




REGIONAL SCHOOL BUDGET

Gearing Up for Your Marketing
& Approval Process

Dr. Michael F. Fitzpatrick

*Superintendent-Director of the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District
& President of Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools*



Dear Superintendent,
Congratulations! You have secured an ambitious opportunity to serve the educational needs of students from multiple member communities. Most recognize that the golden rule for real estate is *location, location, location*. So, hopefully it comes as no surprise that the blueprint for regional affiliation is *relationships, relationships*, and you guessed it, *relationships*.

The job description of every school leader invariably includes responsibilities relating to designing, securing funding for, and functioning within an operational budget. For the regional school superintendent, however, those responsibilities encompass accountability to a considerably larger audience, and result in wider challenges to relationships. To successfully shepherd a regional school budget, you will need to work closely with your school committee, nurture positive relationships with an external network of stakeholders and decision makers, and communicate effectively. Success will require that you understand your regional agreement, build your budget strategically, recognize local concerns, come well prepared to any public presentation on your budget, and be keenly aware of options that may be available to you.

By taking nothing for granted and prioritizing as you navigate the budget calendar, you will avoid surprises, be prepared to explain differences, and demonstrate a level of fiscal responsibility that will garner credibility across your region.

Recognize the Value of Your School Committee

A key responsibility of your role includes working in tandem with your school committee members, your fiscal colleagues, and others. Avoid any temptation to completely delegate or disassociate yourself from the budget process. While convenient, such divestiture will cause both you and your system disruption and will result in a loss of credibility. Establish a productive, trusting, and shared responsibility with your school committee members. Regional systems are inclined to have school committee members with diverse backgrounds and skill sets that should be used to the best advantage.

During my twenty-eight years as a regional superintendent, our budgetary process benefitted from the contributions of our school committee members. A committee member with private sector customer service representative expertise can add technical assistance. Conversely, a member with trade skills can share unique insight into a budgetary function. Recognize that some school committee members will expect you to take the lead in public presentations, but others might prefer to share the limelight. Shared podiums require advance coordination, which ensures a consistent and accurate message to the public. Over the years, I have viewed the school committee member as the liaison and conduit to his or her community of residence. However, it should be noted that each school committee member is elected or appointed to serve all member communities.

Understand Your Regional Agreement

One of the early steps in your budget design is becoming familiar with the original regional agreement, which specifies several aspects of the process. That homework assignment includes the review of any amendments to the agreement. In summary, new Commonwealth guidelines [and to some degree federal] supersede outdated calendar and other items put forth within the agreement. For the purposes of trying not to overwhelm, let's stay on the local level prior to examining outside factors.

Identify and Cultivate an External Network

You will find it beneficial to identify your external network. For example, the Blackstone Valley Tech (BVT) district includes thirteen member communities. Its political representation includes two U.S. congressmen, two state senators (each representing some 159,000 citizens) within a state senate of forty individuals, and five state representatives within a legislative branch of one hundred and sixty members. Your inventory of contacts should include the aides of these key political players. Whether lobbying on behalf of legislative petitions or seeking any special assistance, you should be a known commodity to these players.

Like it or not, the aforementioned are your extended business partners. Stay out of the local political races as you cannot risk relationships moving forward.

On the local level, municipal officials having influence on BVT fiscal matters collectively include thirteen town administrators, sixty selectpersons, and one hundred and twenty-six finance committee members. As a school system serving a rural demographic, BVT’s district does not include mayors, city managers, or city councils; but more suburban or urban regions will need to interact with those entities as well. My recommendation is to get to know all these public servants. Treat them respectfully and recognize that they are partners in the process. Your interactions might encompass scheduled tours and return-on-investment documentation of your system. Professional exchanges might also identify budget cost containment or potential collective bargaining strategies. In any case, create a directory and update it regularly. List names, occupations, and all available methods of communication.

