. Our ten year capital plan includes almost \$50 million in project costs - Which are IN ADDITION TO new building costs.
- Support Programming Costs - Multilingual learners, Gifted and Talented, RTI, Special Education, 504, Nursing, Social Workers & Counselors... Our student

needs in these areas continues to increase at a significant rate and I do not see this slowing down anytime soon.

- Transportation - During the pandemic we used a great deal of our federal funds to purchase buses and vans. This was good - but this means that we will have a bloated list of replacement needs in the next 10 years that will likely exceed our typical 2 bus per year replacement schedule.
- Technology - Similar to transportation, we used a significant amount of our federal funds during the pandemic to upgrade our existing technology infrastructure and student devices. These will need to be replaced eventually...so we will have some spikes in this area of costs coming shortly as well.
- Increasing property values - Our community's property values continue to increase at a rate that exceeds the state average. When this happens, state subsidy dollars used to fund public education begin to flow away from us and towards community's whose values are not increasing at these high rates. Right now, we've been able to offset these impacts via being smart as a school system on how we identify staff to maximize the formula, or by increasing Pre K populations, or by applying for and receiving approval to offset modular costs - but this creativity is running out. The Town has also been creative in its use of TIF's to help "shelter" some of our growth - but at what point does that cause diminishing returns?

**11. Question: How do investments in things like RTI programs help reduce costs down the road?**

Answer: The goal of RTI is to provide strong classroom based supports (Tier I and Tier II) supports to students who may need a little extra boost to make sure that only students who have actual disabilities are being referred to and accepted into our special education programs. Our RTI programs make sure that we spend the appropriate amount of time and classroom resources working with students who may be struggling to support them so that they do not enter our special education programs. The way this reduces costs is pretty easy to explain.

Our RTI students are "regular education" students. Our cost for these students for 2022-23 was just a hair over \$17,000.00 per student last year, while our per pupil costs for special education students was \$18,150.00. This is a \$1,150.00 increase PER PUPIL in costs. Multiply this times the number of special education students and then understand that this increased costs remains in place each year for the career of the student...well - that explains why an investment in RTI actually can reduce long term costs by preventing students from having to enter into special education programs for extended periods of time at a much greater cost.

Generally speaking, RTI programs are small interventions for short bursts of time that allow a student to get right back on track in the regular classroom and prevent us from

having to spend larger amounts of money to support students in bigger ways for longer periods of time.

**12. Question: How do you review each and every budget request to make sure requests are needed and are in alignment with our mission/vision and strategic plan.**

**Answer:** This all takes place behind the scenes before an initial proposed budget is even introduced to the School Committee in February. The process begins each year in October/November when I meet with the District Leadership team to review our budget development process and I share with them their excel budget templates that they must use to deliver their proposed school and program budgets to the Central Office in Mid-December of each year. During this initial meeting we also talk about initial budget priorities and we remind everyone about the fact that we utilize a “needs based” or “zero-based” budgeting approach. In other words, we do not base the coming year’s requests on the previous year’s. Instead we start from zero on each line and build up together from there. It is expected that building principals and admin. Assistants inventory existing supplies and equipment and have a solid understanding of needs each year.

Building/Program directors then work with their school/program staff to develop their individual budgets. At the Pre K-5 level, each school’s leadership team and grade level teams are highly involved as is our K-8 instructional leader as there are LOTS of consumables required at these grade levels. At the Grade 6-8 level, individual teams and grade level staff are highly involved and at the Grade 9-12 level, individual department leaders are responsible to work with their departments to create their proposed budgets and turn those into the building Principal. Building principals and program directors are expected to meet with grade levels, teams, department heads, etc. to review all requests prior to submitting their proposed budgets to Central Office.

Once I get all budget requests, I then meet individually with each principal and program director to review their budgets line by line. Typically, we discuss needs, and “flag” any big increases or decreases and discuss those in depth. We review specific items requested and if there are large “asks” I am asking how that is linked to their comprehensive school plan (which is based on the mission/vision and strategic plan for the district) and if a solid answer isn’t given, the item is reduced. Our principals/program directors do an excellent job of making sure that by the time their budgets get to me - they are very solid in their requests and reasons for them. These individual meetings are held with me, Hollis Cobb, and the assistant superintendent so that we can each bring our particular questions to the attention of the principals/program directors and make sure there is calibration between schools and programs.

You can [CLICK HERE](#) for a list of the budget meetings we are going through right now. They each typically take 1.5 hours, sometimes more.

