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February 15, 2023

By mail and by email to constituent.services@state.ma.us

Her Excellency Governor Maura Healey
Her Honor Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Office of the Governor
Room 28
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Masconomet Regional School District FY 2024 Budget

Dear Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll:

As members of the Masconomet Regional District School Committee, we are writing to you about a concerning issue in public education that we believe will affect many districts. We ask that you advocate for appropriate state funding that would help to address this issue.

The Operational Services Division (OSD) of the State's Executive Office of Administration and Finance approved increases to special education private school tuition rates of 14% in FY24. For the last 13 years the OSD rate increase averaged under 2% annually (well within the limits of Prop 2½), so a rate increase of 14% for the next school year will significantly and negatively impact Masconomet's FY24 budget.

It is estimated that this 14% increase will cost our District \$643,000. For perspective, that would mean that OOD costs alone would be an increase of over 2% of the prior year's total operating assessment to our district's towns. We are also facing a \$200,000 increase in special education transportation.

With this increase and without any funding from the Commonwealth, FY24 will see teacher layoffs, existing program cuts, across-the-board fee increases, additional requests for local property tax overrides, and, come fall, larger class sizes in innumerable communities throughout the Commonwealth. All of these will have long-term negative effects on all of our students and schools, who are still reeling from the effects of a pandemic.

This is a shocking and unprecedented rate increase. Our school districts simply cannot absorb such an increase to pay private (and in many cases for-profit) institutions. Certainly, all schools, public and private, are facing the pressure of this generational period of inflation. It is, however, unreasonable and unsustainable to expect local communities to pick up such a significant increase when local budgets may only be able to afford a fraction of that increase in FY24.

Approved special education schools in Massachusetts provide a valuable and important service and education to many students throughout the Commonwealth, and we appreciate and acknowledge the wonderful work of our colleagues in the private school setting. But a tuition increase of 14% will inevitably mean a reduction in services to general education students and in-district special education students unless there is a corresponding and significant increase in state funding for FY24 and beyond.

We support the North Shore Superintendent Round Table Superintendents who have requested that Governor Healey, through her budget, provide funding to cover 12% of the 14% increase.


We need your help in ensuring that Masconomet as well as other schools in the Commonwealth are able to provide all our students with the educational opportunities that our students deserve and that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts prides itself on delivering. However, without additional state funding, our educational system is at risk.

We would be happy to discuss this further with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Masconomet Regional District School Committee

By: _____


Melissa A. Gnoza Ogden, Vice Chair
Chair, Budget Subcommittee

Cc by email only to:

John Erickson, Co-Chair, Middleton Finance Committee
Richard Gregorio, Co-Chair, Middleton Finance Committee
Che Elwell, Chair, Topsfield Finance Committee
Michael White, Chair, Boxford Finance Committee
Kosta E. Prentakis, Chair, Middleton Select Board
Marshall Hook, Chair, Topsfield Select Board
Barbara G. Jessel, Chair, Boxford Select Board
Jackie Bresnahan, Assistant Town Administrator, Middleton
Kevin Hartunian, Town Administrator, Topsfield
Matthew Coogan, Town Administrator, Boxford
Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent, Masconomet Regional School District
Jeffrey Sands, Assistant Superintendent, Masconomet Regional School District
Members, Masconomet Regional District School Committee