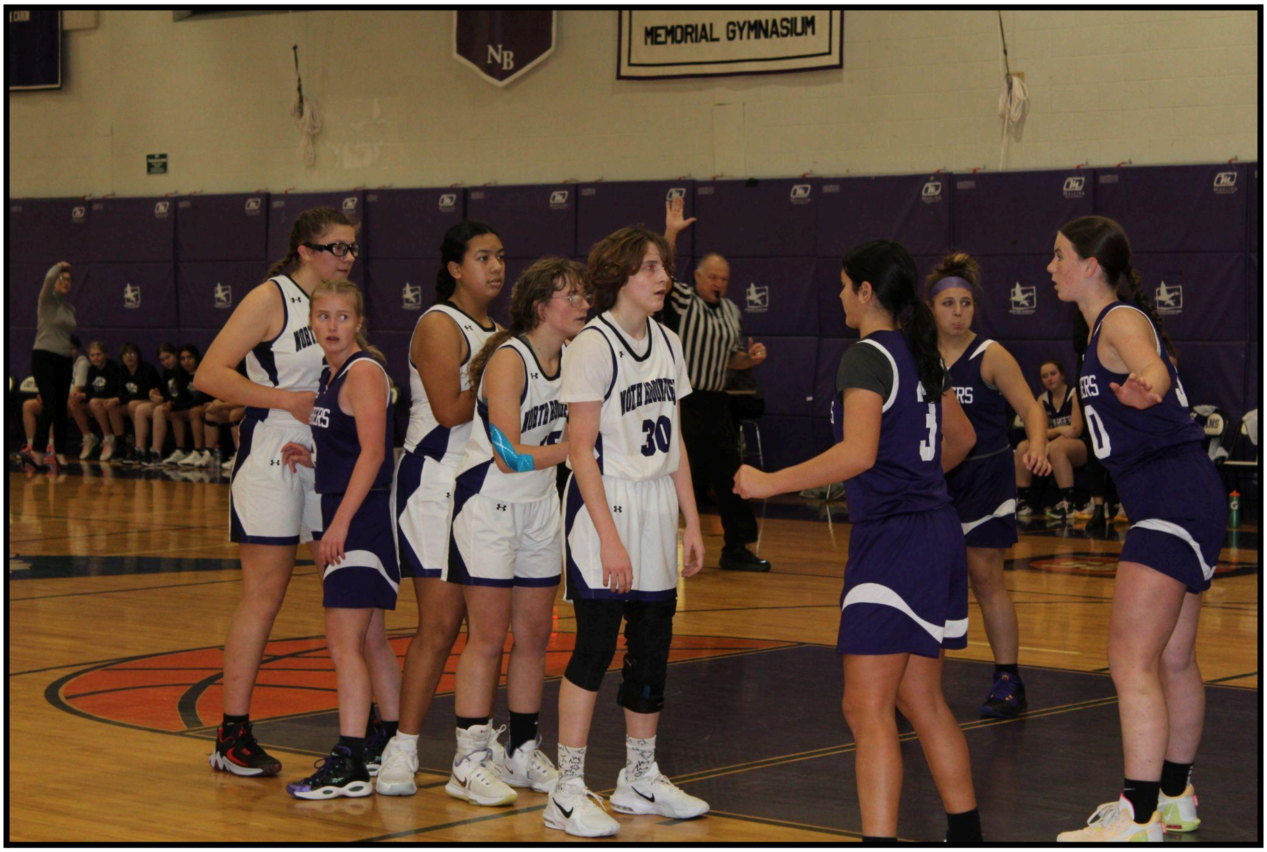
North Brookfield Public Schools



Proposed FY25 Operating Budget

Executive Summary

Developed By:

Tim McCormick; *Interim Superintendent*

with the support of the Administrators, Faculty,

and Staff of the North Brookfield Public Schools.

The strategic planning process is a systematic and inclusive approach designed to leverage the collective wisdom of stakeholders for the betterment of our school district. It begins with a crucial phase of Preparation and Orientation, where stakeholders are provided with essential information to ensure a shared understanding of the strategic planning process and their integral role within it. Ultimately, the strategic planning process culminates in the revision of the vision, mission, core values, and articulation of strategic objectives, reflecting the collective efforts and insights of the team. The following Mission statement; Vision statement, and Core Values will help guide our school district during the 2024-2025 school year and beyond.