Once these have each been reviewed, Principals and program directors input their proposed budgets into Munis, and then we can see the full request as a district to understand implications. Once we have this, we meet as a full District Leadership team to talk about +/- and things that need to be changed to be in alignment with our budget priorities, our budget target, and our mission/vision and strategic plan. Keeping in mind that all these conversations have already occurred individually and these meetings are meant to continue to “tighten up”. This information is then used to develop the first initial superintendent’s proposed budget that is delivered to the School Committee in early February. Then they take it from there over 4-5 more budget meetings until they approve of a proposed budget in April. That is then taken to the Town Council for approval and then on to voters for referendum approval.

It is a VERY STRINGENT PROCESS that begins in October of each year and goes through June (and sometimes August as could be seen last year).

**13. Question: What is the vision for our schools and what are we doing short and mid term to get there?**

**Answer:** I think the best documents to look at here are our Mission/Vision and Strategic Plan. Those are linked below...

- [Gorham Schools Mission/Vision & Core Beliefs Document](#)
- [Gorham Schools Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)
- [Strategic Plan Dec. 2023 SC Update](#)

**14. Question: Are there ways we can better communicate between the TC and SC?**

**Answer:** Yes, there are definitely ways we can communicate better between TC and SC. Ultimately, though I think it is important for both groups to understand that unless the TC wants to sit in on all the SC meetings and unless the SC wants to sit in on all the TC meetings (in other words - do two jobs)...it is important to trust that each group truly works hard and understands best the needs of the groups they are elected to represent. The last thing we want is for SC members to think they are “experts” about maintaining roads or the TC to think they are experts in Special Education.

With that said, here are some ideas for how to strengthen our communications:

- Continue monthly meetings of TC and SC chairs.
- Continue monthly reporting of SC chair to TC at their regular monthly meeting.
- Share SC report to TC each month with public via blog posts.
- Set up opportunities for TC & SC members to visit school programs and municipal programs (we have already done this for school programs - would love to see this for municipal programs like PD, FD, Public Works, and Rec).

- Request that Town Manager and Superintendent meet regularly (right now we meet on an as needed basis - which is ok to react to things - but probably not conducive to proactive communications).
- Increase willingness to hold joint meetings as needed throughout the year and not just when budget comes up.
- Ensure each year's audit is reviewed jointly at the same time by Town and School Finance Committee members with auditors.

I am sure there are other great ideas out there - please know SC and I are "all ears" and would love to brainstorm more ways to strengthen our already strong communications.

**15. Question: In what ways do we look for best practices in other school districts to be as cost effective as possible?**

**Answer:** Well first and foremost I think it is important for folks to know that we take pride in the fact that we do not "jump from one shiny thing to another" as can be the case for some school systems. As a public entity highly regulated at the federal and state levels, and where everyone is an "expert" because they once attended schools - there are LOTS of ideas out there about how to operate schools appropriately. And these ideas can shift and change as quickly as Maine's weather! We take a more strategic and structured approach to how we do things here in Gorham. We pay very close attention to our mission/vision and strategic plan and we work to make sure each of our school's CEP plans are aligned to that mission/vision and strategic plan. When thinking of what we do and how we do it - we are ALWAYS thinking about whether or not these things are in alignment with our overall vision and focus. This allows us to remain focused over the long term on achievement of real results and not just shifting from one "fix" to another every other year. This ensures that we operate very cost efficiently. When we purchase a curriculum - it is after much study so we know we will stick with it and not throw it away in four years to go in another direction. We place great faith in our professional teachers to know how to teach. We create clear standards that we want our students to meet, but we trust our educators to develop creative units and lesson plans to achieve these results. We do not micromanage and we certainly do not over purchase curriculum materials, or software that can be very very expensive. For example, when we made the move to Reveal Math for grades K-8, this was only done after 3 years of study and understanding that our existing curriculum was not delivering what we had wanted it to after 11 years of implementation. The cost for this one curriculum grades K-8 was just over \$400,000.00. So as you can see - switching back and forth as some districts do can get very expensive. This is just one example...but generally my theme would be "we stay the course" which saves us significant funds.

Now that isn't to say that we don't look to our neighbors to learn. We absolutely do! We compare ourselves every year in lots of different metrics to our Cumberland County Counter parts. We compare staffing costs, insurance costs, transportation costs, etc. We compare staffing levels at business offices. We compare substitute costs. We are



constantly seeking and sharing information across our schools. As superintendents we meet monthly as a Cumberland County Superintendent's association where we share ideas and learn together about best practices occurring across the county.

