

Reconstruction Plan and Override Budget

Approved by School Committee 1/22/2018

Creating a new vision for the Reading Public Schools

As we look to a possible election for a Proposition 2 ½ override, the entire leadership team of the Reading Public Schools realizes that we are faced with a challenge requiring a renewed vision for our school system, which not only provides the children of Reading with a first-class education consistent with the expectations of our current era—but also aligns with the understandable fiscal parameters of a small community and our desire to have a financially sustainable structure for all our educational and municipal services. To honor both goals, these two objectives must be intertwined or complementary, and certainly not polarizing or oppositional to each other—as both goals are integrated in the foundational values of our community. To do so means that we must make some difficult decisions, restructure some existing expenditures to satisfy new needs, and keep our goals both streamlined and focused to yield maximum impact from what would still be a relatively modest infrastructure when compared to many other school districts.

Over the last five years, Reading has not been able to support a level-service budget for the school district, which means that sufficient funding was not available to sustain the same level of programs and services as the previous year. As a result, cuts to a level-service budget have had to be made each of those years. With reductions that have been occurring in both federal and state aid, and with increasing costs in mandatory areas such as transportation and Special Education services, budget funds have needed to be reallocated to these items—resulting however in nearly \$4 million of reductions from level-service over the last five years in other areas of the budget. As our leadership team looks to the future however, we realize that it is neither possible nor fiscally sound to restore everything, or to navigate the future by attempting to simply go back to the past. Instead, we must prioritize and restructure in a way that is both effective for our district’s goals and more sustainable for our community. The voters indicated that the dollar amount of the previous Prop 2 ½ ballot question was not attainable; and many Town leaders have understandably reached the conclusion that if an override question were to be considered again, the total amount would need to be significantly smaller. The following plan incorporates these assumptions, while still accounting for the demands of effectively educating our children in an era of profoundly different demands and realities from the past—and still addressing the current improvement needs of our school district.

The education landscape has changed drastically in the last several years, largely in response to the demands of the digital era. Another change of course has been the state’s accountability system, used to assess district performance. Although there have been understandable obstacles, we have perhaps been too slow in adapting our district structures to effectively navigate these changes. Our entire team realizes, however, that we must now implement new ways of doing things to ensure achievement for all children and for all schools. In short, we must explore a “reconstruction” of our system to implement a structure better designed to ensure student outcomes, to better support our staff, and to be a school system that contributes both to our children and to our entire community. This plan does not attempt to restore all the positions that have been reduced over the years; nor does it attempt to implement many positions that are commonplace in comparable districts. That would not be sustainable. Instead, our leadership team is proposing the addition of 2 curriculum support positions to ensure consistency across the schools and the restructuring and expansion of current Team Chair positions to more quickly identify and address student needs and to increase our elementary principals’ opportunities to provide curriculum and instructional leadership to staff. This plan reflects our community’s values to be both fiscally sound *and* to provide a great education to its children. For our district, we understand that an override must not be simply a list of items to fund—but rather, an opportunity that marks a new way of doing things and a new beginning toward better performance capacity and ultimately greater results for our students.

Teachers / Student Personnel

Most importantly, most of the plan’s funding is devoted to classroom teachers and personnel who directly support students, and it will provide the financial resources to retain excellent educators in the Reading Public Schools. These educators are of course the backbone of our school system and need to be restored to meet student needs. This plan will restore several key positions, in order to bring class sizes back to desired levels in elementary school, maintain the Foreign Language program in Grades 7 and 8, sustain a middle school structure that has been so successful for our district, strengthen academic intervention opportunities for all students, and increase Advance Placement and other course offerings at Reading Memorial High School. It will also allow RMHS to use recommendations from the ongoing NEASC Accreditation Process to restructure or redevelop offerings to better address the needs of all students.

Teachers / Student Personnel	FTE Request	Amount
<i>Retain Elementary Tutor – Regular Ed/School Day (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	1.0	\$20,000
<i>Retain Elementary Teachers (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	3.0	\$241,000
Salary Adjustments for Retaining/Attracting Staff	N/A	\$360,000
<i>Restore High School Teachers (which were eliminated in previous budget reductions)</i>	6.0	\$420,000
<i>Retain Middle School Teachers (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	7.0	\$500,000