Mission
Our mission is to empower every student to reach their full potential by providing a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and a sense of belonging. We are committed to continuous improvement, innovation, and the celebration of diversity, ensuring the delivery of high-quality education to all. We prepare our students for success in a global society by instilling qualities and skills to be contributing and effective citizens.
Vision
Our vision is to create a school community where every stakeholder feels valued, connected, and inspired. We aim to be a model of excellence in education, embracing diversity, and promoting equity, respect, and understanding. Our students are not only academically prepared but also equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in educational pursuits and their careers as a citizen in an interconnected world.
Core Values
***Inclusivity**: We believe in creating a welcoming and supportive environment where all students, staff, and families feel valued for their unique contributions.* ***Excellence**: We are dedicated to continuous improvement in curriculum and instruction to provide the highest quality education.* ***Equity:** We are committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed regardless of their background or abilities.* ***Collaboration:** We foster partnerships with industry experts, families , and the community to enhance learning opportunities.* ***Respect:** We promote a safe culture of respect, empathy, and open dialogue, where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated.*

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest"

-Benjamin Franklin

January 2024

Dear North Brookfield School Committee and North Brookfield Residents,

The purpose of this Executive Summary is to offer a comprehensive yet accessible overview of the FY25 Superintendent's Recommended School Operating Budget for the North Brookfield School Committee and all residents of North Brookfield. This document is meticulously crafted to ensure clarity, transparency, and a thorough understanding of our financial requests for the upcoming fiscal year.

Our primary aim is to present a budgetary overview that is both transparent and comprehensible to every North Brookfield resident. By offering detailed explanations alongside overarching themes, we aspire to foster community understanding and engagement in the budgetary process.

Key Highlights:

> **Transparency**: Every effort has been made to break down complex financial data into digestible sections, ensuring that our community members can easily grasp the rationale behind each budgetary item.
>
> **Comprehensive Overview:** While this document provides a high-level summary, it is interspersed with detailed explanations, enabling readers to delve deeper into specific areas of interest.
>
> **Accessibility:** With a reader-friendly format and an intuitive table of contents, residents can navigate this document effortlessly, accessing information pertinent to their concerns and interests.

As stewards of our community's educational resources, we are committed to fostering transparency, accountability, and collaboration throughout the budgetary process. We invite all North Brookfield stakeholders to review this Executive Summary and actively participate in shaping the future of our educational landscape.

Your feedback, insights, and perspectives are invaluable to us. Together, let us embark on this collaborative journey, ensuring that our schools continue to thrive, innovate, and provide unparalleled educational opportunities for all students.

The budget request for FY25 totals $7,828,605.89 which represents a $636,642.29 increase over FY24. A summary table is below:

Final Approved FY24 Budget	$7,191,963.60
FY24 Budget with Offsets	$8,541,391.09 ($1,349,427.49)
FY25 Recommended Budget	$7,828,605.89
FY25 Budget with Offsets	$9,822,021.95 ($1,993,416.06)
Increase Approved to Recommended ($)	$636,642.29
Increase (%)	8.85%

For more detail, the following table breaks down the FY25 budget further into three major accounting categories and includes an FTE[1] count. For FY25 the major budget driver is special education increases; salary increases, and additional costs for all transportation. **Salaries account 63% of the total FY25 budget, and 28% of the total increase.**

Account Type	FY24 FTE	FY24 Actual Budget	FY25 FTE	FY25 Budget	Difference ($)	Difference (%)
1- Salaries (Professional, Admin, and other)	101 FTE	$4,710,346.63	101 FTE	$4,931,110.94	$220,764.31	4.7%
2-SPEd tuition		*$1,629,894.48 *($1,142,726.31 proposed FY24); 3 additional students absorbed this year*		$1,727,962.56	$97,761.32	6%
3- Transportation		$980,011.58		$1,183,664.45	$203,652.87	20.7%

1. *FTE stands for Full Time Equivalent personnel. As an example, a full-time teacher or staff member is 1.0 FTE. A part-time teacher is a fraction of the FTE.*

Budget Increase with more context

I want to begin by acknowledging the reality that our budget has surpassed a 5% increase. Rest assured, my commitment to collaborating with the town of North Brookfield remains unwavering, as we work together to forge sustainable school budgets both now and in the future.