Our principals and AP's meeting together with their Cumberland county peers. We meet monthly with the Greater Sebego Education Alliance to share best practices. Our Instructional leader meets with Cumberland County Curriculum Coordinators monthly and our special education director meets at least monthly with Cumberland County Directors. Homeless Liasons meet together monthly...and this list just keeps going! Bottom line - we communicate very effectively with our neighbors and share effectively as well. Just yesterday actually, we were struggling with figuring our our nursing coverages across our five schools as we've had several of our full time nurses out for long term medical needs - impacting our coverages significantly. I reached out to our GSEA neighbors to ask what do they do for nurse sub coverages. I found they do pretty much the same things we do. One system used a contracted services company that was VERY EXPENSIVE that we elected not to pursue. Instead, we agreed as a GSEA to put together a list of our spare sub nurses and share them across our districts to broaden our pools.

Bottom line - we communicate with our neighbors A LOT. And Gorham is known for our leadership in this area. For example, I am the MSSA Executive Committee representative to our state association and our AASA executive committee representative to our national association - so I keep my ears to the ground all the time for this type of information. I am also the exec. Director for GSEA so I am able to influence sharing at this level. Kathy Hamblen is the President of MADSEC, the state wide special education coordinator's association. Brian Jandreau leads the cumberland county high school principal's group that meets monthly. Brian Porter chairs the county wide certification committee. Jodi Mezzanotte is on the executive committee for Junior achievement with other school representatives from across the state. We are very involved and absolutely use this to make sure our practices are the most cost effective possible while still delivering on meeting our goals.

**16. Question: With 80% of total expenses being staff, how can we manage those costs over the next several years? What qualifications do we require for incoming staff that may be increasing these costs and how can we mitigate them?**

**Answer:** The biggest thing we can do to mitigate costs in these areas over the next several years is to work hard to retain as many of our existing staff as possible and to be well suited to recruit new highly qualified staff in the future. The reasons for this are that the lower quality staff you have the more expensive it is to operate programming. Lower quality staff means less quality classroom instruction which leads to lower achievement of students, increasing support program needs and the potential for costly litigation. Lower quality staff means a need to increase investments in training and the potential for having to go through costly dismissal proceedings. Lower quality staff means lower

moral, strained relationships and culture and less productivity. Lower quality staff means folks only willing to do the bare minimum required of their contracts, and requests for anything more to be paid. Lower quality staff also means more transitions, which means more hiring committees and the time associated with these processes. It means more onboarding and hiring processes which means more needs from business office folks to onboard, it means more payments for fingerprinting certifications, it means more time spent checking certifications and making sure they meet requirements from the state...lower quality staff just means you are paying the same if not more for less work to get done - but the work has to get done - so you are actually paying far more for less quality! A vicious cycle indeed. So the biggest thing we can do to prevent these skyrocketing costs is to INVEST IN OUR EXISTING STAFF and work to keep the high quality staff we have as well as position ourselves to recruit high quality staff for the future!

In regards to qualifications - we are highly regulated by the Maine Department of Education in this area. Our staff must meet all minimum requirements for the positions they are hired. Everyone has to have updated CHRC approvals (fingerprinting). Then teachers must meet their specific certification requirements for the fields they are teaching in. This requires Bachelors Degrees at the very least.

Now some may say - let's hire younger teachers or perhaps less qualified teachers who are transitioning into education. Couple of things here to be aware of. First, although the salaries may be lower because they are starting lower on the scales - often their health insurance costs are higher because they have young families. Also, if you hire teachers who have conditional certifications, they have three years to complete requirements with the state - which all involved more coursework which is to be paid by the district. So those are additional costs that most folks don't think of - not to mention the costs associated with bringing these younger teachers up to speed with our training programs in safety, curriculum, or other state required trainings.