Learning & Teaching Support

Curriculum Materials, Training, and Technology

This plan also addresses our district’s need for curriculum updates and technology replenishment. In an era when so many curriculum standards have changed significantly, it is critical that we are updating resources to ensure the best results for our students. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recently reminded districts that “providing teachers access to high-quality, standards-aligned curricular materials can significantly improve student outcomes” and well-designed curricular materials can also “lessen teachers’ workloads, deepen their pedagogical content knowledge, and increase coherence within and across grades.” Next year, curriculum funding is allocated to complete the science curriculum implementation. In future years, funding will be earmarked to allow a curriculum review cycle for areas such as social studies, reading, math, and computer science/engineering (all areas that the state has either recently updated or has plans to soon implement a revised framework). Funding is also allocated in the plan to provide necessary training for teachers to become more familiar with revised curriculum and to make important adjustments in instructional practices. During this time of vast curriculum transition, our teachers greatly need not only updated resources that are aligned with standards, but also the ongoing support to successfully make the shift to new expectations. As any teacher might attest, technology is also now an integral component to education, and can be an effective instructional tool on which teachers now depend to meet the diverse needs of students. To be a competitive school district—and more important, one that prepares students to meet demands of the emerging workplace—we must not disregard this important component. Technology replenishment funding will be used to move our district closer to a 5-year replacement cycle (versus the current 8-year cycle). The funding also includes restoring 1 Computer Technician position to better support classrooms, install replacement technology, and more efficiently service existing network hardware and the wireless infrastructure. Our staff has clearly indicated that this is an area where they need to be better supported and in which we must improve our capacity.

Instructional Leadership and Support

During this era of tremendous change in education, *instructional leadership* has also become critical to successfully navigate new expectations. In the past five years alone, we have seen at the state level three new curriculum frameworks in science, mathematics, and literacy; and we now of course also have more rigorous MCAS, SAT, and AP exams. All of this unfortunately has been happening during a time in Reading when budget reductions were required. As a district that has been comparatively very lean in support positions, changes have been more challenging to navigate than for many other districts who have already ensured instructional leadership capacity. For these reasons, it is necessary to reform our leadership and support infrastructure to

reflect the demands of new educational standards, to better support our current administrators to function as instructional leaders, and to effectively address the challenges our district has faced with meeting the needs of *all* students—especially students with disabilities.

First, the plan includes two **K-8 Curriculum Coordinators** (one for English Language Arts/Social Studies and one for Mathematics/Science). In practice, these positions would focus primarily on improving consistency among our five neighborhood elementary schools, but would also provide the coordination necessary for a smooth curricular transition to middle school and a vertical coherence within our K-8 continuum. Overall, these coordinators will work closely with building principals and teachers to facilitate ongoing improvement of the educational program, coordinate and maintain curriculum documents aligned to state standards, provide content expertise and feedback for staff, and help coordinate and provide ongoing training for teachers. By ensuring a strong Tier 1 curriculum program for *all* students, we believe this will also provide the proactive leadership necessary to improve our effectiveness for students with disabilities and potentially generate cost-savings for the district. While the curriculum coordinator concept is relatively new to Reading, it is common in school districts across our state and its effectiveness is well-documented. These positions are integral to a district that wishes to use efficient, evidence-based practices to improve outcomes.

Secondly, the plan includes a restructuring of current positions in PreK-5 Special Education with an additional 2.4 FTE to provide better support across the district. First, .4 FTE would be added to the existing .6 RISE Team Chair to create a single position for both preschool and out-of-district students. Then, 2.0 FTE would be added to existing 3.0 FTE (currently structured as elementary Team Chairs) to provide **Assistant Principals** at each of the elementary schools. This provides an administrative team at each elementary school, creating consistent supports for students, families and teachers—and allowing principals to become more effective in their role as instructional leaders. Assistant Principals would be responsible for Special Ed Team Chair responsibilities, as well as supervision and evaluation of staff, IEP implementation and resource allocation, and building-level leadership for special education. They would also be able to make stronger connections with students and families who receive special education support. Additionally, they will be able to spend time in *all* classrooms to support the practices of both general *and* special educators. The opportunity to provide timely and meaningful feedback to teachers ensures that all students are being exposed to a robust Tier 1 curriculum, as well as high leverage classroom practices that result in improved student achievement.

Lastly, the current Preschool Director position (.4 FTE) is restructured with an additional .6 FTE to form an **Assistant Director of Student Services**. The Assistant Director would assume director responsibilities of RISE preschool, including direct supervision and evaluation of staff—but also would provide much needed support to our Special Education programs across the district. This position would provide central leadership for in-district programs, provide consultation to school teams if specific areas of expertise are required, and coordinate ongoing training for all staff. All these components are designed to work cohesively and to forge a strong integration of both general and special education. With limited resources, we will never be able to provide many of the supports and services that other school districts might provide. With this plan however, we are envisioning a renewed structure that not only supports both general and special education needs for the future of the Reading Public Schools, but also provides a more cost-effective and proactive way of meeting our district goals and improving student outcomes. In addition, this instructional leadership structure will make the Reading Public Schools more desirable to retain and attract outstanding educators for our children.