The development of the FY25 budget is a comprehensive reflection of the essential resources NBPS students require for their success. Yet, it is vital to recognize that our district is grappling with formidable challenges that extend beyond our sphere of influence. Specifically, three significant budgetary factors are exerting substantial pressure on our FY25 budget:

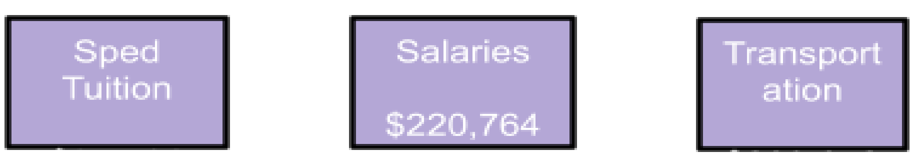
Special Education Tuition: The budget in this category has risen compared to FY24, primarily due to the State's decision to greenlight a 6% tuition increase for private special education schools. Furthermore, our FY25 budget projection anticipates an **increase** in the number of students necessitating private school placements. To offer some perspective, each out-of-district placement typically incurs costs exceeding $100,000.

Transportation: Our contract with AA transportation indicates a 6% uptick in the transportation budget for FY25, with a total increase of 30% anticipated over the next five years. The nearly 21% increase is due to the increased number of special education students requiring transportation for their out of district placements.

When we amalgamate these factors—the increases in Special Education Tuition amounting to $97,761, the $220,764 rise in the salaries budget, and the $203,652 escalation in transportation costs—they constitute the foremost drivers of our budgetary growth. Collectively, these three factors contribute to 82% of the total budget increase, which stands at 8.85%. To express it differently, in the absence of these three uncontrollable budget drivers, the budget increase would have been 1.6%.

Our mission persists in seeking collaborative and strategic solutions to navigate these challenges and ensure that our students receive the exceptional education they merit, despite the financial constraints we face.

Three major budget drivers for increases:



More detailed information about Special Education and Utilities can be found later in the Executive Summary.

Conclusion

Certainly, it is imperative to acknowledge that the FY25 Budget for North Brookfield's Public Schools reveals certain unfunded needs. While we strive for a balanced approach that avoids drastic reductions, the current budgetary framework predominantly facilitates the preservation of existing services rather than fostering innovation or expansion.

Understanding the financial constraints that permeate municipalities, it becomes evident that funding public schools presents a multifaceted challenge. The contemporary educational landscape is characterized by its complexity, with schools evolving from standardized learning environments to institutions that cater to an incredibly diverse student body. This transformation necessitates a heightened focus on specialized instruction, intricate social and emotional support mechanisms, and an unwavering commitment to student safety and security. Moreover, the heightened scrutiny from state and federal entities underscores our obligation to deliver equitable education to every student, without exception.

Looking forward, our collective aspiration remains steadfast: to ensure that North Brookfield Public School students benefit from an unparalleled educational experience. The students and families of North Brookfield inherently deserve a school district that is sufficiently funded, empowering our students to thrive and achieve their fullest potential.

Should you have any inquiries regarding this budget or any other educational matters, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am accessible via email at tmccormick@nbschools.org or by phone at 508-867-8148. Your unwavering support for the North Brookfield Public Schools is deeply appreciated, and together, we will continue to prioritize excellence and innovation in education.

Sincerely,

Tim McCormick

Note: In Massachusetts, the "Fiscal Year" runs from July 1 to June 30. The FY25 budget is for the time period July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025.

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How was the FY25 Budget Calculated?

Using our current-year budget as a starting point, the chart below shows a **sample** of the step-by-step progression of how we arrived at the Superintendent's Recommended Budget of **$7,908,084.39**. Explanations of the major budget drivers can be found later in the document.