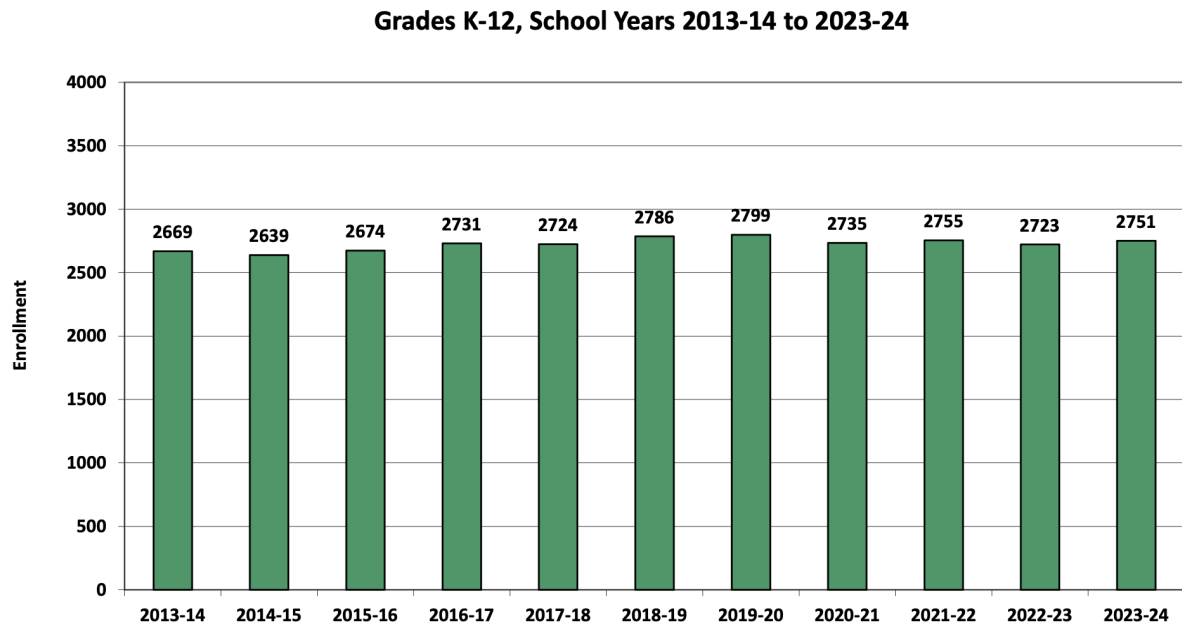
In short - the "smartest" investment to reduce long term costs in this largest portion of our budget is to invest in our existing staff in the deliver of strong retention programs and then work to strengthen our recruitment programs to ensure these high quality staff continue to fill out open positions.

**17. Question: What additional revenue sources have we added over the past several years and what additional ones are we considering?**

**Answer:** Recently added include: Out of district tuition, state agency client funds, CDS billing funds, CTE revenues from adult education and increased revenues from EPS associated with our Pre K program. Considering for the future are: Strengthening tuition revenues, Medicaid billing and strengthening CDS billing and adult education revenues.

**18. Question:** What are the trends in enrollment numbers in recent years? What are the trends in required student support needs in recent years? How do these two data points affect staffing needs?

**Answer:** Below is a graph from NESDEC showing our historical enrollment data. PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS GRAPH DOES NOT INCLUDE THE ADDITIONAL 87 PRE K STUDENTS ADDED DURING THE 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR.



Although our enrollments are NOT going up significantly - it is clear they are also NOT going down. They are pretty sustained small increases over time.

What is also important to note is that over this same time frame, it isn't just enrollment increases that are causing strain in our overall facilities - it is also the increasing needs of that existing student population. For example, over the past three years our K-5 autism program has more than doubled. The square footage space required to educate students in this program is more than triple what is required for a regular education student. As our specialized populations increase - even as our overall student enrollment may stagnate...our needs for space still continue to increase. I would encourage folks to visit these specialized programs as part of our program review invitations to see for yourselves what this looks like. And remember - special education program rules are highly regulated by Federal and State statute, leaving little room for us to maneuver.

**19. Question:** Is there a potential for enough increased USM attendance by GHS students to mitigate our space needs at GHS?

**Answer:** We already have a pretty large number of students that travel up to USM for

courses - but no - I do not see this as a method for decreasing overall space needs at GHS. These students often travel up for one class and then back for their other classes. They need to have classes to travel back to, and there isn't a dense enough population of students taking any specific coursework that would allow for us to mitigate space in this manner. HOWEVER - I do see that our increased emphasis on ELO's, Internships, apprenticeships, etc. COULD have a larger impact on space - especially with the goal of having 11th and 12th graders have "one foot" at GHS and another "foot" in the outside world experiencing their future stories! I still wouldn't look for this to be a panacea...but it could help to mitigate over time.

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## Town Council Budget Questions - April, 2024

Please list below...

20. **Question (Hollis):** The table on page 9 of our budget booklet "Cost Center Summary" indicates a reduction of \$137,301 for #92 "Student Transportation" at \$2.2M and the table on page 10 lists a reduction of \$166,265 for Category 8 "Transportation and Buses" at \$2.4M: can you please explain why those two line items are different? And more importantly, how did you achieve the reductions in costs for these line items?

