

**Brad Morgan**

Superintendent of Schools  
bmorgan@nmrsd.org  
Tel. 978-597-8713

**Gary Burboa-Reese**

Assistant Superintendent  
gburboareese@nmrsd.org  
Tel. 978-597-8713

February 25, 2025

VIA E-MAIL

Michael McGurl

[Michael.McGurl@massschoolbuildings.org](mailto:Michael.McGurl@massschoolbuildings.org)

Dear Mr. McGurl,

I am contacting you as Superintendent of Schools for the North Middlesex Regional School District located in Townsend. We serve Pepperell, Townsend, and Ashby.

At our February 6th joint boards budget presentation and subsequent School Committee meeting, the NMRSD School Committee faced the difficult decision of voting to close Ashby Elementary School (AES) at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. Our Committee is working tirelessly to present a budget that our towns can support, but our financial challenges may leave us with no choice but to close one or even two schools. That said, Townsend's Spaulding Memorial School (SMS) may be considered as an alternative to AES, or both schools may need to close if we do not receive additional state funding or secure a successful override.

With the potential closure of SMS, the Town of Townsend has requested information regarding any financial obligations tied to past MSBA grant projects, prompting this letter to the Massachusetts School Building Authority. This is an incredibly difficult time for our district, and we remain committed to transparency and finding the best possible solution for our students, staff, and communities.

As a recent Boston Globe article (2/10/2025) and a recent press conference have outlined, NMRSD continues to face significant budget struggles that will have an immediate and lasting impact on learning, wellness, and student achievement.

These issues compound an already difficult enrollment cycle. Additionally, NMRSD faces a myriad of challenges, primarily due to generations of unfunded mandates for regional school districts and the current state funding formula, which severely disadvantages regional schools. Next, significant increases in special education and multilingual education, including a largely unregulated increase in private outplacement special education facilities, place immediate, long-term downward pressure on our budget.

Our level-services budget currently has a \$3.5M shortfall. Our member towns have jointly advised us that they can only support assessments that increase by 3% over FY2025.

This increase with our known revenue and projected state aid, the NMRSD budget needs to come in at a

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0% increase over FY25 coupled with the following budget drivers that come in well over the Proposition 2 ½ levy:

- Collective Bargaining Agreements (Steps 3-4% and COLA 3.5%)
- Health Insurance (10%)
- \$1.6M increase in out-of-district placements (since June 2024)
  - Private School (averaging 14% in FY2024 and 4.7% in FY2025, compared to an average of 2.5% in previous years)
  - Collaboratives (5%)
- Increases in students qualifying for special education and multilingual services (mandated both at the federal and state level) in the past year and a half have resulted in our hiring of 25 additional positions. These positions include but are not limited to:
  - Adjustment Counselors
  - Special Education Teachers
  - Behavior Technicians
  - Multilingual Teachers
  - Board Certified Behavior Analysts
  - Speech & Language Pathologists

Meanwhile, our funding has remained stagnant due to being a “held harmless” district.

For FY2025, the committee used all available excess and deficiency funds and did not fully fund our stabilization or capital accounts. We anticipate using all our Excess and Deficiency again in FY2026. We have reduced our capital funds and removed any contributions to the regional stabilization fund. We are also expected to reduce approximately 20+ staff for FY2026, even if we close Ashby Elementary.

We received additional financial support from federal funding sources during COVID. Funding has dried up or disappeared post-COVID, while many of the residual needs following a year and a half of disrupted education remain. To be clear, the vast majority of our ESSER funds were used for one-time costs as opposed to supporting our operating budget.

For FY2025, we reduced our budget by \$1 million for it to be passed by our three member communities. For FY2026, with the slim chance of a Proposition 2 1/2 override, we may be looking at further cuts of \$1.7 million. The anticipated source of these reductions would be an additional 15-20 positions from general education staffing, as class sizes are not mandated beyond kindergarten. This will eviscerate our

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district, creating class sizes in the high 30s to low 40s across Grades 1-12, and our classroom teachers would be managing these class sizes with fewer support staff and paraprofessionals in the rooms.

Like all districts, we are being asked to do more with less.

One glaring area is the size of our facilities footprint. We have too much space and can easily serve our students with the closure of one building. However, if we do not receive a budget and need to move to an FY2026 budget that is less than a 0% increase, we may also need to close Spaulding Memorial School.

While we realize that both buildings were sites for projects, we are hopeful that MSBA will work with us due to our ongoing budget issues. We are simply following the state's request to consolidate where possible. We are in an unenviable position. If you could advise of any penalty associated with the closure of Spaulding Memorial School, it would help NMRSD make the most informed decision possible.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Brad Morgan, Superintendent  
North Middlesex Regional School District

cc: Robin Eibye  
Nancy Haines  
Lisa Martin  
Mary Daughraty  
David Nadeau  
Andrew MacLean  
Mark Mathews  
Nelson Mui  
Laura Shifrin