Budget Action	Budget Impact ($)	Cumulative Total Budget	Cumulative % Increase
Starting Point: Final FY25 Budget	$7,191,963.60		
Salaries: increase in salaries including steps, lanes, and estimated cost-of-living increases	$4,931,110.94 ($220,764 increase)	$4,931,110.94	4.7%
Special Education: Increase in out of district tuition	$1,727,962.56 ($97,761.32 increase)	$6,659,073.50	35%
Facilities: Amount in NON-SALARY accounts	$529,932.94	$7,189,006.44	45.8%
Technology: Increase in NON-SALARY accounts	$150,114.98	$7,339,121.42	48.8%
Contracted Services:	$179,985.20	$7,519,106.62	52.5%

Why does the Special Education Budget continue to increase by such a large amount?

Special Education Budget Increase

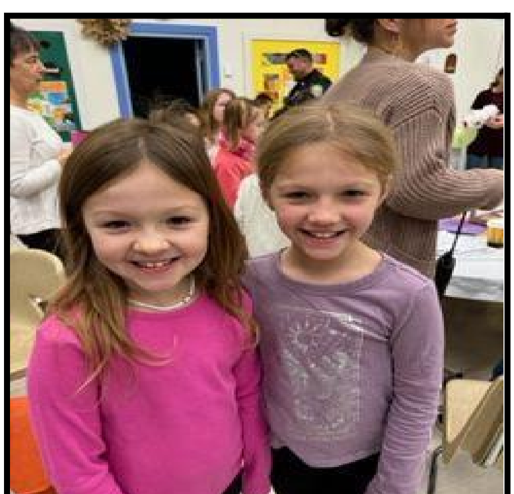
Navigating the complexities of school budgets often brings us to the intricate realm of Special Education funding, a domain marked by its inherent volatility. The crux of this volatility stems from our unwavering legal commitment to tailor education to the unique needs delineated in a student's Individualized Education Plan, commonly known as the "IEP." This means that as the needs of our students evolve, so too must our budgetary allocations, creating a dynamic and challenging financial landscape.

Compounding this challenge is the recent decision by the state's Operational Services Division (OSD) to sanction a 6% uptick in tuition for private special education institutions. To put this in perspective, this 6% increment sharply contrasts with an average annual OSD rate increase of around 2% over the past 13 years. While this figure may appear less daunting than last year's 14% surge, its ramifications are nonetheless significant, casting a shadow over Massachusetts public school districts that rely on out-of-district placements.

It is crucial to underscore our meticulous approach to budget development within the Special Education sector. Our financial projections for FY25 are rooted in a granular, student-centric methodology. Specifically, our budgetary estimates exclusively pertain to students anticipated to necessitate private placements in the upcoming academic year. There exists no "contingency" within this budgetary framework, emphasizing the precision and specificity with which we approach these critical financial decisions.

Out of District Placements

Placement	# of Students	Projected FY24 Budget	Actual FY24 Budget	# of Students	FY25 Budget
Collaborative	2	$229,153.06	$104,905.20	2	$111,119.00
Private Day	7	$674,935.64	$826,058.86	7	$875,667.49
Residential	2	$238,637.61	$698,933.32	2	$740,869.33
Grand Total	**11 (8)**	**$1,142,726.31**	**$1,629,894.48**	11 (plus 2 1:1 paraprofessionals)	**$1,727,692.56**
Tuition Difference 24/25					**$97,761.32**
Cumulative % increase					**6%**



Budget Reallocations
(Net $0 budget impact)

At present, we are not proposing any budget reallocations for North Brookfield's school district. Our focus remains on maintaining efficient and effective operations within our current financial framework, without making immediate changes to the budget distribution. There is always potential for this to change throughout the ongoing budget process.

Budget Additions
(Net $0 budget impact)

At present, we are not proposing any budget additions for North Brookfield's school district. Our focus remains on maintaining efficient and effective operations within our current financial framework, without making immediate changes to the budget distribution. There is always potential for this to change throughout the ongoing budget process.

Using Outside Revenue to Offset the Operating budget

The North Brookfield Public Schools budget is significantly supported by various external revenue streams, which help to reduce the overall operating costs. These sources include:

Federal Grants: These are funds allocated by the federal government, often earmarked for specific educational programs or initiatives.