**Answer:** The \$180,000 difference is related to bus lease purchases. You will see the same variance, in the same amount in the Debt Service Category. The Cost Center Summary for Student Transportation does not include bus leases because they are reported in Capital Leases/Debt Service.

However, the MDOE budget categories are defined differently, and the leases are part of the Transportation and Buses category rather than Debt Service.

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<b>940 CAPITAL LEASES</b>				
<b>0000 SUPPORT</b>				
<b>2700 STUDENT TRANSPORTATION</b>				
1000-0000-2700-58300-940 BUS LEASE-PRINCIPAL	208,965.00	180,000.00	(28,965.00)	(13.86)%
<b>TOTAL 2700 STUDENT TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$208,965.00</b>	<b>\$180,000.00</b>	<b>\$(28,965.00)</b>	<b>(13.86)%</b>

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Transportation by CC Summary      \$ 2,216,077.22

Transportation by MDOE Category      \$ 2,396,077.22

Difference      \$ 180,000.00

We were able to make several adjustments to the Transportation cost center that resulted in a decrease in the FY25 budget. One of adjustments was a reduction to the gas/diesel/propane account as a result of lower rates than last year.

The other reduction was related to staffing. When budgeting FY24, we relied heavily on contracted services because we were having difficulty filling our open driving positions. The FY24 budget accounted for 5 open positions. When open positions are budgeted, we assume a mid-scale pay rate with full health insurance benefits. Fortunately, we have been able to fill those positions in FY25 and their actual cost is being budgeted. The actual hire cost was lower than what we used for the budget projection so we reduced the accounts accordingly.

**21. Question:** I am pleased to see the proposed addition of a MaineCare Billing Specialist to be hired for Fall 2024. Can you provide any “best guess estimates” as to how much MaineCare payments you expect to bring in to help offset special education expenses for FY25? FY26? (with the understanding that this is a difficult number to project accurately...)

**Answer:** You are correct, this is very difficult to accurately predict, but I'll do my best. When we look at FY 25, we are likely looking at a very small number as we are going to start small with just billing for speech services, and perhaps a little OT/PT. I suspect this will only be \$30-\$40,000.00. During that year (which is the 2024-2025 school year) we will simultaneously be developing a plan for how we can train our Ed. Tech. III's to be certified BHP's. This will require specific training hours to meet DHHS certifications. Once these requirements are met, we can then bill more broadly for services provided by our Educational Technicians in preparation for FY 26. In FY 26 we will likely start off small again and work our way bigger. I would imagine somewhere around \$80,000.00 in revenues for FY 26. Then once the infrastructure is fully built out - I suspect we could anticipate an annual billing revenue of \$100,000.00 conservatively for FY 27 and beyond.

**22. Question:** Regarding MaineCare billing, it has been proposed that DHHS and DOE should create a “MaineCare Liaison” to support school departments in successfully navigating this complex billing process – are you aware of any movement within these State departments to establish this position?

**Answer:** I am not aware of any movement at DHHS or MDOE to establish a position such as this. I am aware that that there has been conversation, but so far that is all there has been.

**23. Question:** Could you provide a high-level estimate of the "per-student" cost for the school budget?

**Answer:** Yes, but please know this is just that - an estimate based on what we know right now. If the proposed FY 25 budget is approved as is, it would total \$53,475,801.00. If our NESDEC enrollment projections hold true for 2024-2025 we would have a total of 2738 K-12 students. We would then need to add the anticipated PK enrollment of 104 students for 2024-2025. That would mean a total of 2,842 PK-12 students. We would then divide the total budget by the total students ( $\$53,475,801.00 / 2,842 = \$18,816.00$ ). Therefore our anticipated per pupil cost for 2024-2025 (FY 25) would be \$18,816.00. This is still well below the Cumberland County average for FY 24 of \$20,785.00.

**24. Could you provide a high-level breakdown of what amount of that "per-student cost" is paid by the state, and what amount is paid by Gorham property taxes?**

**Answer:** Yes. So let's once again assume that the budget is passed as is at a total of \$53,475,801.00. Our total state subsidy for FY 25 will be \$23,992,784.00. That means that the state funds approximately 45% of our total budget. This same percentage would therefore also hold true for the per pupil calculation...so if our total per pupil calculation is anticipated to be \$18,816.00 then 45% of that, or \$8,467.00 is what is paid via state funds. As you consider these figures and perhaps use them to think about the per pupil cost comparisons across Cumberland County, please know that each community's share of their total operating expenses vs. what the state pays is very different, and depends heavily upon the overall property value of said community.