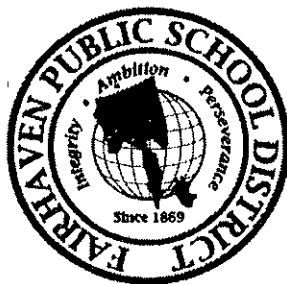


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May 8, 2019

Senator Mark Montigny
State House Rm 312C
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senator Montigny: *+ Rep. Straus*

On Saturday May 4, 2019, the Town of Fairhaven concluded its annual town meeting. Our school district relies on our town appropriation annually to fund our educational program. Leading into this budget cycle it was with the highest degree of urgency that the funding gaps that were identified in the FBRC findings of 2015 needed to be addressed. The fact that yet another funding cycle (FY 2020) has concluded without adopted legislative changes to how the state funds public schools has our town at a "financial and educational tipping point."

A funding gap exists in Fairhaven between the town appropriation and the school district level service request for FY 20. The gap is \$442,247. The funding gap is primarily in Out of District Tuition and Special Education Transportation. Our school department's ability to absorb budget reductions beyond our level service budget request no longer exists.

The FY 20 Foundation Formula for Fairhaven underestimates health insurance and special education by \$2,863,674.00 using the proposed legislation in House 1 for changes to the foundation budget calculation for FY 20.

Over and above health insurance and special education costs, level service dollars are being diverted from instruction to deal with the onslaught of behavioral issues that occur in our schools. The current environment that exists within our schools today is exponentially more complex than the issues that took place one generation ago. Children affected by trauma are displaying actions that require an immediate increase of adult services. Within the past five years, we have re-apportioned classroom teacher budgeted dollars to behavior interventionist, school psychologist and social workers/adjustment counselor positions. The components that make up the current foundation formula of 1993 are not the realities that take place in the educational system of 2020.

The substantial gap that exists between the communities that can and do spend above the foundation formula and those communities that cannot or do not has created the haves and the have-nots. Today, the average district is spending approximately 126% above foundation. There are about 160 communities that spend at or near foundation levels. Fairhaven is one of those communities. While all communities are measured utilizing the same statewide accountability system, one cannot claim that a race to educational achievement is fair if the participants begin from such diverse starting points.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education DESE data shows that Fairhaven's Per Pupil Expenditure is \$11,715.00. The average of the comparable districts in our region is \$13,743.00. Per pupil spending for Fairhaven is last in per in-district pupil expenditures compared to districts with similar student demographics, and similar wealth (personal income and property value), in our region.

Fairhaven is in the second 20% from the bottom Wealth Quintile, along with the communities of Swansea, Somerset, West Bridgewater, Abington, Holbrook, and Seekonk in the MASS Budget Analysis of Wealth Needs.

Based upon this data, why is our percentage increase of 1.6% in the FY 20 Governor's Budget and 2.1 % in the FY 20 House Ways and Means Budget below Swansea 4.5 %, and 4.5% respectively, Somerset 8.8% and 9.1% respectively, West Bridgewater 9.4% and 9.8% respectively, Abington 13.7% and 14.3% respectively, and Seekonk 22.2%, and 22.9%?


A comparative analysis of the Wealth Quintile from the MASS Budget analysis of wealth needs with the percentile increases provided to districts via both House 1 and the House Ways and Means proposed budget reveals that communities that are in the top 20% Wealth Quintile such as, Hingham, Westwood, Newton, Wellesley, Concord, Cohasset, Needham, and Weston, receive a greater percentage increase than Fairhaven which is in the Second 20% from the bottom Wealth Quintile. Communities that are in the second wealthiest quintile such as, Natick, Burlington, Belmont, Scituate, Norwell, Cambridge, Andover, Beverly, Bedford and Arlington receive a greater percentage increase than Fairhaven, which is in the Second 20% from the bottom Wealth Quintile.

This information leads me to believe that Fairhaven is being treated as a "forgotten sub-urban" district. On March 21, 2019, Michael Jonas published the following in Commonwealth Magazine, *"Districts without a lot of property wealth to tax, but also without a high population of low-income students who generate added state aid, fall through the cracks under the various formula fixes."* Backup material to each of the claims made within this letter relative to Fairhaven is attached in a file entitled, "Foundation Formula Gap Analysis."

Once in a generation adults must come together to make bold decisions that pave the road for our children's future. The legislative and executive branches need to come together, get this right, and do this now. The final outcome cannot be negligible, mild, or short-term for some, but must be major, grand, and significant for ALL.

Thank you for your time and your continued efforts on behalf of what is in the best interest of our Commonwealth, our children, and their future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Baldwin", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert N. Baldwin Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools
Fairhaven Public Schools