State Reimbursement Programs: Such programs typically involve the state government reimbursing the district for certain expenditures, which might include special education, transportation, or other specific needs.

Other Sources: This category includes diverse income streams like pre-school tuition fees and possibly local or private grants.

The total contribution from these outside revenue sources amounts to $**1,993,416.06** million, playing a crucial role in funding the district's budget.

For a detailed breakdown of how these funds are allocated, a chart or a detailed report is usually provided. This chart would typically show the specific amounts contributed by each source and how these funds are distributed across different budget categories or programs within the district.

By leveraging these external sources of funding, the district can more effectively manage its financial resources, ensuring that essential educational services are maintained while keeping the local tax burden in check. This approach reflects a strategic financial planning effort to maximize available resources for the benefit of the educational community.

Total Revenue by Source

Budget Offset	FY'24	FY'25	Incremental Changes ($)	Offset to account type	Notes
ESSER III (FY'23/FY'24)	$267,209	$0	$267,209	Grant has ended	
SPED Circuit Breaker Reimbursement	$350 projected; ($615,164.00 actual)	$800,000 (projected) plus 298,341.33 carry over	$483,177.33	Out of District Placements	
SPED IDEA Grant 240	$154,957	$154,957 (plus $74,000 carryover)	$74,000	SPED salary costs; supplies	
SPEd Early Childhood Grant 262	$4,163	$4,163	$0	Supplies	
Early Learning Center Tuition	$115,210	$90,000	$25,210	Salaries; Testing	
Student Gift	$24,162.25	$0	$24,162.25		
School Choice	$337,500	$226,843.40(projected) plus $45,450 carryover)	$65,206.60	Salaries	
Title I Grant	$101,657	$107,955	$6,298	Salaries; Reading supports	
SRSA	$31,173	$31,173	$0	PPS/ODP	
Rural School Aid	$61,000	$61,585.28	$585.28	Technology	
Title IIA Grant	$16,144	$16,144	$0	PD/Course Reimbursement	

Lost Books	$0	10,000	$10,000	Curriculum	
Title IV	$10,000	$10,000	$0	Contracted services	
AM/PM Program	$0	$24,022.39	$24,022.39	Pre-K salaries	
Sped Stabilization	$0	$20,914.08	$20,914.08	Out of District Placements	
E-Rate	$17,867.58	$17,867.58	$0	Technology	
TOTAL	**$1,756,206.83**	**$1,993,416.06**	**$237,209.23**		

The two largest offsets are the **Special Education Circuit Breaker** and the **Federal Special Education Entitlement Grant (240)**. Definitions for both are below.

The state's Special Education **Circuit Breaker** program reimburses local school districts for a portion of their costs for educating severely high-needs special education students. The state reimburses a portion of district costs above a certain threshold and the precise reimbursement formula changes year-to-year depending on the total amount allocated for this line item in a given fiscal year and on the level of claims statewide.

The purpose of the **IDEA Federal Special Education Entitlement Grant (240)** is to provide funds to ensure that eligible students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education that includes special education and related services designed to meet their individual needs.

There are a few major changes that I want to highlight:

1. **$184,836 increase to Circuit Breaker Offset**

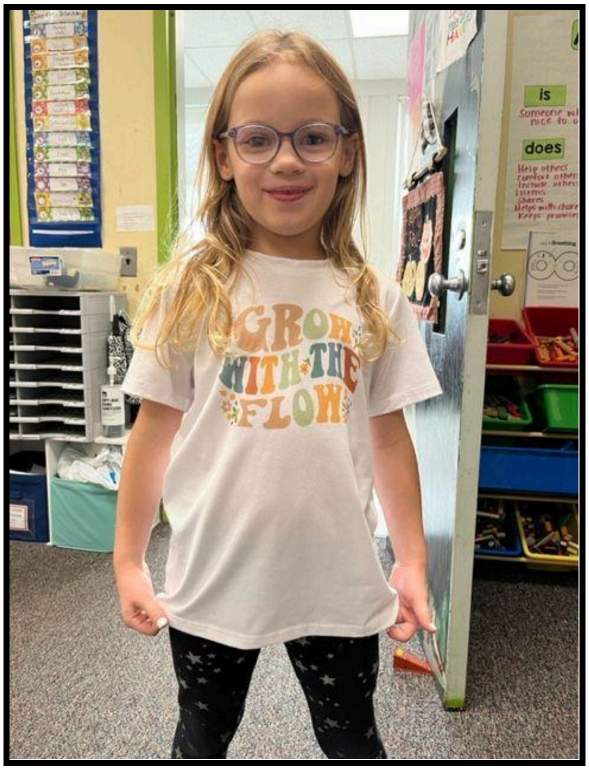
The projected $800,000 for FY25 under the circuit breaker, largely attributed to the integration of three (3) additional students this year, is set to significantly mitigate the 6% increase imposed by the Office of Student Development (OSD) for the current year. All of these funds are being reinvested into the budget, with no allocation for savings at this time.