Acknowledge Local Concerns

While it may appear prudent or even efficient to gather all the outside players when sharing your budget plan, I suggest you recognize each member community subgroup is focused upon the fiscal impact to their municipality and meet with them individually. They will likely apply multiple lens to compare and contrast with other member environments, but in the end, all they really want to know is what is the plan for them. Thus, each of your budget presentations should allow for town-by-town specificity.

Annual operational budget approval is governed via securing a favorable vote at a local town meeting (registered citizen resident voter majority) of two-thirds of your member communities. In a two-town regional, you would need a favorable determination from both communities. In the event only one of your towns supports the budget you can opt to conduct a general town meeting involving the voters of both. In a five-town region, you would need four communities to endorse in order to secure the two-thirds [66.67 %] required. In the event approval by two-thirds is not secured, other scenarios of pursuit exist, and they include revisiting and revising your original overall budget and offering a modified and reduced funding request.

Understand Your Options

During periods of economic upheaval, such as drastic reductions in anticipated federal or state aid, the Massachusetts Department of Education has established transitional funding approaches, which allow a system to operate on a monthly basis at a level of one-twelfth of the prior approved annual budget. Kindly refer to Attachment A, Fiscal Intervention and Oversight – Guidance for Regional School Districts, available on the DESE website, which details that process.

Communicate Effectively

Since the ultimate fate of your budget approval rests with the voters, you need to adopt a communication strategy to inform your citizens at large. Recognize that your public relations campaign should not be limited to a blitz at budget time. You have the challenge of informing individuals who reside in communities outside of the boundary of your campus. Whether you utilize the PR skills of a professional firm or address this function internally, the process has several common aspects. Those include identifying all of the dissemination launch sources. In today’s climate of social media, your website will certainly be the primary source of information for much of your constituency. It will be the first place your voice is heard by parents and students and may well be the go-to place for information by local citizens.

In addition to ensuring a consistent message on your website, establish an inventory of outlets (newspapers, cable TV studios, radio stations, and other social media platforms). Research the deadlines, article word count, and visual display preferences to increase the receptivity of your coverage. Establish relationships and consider tours of your system by the media contacts.

My experience with the media suggests that they prefer articles tailored to direct affiliation with their local readership. Thus, it has proved advantageous to structure releases with specific reference to the impact of the community or communities, which the media outlet considers its target population.

Build Your Budget Strategically

The actual formation or building block process of creating your budget has multiple options. Some veteran colleagues likely prefer the Plan Programming Building System (PPBS) approach. Within that scheme, you would begin with a zero-based reference and any subsequent budget entry would be linked with a function. A designed appropriation would have an adjoining rationale of its significance. One of the major benefits of this technique is its ability to define and defend the need.

Another budget approach jump starts the process with a political reality parameter regardless of need. This is the projected maximum, which the district should anticipate, and the design must live within it. This might come across as spend and then justify your request, but in some ways it is like living within your means. The PPBS is scientifically proven, yet the backward subtraction of a maximum target still forces you to identify priorities. Regardless of your approach, you will need to consider long term as well as next fiscal year driving components.

A sample calendar schedule of BVT’s budget design process

HINT: Remain consistent with your public budget message and never pit one town against another.

<div><div>BVT</div><div>Proposed Budget Sub-Committee Meeting Dates</div><div>BLACKSTONE VALLEY VOCATIONAL REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT</div><div>FY2022 BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE TIMETABLE</div></div>		
DATE	TIME / LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
10/2020		Meet with leadership team as well as Vocational & Academic Team Leaders to begin thought process for FY2022 budgeting.
10/15/2020 Thursday	<i>School Committee Mtg / Three Seasons</i>	Circulate proposed list of sub-committee meeting dates for FY2022 budget to full school district committee.
11/19/2020 Thursday <i>(School Committee Mtg)</i>	5:00-5:50PM Superintendent Conference Rm	Elect chair of FY2022 budget sub-committee, verify meeting dates, first review Debt (8000) function.
12/03/2020 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	First review of Salary & Wage & Fringe Benefits - Instructional staffing patterns (Anthony Steele) and non-instructional staffing (respective department heads) identified by FTE’s. First review Administration (1000) and Fixed Charges (5000) functions.
12/10/2020 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	Follow up review all areas presented to date. First review of Other School Services (3000) and Facility/Plant Operations (4000) [Master Plan, building alterations, utilities] functions.
12/17/2020 Thursday <i>(School Committee Mtg)</i>	5:00-5:50PM Superintendent Conference Rm	Follow up review on all areas presented. Develop any questions for further review.
01/07/2021 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	First review of Acquisition of Fixed Assets (7000) [five-year fixed asset plan] and District-wide Technology (Rosetta Spino).
01/21/2021 Thursday <i>(School Committee Mtg)</i>	5:00-5:50PM Superintendent Conference Rm	Address any questions on all areas presented.
01/28/2021 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	First review Instructional function (2000) [new programs/initiatives]. Address any questions from Other School Services, Facility/Operation of Plant, Fixed Assets and Technology areas.
02/04/2021 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	SNOW DAY (IF NEEDED)
02/11/2021 Thursday	4:30-7:00PM Superintendent Conference Rm	Overview commitments on the table. Review revenue projections from State Aid, anticipated final budget packet and presentation for public hearing. Obtain consensus vote of full sub-committee for FY2022 budget.
03/04/2021 Thursday <i>(School Committee Mtg)</i>	5:00-6:00PM Library	BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING (MEDIA CENTER) ~ Notice of Public Hearing will be published no later than 02/25/2021 ~ Anticipated FY2022 budget adoption at regularly scheduled district School Committee meeting.
04/04/2021 <i>(no later than)</i>	30 Days from S.C. Acceptance	Mail Treasurer Certification Letters (FY2022 Budget and Assessments)
All areas will be coordinated with Federal & State Grant initiatives to maximize educational resources to the classroom.		
Note: The above meeting dates must be approved by S.C. and will be posted on the school’s website, on the Main Office & Business Office bulletin boards and distributed to Member Towns for posting. Dates may be adjusted if a sudden, unexpected circumstance (such as inclement weather) demands immediate action.		

One of the more remarkable developments is exhibited in the longevity of the budget line series categories originally established by former public servant Leo Turo many years ago. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth continues to tweak the categories and you will find it necessary to occasionally explain how an account or series went up or down as a result of its reclassification.

Come Prepared

For public presentation purposes you will find it advantageous to create municipal specific reference worksheets, as displayed within the sample below illustrating a four-year historical experience with our member town of Mendon. The spreadsheet displays recent trends in our assessment requests.

You can adjust data to include additional items based on the inquiries which surface from any particular community’s fiscal policy makers. Advance research enables you to be well prepared to address major points for your marketing and enables you to draw multiple year comparisons and contrasts at your fingertips.

Explain Differences

The single, consolidated regional school budget includes multiple expense categories that are not included within local school budgets, but instead are spread across a variety of warrant line items in the town or city budget. You will want to identify regional-specific budget items, which are included within your annual spending plan. If municipal fiscal agents seek to compare your budget request with that of the local schools, be sure to remind them of those expenses, which are paid by the mu-

nicipality outside of the local school department budget. These may include workers’ compensation, health and other insurance, unemployment, snow removal, and central office expenses such as bookkeeping, treasurer, legal, audit, and other costs relating to district management.

Demonstrate Fiscal Responsibility by Securing External Resources

Grants and basic aid from federal and state sources have not kept pace with inflationary expenses. This economic reality has placed a significant burden on local municipalities to fund educational budgets. One technique for complementing fiscal resources can be found in securing external assets via grants. Generally, grants are made available via LEA entitlements, usually specified by predetermined formulas and/or competitively announced opportunities. The sophistication of your system’s approach to pursuing grants will govern your success. The goal is not to chase grants, which generate PR notoriety but to match them with the consistency of your LEA mission. Synchronization of your grant acquisition efforts will strengthen your credibility with local budget reviewers. Establishing a track record for matching limited local dollars with grants

displays a phenomenon similar to a stock dividend. The grant itself can remove a new item that otherwise would be added to a local request. Sensitivity to avoiding supplanting issues should guide you in this process.

It is not my intent to extend a detailed grant manual, but within the limitations of this paper I offer some basics. Generally, the bible for federal grants “requests for proposals” (RFP) is the Federal Register [FederalRegister.gov]. This online publication identifies time sensitive procedures regarding grant opportunities. On a state level, your sources include the DESE website and its newsletters, as well as the Massachusetts government website [Mass.gov]. An inventory of all area foundations will expand the potential sources to investigate the feasibility of awards. Monitoring the awards highlighted in area public announcements will provide a targeted list of potential pursuits to consider. Formula grants are usually set asides and, although set with submission deadlines, are far less competitive.

Another major source of state information can be accessed via the Massachusetts Department of Revenue’s Division of Local Services. Subscribing to this agency can be accomplished by email [dls_alerts@dor.state.ma.us]. Informational dissemination traditionally includes city and town newsletters, legal bulletins, cherry sheet revenue levels, and other municipal finance related material. More recently another DOR subset will assist with Q&A inquiries. The Data Analytics and Resource Bureau can be accessed through databank@dor.state.ma.us.

Synchronize and Prioritize

As you build your calendar of deliverables and deadlines you need to synchronize and prioritize your schedule. After designing your budget building calendar, you will need to be sensitive to multiple dates established at the municipal level. Those include warrant closing dates, annual report due dates and format preferences, finance committee meeting dates, public hearing dates, town meeting dates, and DESE required reporting obligations.

With multiple communities, you will need to coordinate local presentations to avoid conflicts yet still be able to share specifics regarding your request. Interestingly, over the years most local finance reviewers prefer to focus on the impact to their community with lesser interest in the districtwide scenario. That said, it is still best to be prepared to respond with contrast data when called upon to do so. Per student assessment amounts can often be a target for discussion. Tally these with and without debt for more valid comparisons.

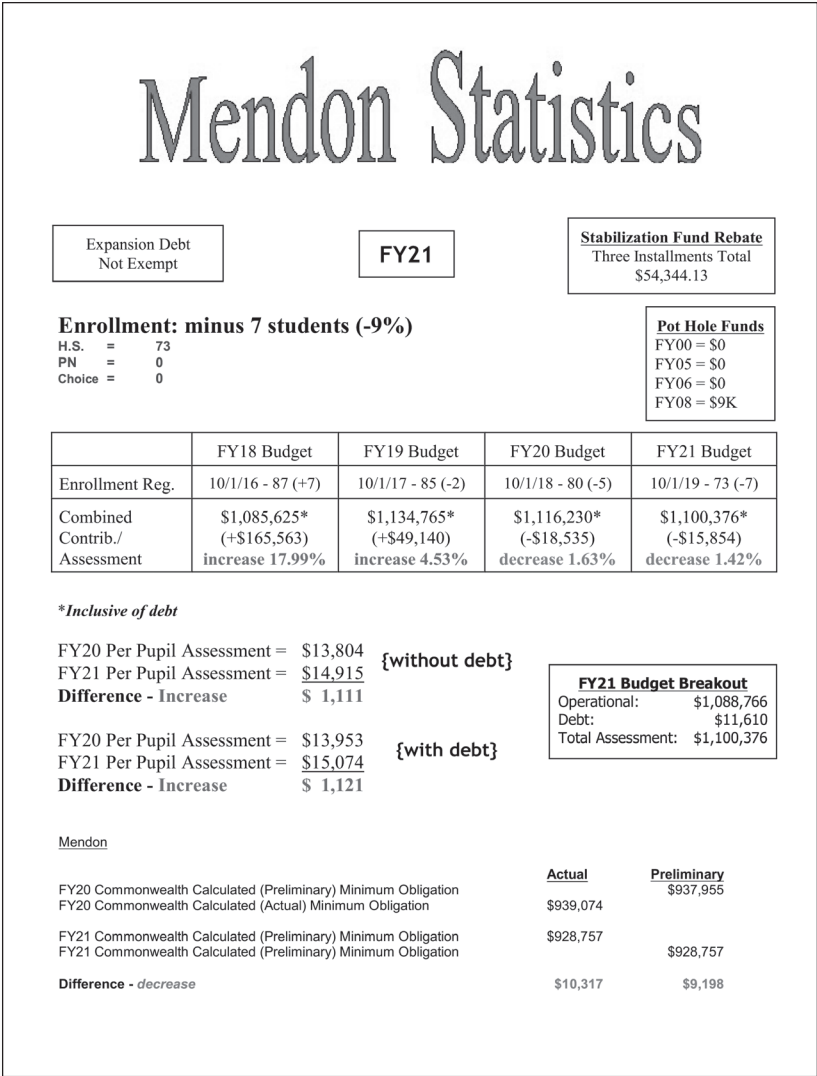
Recognize that you represent all communities, so take care to avoid any negative comparisons with other member towns when you make your budget presentation. Always remember you work for the community partners you represent.

Avoid Surprises

Colleagues have asked whether I would recommend providing an advanced projection of the potential local assessment to a town manager when asked. While I do not generally recommend dollar amount advance projections, I have found it beneficial to alert member town fiscal planners of any significant increases in enrollment when the October 1st enrollment data is available. I have made it my practice to write a letter to the appropriate town official in any member community with a greater than 5% increase in enrollment, advising of that change and alerting them to anticipate an

ANNUAL REPORT

You should anticipate that the invitation to provide a regional LEA entry in a community’s annual report will likely include space restrictions. One method of addressing this limitation includes alerting the reader of your entry with a message such as “A more complete report of the District’s activities and return on investment can be obtained via our website: www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/annualreport.”



increase in assessment for the next budget cycle. After sharing that alert, I have been willing to provide an early estimate to assist the manager as he or she builds the town’s budget. Such estimates are shared in good faith, very conservative, and with clear indication of subsequent reconfiguring when the picture becomes clearer. Given the numerous factors which go into the state’s minimum contribution calculations and thus impact individual town assessments, when enrollments decrease within a given community’s base, be cautious about predicting any major assessment reduction.

Take Nothing for Granted

Another question raised by colleagues is whether I participate in town meetings after the two-thirds approval has been secured. My response is always in the affirmative as you strengthen relationships going forward by demonstrating the professional courtesy of making an appearance. You just might need support from those communities in a subsequent budgetary cycle.

Tinkering with Assessments

A typical challenge involving external requests to reduce a given community’s assessment should be expected. Unlike a local town department, the multiple municipal partners relationship creates a ratio or percentage ownership dependency factor across all communities. Thus, what may appear as a simple ten percent reduction in one town’s assessment results in a ripple effect across the region, causing a complication to your entire budget design.

While a local town department has the option to replenish any temporarily reduced funding via subsequent annual appropriations, that is certainly unlikely when you are at the mercy of multiple municipalities. Displaying this phenomenon in dollars would look like the following: Member community A owns a ten percent obligation within the annual operational budget. Community A seeks a \$10,000 reduction. The actual impact would be a \$100,000 across the board budget reduction.

Don’t Reinvent the Wheel

Finally, recognize that for every challenge you face, someone else has most likely been there before. Take advantage of the vast array of collective knowledge that is available to you through affiliations with professional organizations. As a regional school superintendent, you may consider active membership in any or all of the following organizations:

- **MARS (MA Association of Regional Schools)**
Develops and disseminates strategies to address issues of concern to regional schools.
- **MASS (MA Association of School Superintendents)**
Dedicated to the unique advocacy concerns of school superintendents, provides professional development, a network of peers, and lobbying on behalf of high-quality public education.
- **MIAA (MA Interscholastic Athletic Association)**
Provides leadership and support for the conduct of interscholastic athletics.

- **AASA (American Association of School Administrators)**
Advances the goals of public education through national advocacy, regional collaboration, professional enrichment, information, representation, and networking.
- **MASC (MA Association of School Committees)**
Supports school leaders in their governance role by providing professional development, alerts and analysis of new educational legislation, school policy development, and superintendent search services.
- **NEASC (New England Association of Schools and College)**
Partners with schools to assess, support, and promote high quality education through accreditation, professional assistance, and the pursuit of best practices.
- **NESDEC (New England School Development Council)**
Offers planning and management services which include enrollment research valuable for long-term budget planning.
- **MAVA (MA Association of Vocational Administrators)**
Provides resources for administrators within vocational systems or with Chapter 74 programs.

Also consider any local subsets of the organizations above. Within the BVT network, these include the Worcester County Superintendents Association Roundtable and the Blackstone Valley Consortium.

Each of these organizations provide resources, networking opportunities, professional development, and camaraderie that can prove invaluable to school leaders in a challenging and constantly changing educational climate.

Most importantly – In the quest for relationships and revenues, cooperation should outweigh competition.

School Finance and District Support
Fiscal Intervention and Oversight — Guidance for Regional School Districts

Introduction

Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L.) and the state Regional School District regulations outline the financial circumstances under which the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (Commissioner) is required to intervene in and assume fiscal oversight of a regional school district. This Guidance is provided to help all stakeholders, including regional school committees, regional school district leadership and staff, city council and select board membership, and local citizens, understand these requirements and navigate the process of state fiscal intervention and oversight, in accordance with provisions of Massachusetts law and regulations and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) practice.

Regional School District Budget Process

In order to understand the Massachusetts law and regulations that govern fiscal intervention and oversight of a regional school district, it is helpful to have a general understanding of the regional school committee budget process. The state of Massachusetts, as well as all school districts, operate on a fiscal year that begins on July 1st and ends on June 30th. While the development of an annual district budget is part of an ongoing planning process, budget preparation generally begins in the fall with priority-setting, revenue and student enrollment projections, and expenditure forecasts, and ends with the adoption of the budget in time for the new fiscal year, on July 1st.

Unlike municipal school committees, whose budgets are part of a single municipal budget process, regional school committees are independent entities and must not only develop and propose their own budgets within the parameters of law and regulations¹, but must also navigate the multiple budget processes of their member municipalities for a final budget to be adopted for a fiscal year. Because the regional district budget process is subject to many stakeholders and timelines, the regional school committee and member municipalities may not always reach agreement on a final fiscal year’s budget by the time the fiscal year begins. Accordingly, the law provides for state interventions to ensure that if a regional school committee budget process stalls, the regional school district will continue to operate and serve its families and students.

State Interventions

The ability of the state to intervene in a regional school district budget is authorized by law and regulations that provide the state with incrementally more oversight in response to a regional school district’s increasing fiscal vulnerability.

1/12th Budget

Massachusetts law requires that after an annual budget is adopted by a regional school committee and proposed to its member municipalities, the appropriating authorities of two-thirds of the member municipalities must approve the budget when assessments are calculated under the statutory method and all of the member municipalities must approve the budget when assessments are calculated under the alternative (agreement) method.² If, after the submission of the regional budget to its member municipalities, the regional school committee budget is not approved by July 1st of the fiscal year, the first level of state intervention is triggered.

In this instance, law and regulations require that the regional school district superintendent notify the Commissioner of the district’s failure to secure a budget by July 1st. The Commissioner, through the Office of Regional Governance, will request that the district provide information about the regional school committee’s proposed budget and assessments for the upcoming fiscal year, the status of the local votes, and the approved budget and assessments for the prior fiscal year. After review of this information, the Department, under the Commissioner’s authority, certifies an interim monthly budget sufficient for the operation of the district for the beginning of the new fiscal year. The interim monthly budget shall not be less than one-twelfth of the total budget approved by the region in the most recent fiscal year or such higher amount as the Commissioner may determine. This process establishes what is known as an interim monthly “1/12th budget.”

Whenever the Commissioner establishes a 1/12th budget for a regional school district, the treasurer of the regional school district must calculate and certify to the member municipalities their respective assessments based on the statutory assessment method. In doing so, the treasurer must use the final or most recent state aid amounts, general fund revenues and minimum local contributions for the budget year. Since state aid and the minimum local contributions for member municipalities may change between the time the initial budget is proposed by the regional school committee and the time a 1/12th budget is established by the Commissioner, the final or most recent minimum local contribution and state aid amounts must be used in calculating assessments under a 1/12th budget. Each member municipality shall then pay its respective assessment to the regional school district in accordance with the payment schedule in the regional district agreement.

The Commissioner’s 1/12th budget remains in effect until the annual budget is adopted and approved by the regional school committee and approved by two-thirds of the member municipalities or until December 1st, whichever comes first.

State Fiscal Oversight

Between the time the 1/12th budget is established and December 1st, the Department will remain in contact with the regional school district administration to discuss the regional school committee’s progress toward adoption and approval of an annual budget for the fiscal year. Law and regulations detail the requirements related to the reconsidered budget.³ If the regional school committee’s proposed budget is not approved by the member municipalities by December 1st of the fiscal year, the second level of state intervention is triggered. At that time, the Commissioner must assume fiscal oversight of the operations of the district, must establish a final district budget for the fiscal year and must assume responsibility of specific fiscal functions.

Prior to the Commissioner’s setting of a final budget, the Department will contact the chair of the regional school committee, the superintendent, and the chairs of the City Councils and/or Select Boards of the member municipalities to seek input on the final budget for the remainder of the fiscal year. Following consideration of the input from stakeholders, the Commissioner will set a budget for the remainder of the fiscal year. It is important to note that the final budget may be more than or less than the interim 1/12th budget previously set.

Whenever the Commissioner establishes a final budget for a regional school district, the treasurer of the regional school district must calculate and certify to the member

municipalities their respective assessments based on the statutory method. Every member municipality shall pay its respective assessment in accordance with the payment schedule in the regional district agreement. Note that the appropriation of funds to pay an assessment ordered by the Commissioner shall not be deemed approval by the municipality of the district’s budget.

While under fiscal oversight, certain fiscal actions taken by the superintendent, school committee or other officials of the district are subject to the Commissioner’s written approval. These include:

- Adoption or reconsideration of the district budget,
- Transfer of budgetary authority between line items,
- Encumbrance or expenditure of funds not included in the general fund budget,
- Borrowing,
- Execution of new or amended collective bargaining agreements,
- Execution of new contracts or amendments to existing contracts with a value of \$25,000 or more, and
- Establishment, increase, or decrease of user fees.

During the period of fiscal oversight, the Commissioner may also impound any unencumbered funds for such period of time as he determines and may undertake any initiatives that he deems necessary to secure the financial stability of the district.

The regulations allow for the Commissioner to designate a person to implement these responsibilities on his behalf. In order to facilitate the Commissioner’s fiscal oversight of the district, the superintendent and other officials of the district shall promptly provide the Department with such information and reports as may be requested by the Commissioner or his designee. The Commissioner’s fiscal oversight shall continue until the end of the fiscal year or until the member municipalities have approved a budget for the subsequent fiscal year, whichever is later.⁴

Special Legislation

The next level of intervention has historically been triggered when a regional school district is in financial crisis (e.g., deficit spending). In such cases, special legislation has been passed pertaining to a particular regional school district that is intended to restore the fiscal solvency of the regional school district as soon as possible. This state intervention has been developed on a case-by-case basis, and details and requirements of special legislation have been established by the Department in consultation with the Department of Revenue and the legislature. Such special legislation has historically included additional oversight and responsibilities (beyond that outlined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 16B and 603 CMR 41.00), and additional authority for the Commissioner.

For example, state fiscal oversight of a regional school district was recently established through a special law that set borrowing limits for the regional school district to address the immediate financial crisis. In addition, the special legislation required that the district employ a fiscal overseer, whose appointment was subject to the approval of the Commissioner, to perform specific responsibilities with respect to the district. The fiscal overseer works with local officials in the district and reports to the Commissioner as part of a larger strategy of fiscal oversight, monitoring, support, and intervention. In this case, the special legislation required that the fiscal overseer would remain in place for not less than three years (or while any debt authorized by the special law

is outstanding). Additionally, if at any time the Commissioner believes that a finance control board should be established, the Commissioner, in consultation with the Director of the Accounts at the Department of Revenue, may recommend that the Secretary of Administration and Finance establish such a board.

Conclusion

In Massachusetts, state fiscal intervention in regional school districts ranges from the establishment of an interim monthly 1/12th budget as a stopgap measure that enables the district to continue to operate while the school committee and member municipalities continue to work on an annual budget, to complete state fiscal oversight through a fiscal overseer hired by the district that reports to the Commissioner or, in the most severe cases, by a finance control board.

Regional school districts face complex fiscal and governance challenges. Regional school districts facing higher fiscal risk (e.g., difficulty in securing budget approval, scarcity of general fund resources) are encouraged to take advantage of the technical assistance offered to school districts and the new data and finance tools available on the Department’s website.

For more information, please contact the Office of Regional Governance at 781-338-6515.

¹ Note that the regional school committee budget process is outlined in law and regulations. This process is beyond the scope of this Guidance. For an in-depth review of the regional school district budget process, see: Regional School District Budget Process: Preparing a Regional Budget Download Word Document (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2010).

² For more information on calculating member assessments, please see the Department’s guidance: Preparing Member Assessments: Guidance for Regional School Districts.

³ See M.G.L. c. 71, §16B and 603 CMR 41.05(3).

⁴ See 603 CMR 41.07.

Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick has been the superintendent-director of the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District since 1994, working tirelessly with others to shape a school system that serves as a model for innovative, collaborative reform approaches and viable, vibrant methods of teaching and learning.

Before coming to Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT), Dr. Fitzpatrick was a vocational-technical instructional methodologies professor at several Massachusetts public colleges and Director of the Center for Vocational-Technical Education at Fitchburg State College, where he trained vocational-technical leadership personnel and organized statewide professional development programs. He earned a Doctorate of Education Administration from the University of Massachusetts and was honored as Outstanding Vocational-Technical Educator by the Massachusetts Department of Education in 1988.

Under his leadership, BVT was designated a Pacesetter School by the High Schools That Work network in 1999, 2007, and 2010, a 2003 Commonwealth Compass School, a 2005 Vanguard Model School, and one of six school systems nationwide to receive the 2004 National School Change Award for significant and meaningful change. The district was named to the College Board's 2012 AP District Honor Roll for expanding access to Advanced Placement curriculum and maintaining or improving the percentage of students with qualifying scores. BVT has also earned national awards for creating a healthier and energy-efficient school environment. Other recent recognitions include a feature in a 2014 segment of WCVB Channel 5's Chronicle television news magazine, a ranking as a "District of Distinction" in the March 2015 edition of District Administration magazine, and selection as a 2015 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School.

Dr. Fitzpatrick was named Educator of the Year 2000 by the Worcester-based Alliance for Education and a Mover and Shaker in the career training field by Training Magazine in 2001. He was one of 25 nationally recognized educational professionals to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's 2001 National Design Studio Workshop, where he had the opportunity to influence new directions for career and technical education at the secondary level across the country. A recipient of the American Association of School Administrators' 2004 President's Technology Award for vision and leadership in educational technology and the sole recipient in the rural school category of the AASA's 2004 Leadership for Learning Award for fueling student achievement and learning through innovative integration partnerships.

He served as chair of the MASS Professional Development Committee for the 2007-2008 program year and was honored as the 2008 Christos Daoulas Award recipient for his contribution to education and the organization. He also served on the AASA Governing Board, is a MASS and MAVA Past President, and was named Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year 2011 by MASS and AASA.



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