Learning & Teaching / Instructional Leadership and Support	FTE Request	Amount
<i>Restore Classroom Computer/Technology</i>	N/A	\$50,000
<i>Restore Computer Technician</i>	1.0	\$57,000
<i>Restructure existing admin positions - Assistant Director of Student Services/RISE Director</i>	0.6	\$70,000
<i>Restore Teacher Training (e.g., Science, ELA, Math) for curriculum</i>	N/A	\$75,000
Districtwide K-8 Curriculum Coordinator (Mathematics/Science)	1.0	\$95,000
Districtwide K-8 Curriculum Coordinator (English Language Arts/Social Studies)	1.0	\$95,000
Curriculum Updates and Renewal	N/A	\$150,000
<i>Restructure existing admin positions for 5 Elementary Assistant Principals/Team Chair</i>	2.4	\$215,000

Operations / Facilities / Athletics

Our leadership team has also realized that we must improve our district operation in all personnel related matters. A Payroll/HR generalist position will improve the onboarding process for new employees and support their transition into the school district more effectively. This position, along with our current HR Administrator, will allow us to recruit and train substitute teachers more successfully, provide more support for teachers in their first three years in the school district, and extend our recruitment process to attract the best candidates possible for all positions. Funding also will fully restore the vacation cleanings for the custodial cleaning contract at RMHS in order to appropriately maintain the facility and reduce costs later. And finally, this plan will restore full game schedules for all levels (Varsity, JV, and Freshmen) in all sports.

Operations / Facilities / Athletics	FTE Request	Amount
<i>Retain Vacation Cleaning at RMHS (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	N/A	\$18,000
<i>Retain Athletics/Extracurricular funding (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	N/A	\$25,000
Clerical Support (Payroll/HR Generalist)	1.0	\$45,000

Conclusion and “Reconstruction/Override Budget” Summary Table

Below is an overview table of all the plan’s components (listed in descending order by cost). The plan’s components are designed to function in a unified, complementary way to greatly increase our district capacity for improving student outcomes, but also in the most sustainable, cost-effective manner. In summary, this restructured plan recognizes our community’s need for fiscal sustainability, but also effectively addresses the challenges of our school system and provides Reading children with an educational experience in which our community can take pride. By revising current practices for existing positions and by exploring new partnerships with both business and higher education, our goal also is to reconstruct our school system in a way that serves our *entire* community and all its residents. In many ways, a school system reflects the values of its community and is a living symbol of the link among its generations. The educators of Reading are so proud to serve this community as stewards of its future; and by working together with all stakeholders, we feel confident in the future—for our children and for our entire community.

Summary of Plan Components	FTE Request	Amount
<i>Retain Vacation Cleaning at RMHS (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	N/A	\$18,000
<i>Retain 1 Elementary Tutor – Regular Ed/School Day (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	1.0	\$20,000
<i>Retain Athletics/Extracurricular funding (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	N/A	\$25,000
Clerical Support (Payroll/Human Resources Generalist)	1.0	\$45,000
<i>Restore Classroom Computer/Technology</i>	N/A	\$50,000
<i>Restore Computer Technician</i>	1.0	\$57,000
<i>Restructure existing admin positions for Special Education Assistant Director</i>	0.6	\$70,000
<i>Restore Teacher Training (e.g., Science, ELA, Math) for curriculum</i>	N/A	\$75,000
Districtwide K-8 Curriculum Coordinator (Mathematics/Science)	1.0	\$95,000
Districtwide K-8 Curriculum Coordinator (English Language Arts/Social Studies)	1.0	\$95,000
Curriculum Updates and Renewal	N/A	\$150,000
<i>Restructure existing admin positions for Assistant Principals at Elementary Schools</i>	2.4	\$215,000
<i>Retain Elementary Teachers (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	3.0	\$241,000
Salary Adjustments for Retaining/Attracting Staff	N/A	\$360,000
<i>Restore High School Teachers (which were eliminated in previous budget reductions)</i>	6.0	\$420,000
<i>Retain Middle School Teachers (which would be eliminated in FY19 budget)</i>	7.0	\$500,000
Total		\$2,436,000