2. **$267,209 decrease from the remaining ESSER III:**

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) was created to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on schools nationwide. North Brookfield has benefited from this fund through three phases of allocations:

- ESSER I: $65,002
- ESSER II: $265,813
- ESSER III: $574,924

Over the past two fiscal years, we primarily allocated this funding towards vital teaching roles and some educational materials. However, as ESSER funding is not ongoing, we are now facing a financial challenge. The "fiscal cliff" arises when temporary funds are used for ongoing costs. Consequently, we must find new funding sources for the teaching positions initially supported by ESSER, to ensure their continuity.



Are there needs that are going unfunded?

Indeed, there are valid and necessary requirements not included in the Superintendent's Recommended Budget for North Brookfield. This situation arises from the reality of limited funding, which necessitates my role in creating a budget that is both sensible and sustainable for the community. Nevertheless, I consider it crucial to communicate the district's needs, irrespective of the current financial situation. This ensures that when funding becomes available, it can be allocated effectively, without any unexpected requirements emerging. In essence, it's vital to recognize that the absence of funding for a particular need doesn't equate to the elimination of that need.

How Does North Brookfield's Spending on Schools Compare to Other Towns?

Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) uses a metric known as "per-pupil expenditure" to assess spending across school districts. This measurement provides a standardized method for comparing spending across the 322 public school districts in the Commonwealth.

In this context, it's noteworthy that North Brookfield's per-pupil spending is relatively low. To ensure a fair comparison, we analyzed our spending in relation to districts that either: 1) are deemed comparable by DESE via its District Analysis and Review Tools (DARTs), or 2) are part of the Southern Worcester Education Collaborative (SWCEC), of which we are a member.

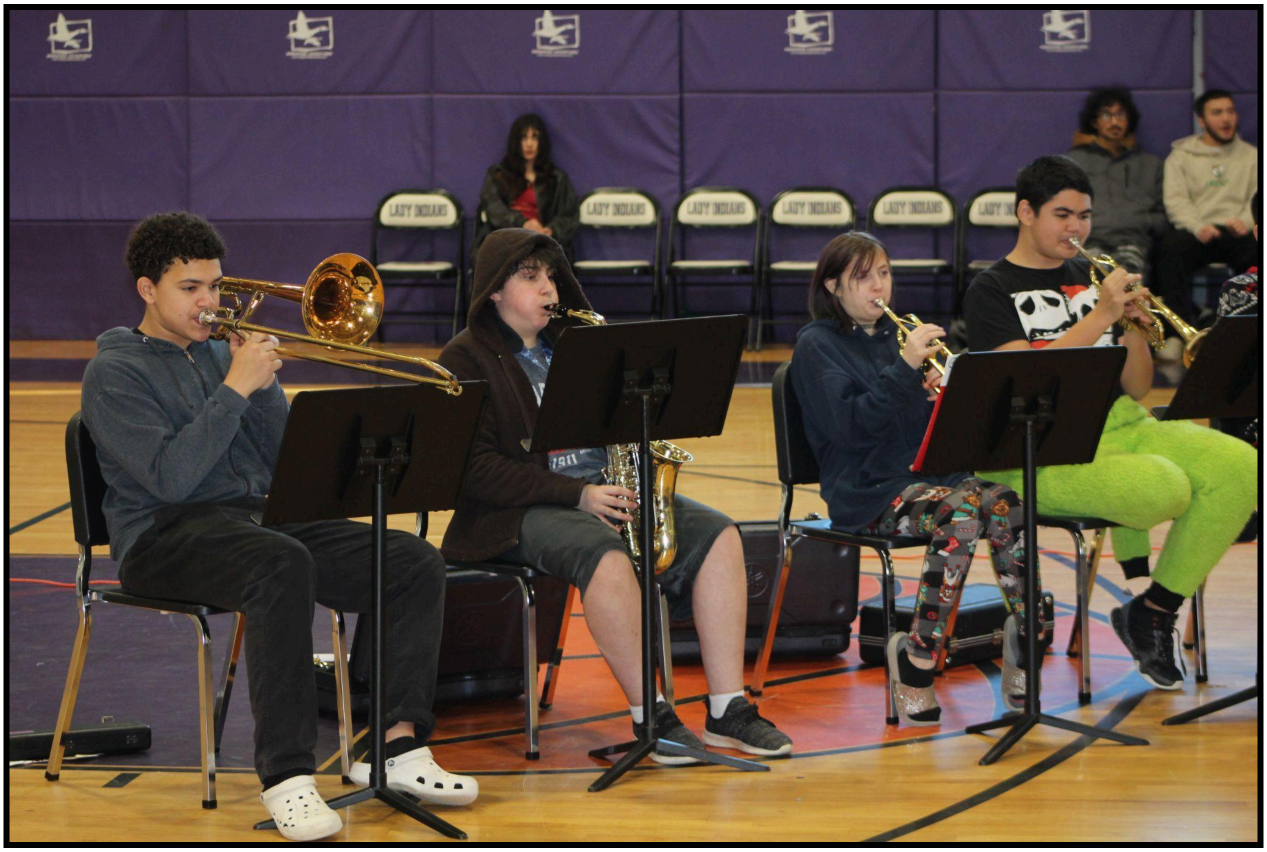
The analysis shows that North Brookfield's expenditure of $17,162.11 per pupil aligns closely with its DART peers, yet is significantly less than many nearby districts. When compared to 17 districts, North Brookfield spends less per student than 7 of them and more than **$2,000** below the state average of $19,113 per pupil.

This data suggests that North Brookfield offers good value for its educational spending. However, this efficiency comes with challenges. Our school facilities require updates and repairs, a result of prolonged periods of maintenance deferral. Moreover, a portion of our school programs, including athletics and extracurricular activities, rely on user fees for funding. This approach indirectly shifts some financial responsibilities onto families. Furthermore, our educators and support staff often face constraints in funding for supplies and materials, echoing a "do more with less" sentiment. Additionally, there are unmet needs in teaching and learning that could benefit from increased funding and enhancing programs.

It's crucial to understand that addressing these needs is a long-term process, constrained by the town's limited resources. Our aim is to run the school district efficiently and effectively, even in times of financial scarcity. Acknowledging our fiscal reality is essential for strategic planning, ensuring that when additional funding becomes available, it is allocated to areas of greatest need.

District Analysis and Review Tools (DART comparisons)

School Name (DART Schools)	Total Expenditures per Pupil
Ware	$15,904.34
Winchendon	$16,066.88
Hoosac Valley Regional	$17,090.72
North Brookfield	$17,162.11
Avon	$18,771.55
Gateway	$19,062.60
Monson	$19,243.81
State Totals	$19,459.53
North Adams	$19,460.82
Mohawk Trail	$23,807.15
Hull	$26,154.61



School Name (Nearby Schools)	Total Expenditures per Pupil
Auburn	$15,022.63
Belchertown	$15,178.61
Brimfield	$15,412.34
Brookfield	$15,420.41
Holland	$15,904.34
Leicester	$16,044.98
Palmer	$16,569.41
Quabbin	$16,982.58
North Brookfield	$17,162.11
Quaboag Regional	$17,400.14
Southbridge	$17,549.40
Spencer-E Brookfield	$17,883.41
Sturbridge	$18,352.02

Tantasqua	$19,062.20
Wachusett	$19,261.52
State Average (2021)	$19,459.53

Visual Budget Breakdown: