



# *Triton Regional School District*

*Respect - Integrity - Excellence for All*

## *General District-Wide Programs & Operations*



## *Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request Book*

## *Context: FY22 Budget Development*

---

The world as we know it changed early on in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, just as we were finishing the development of the FY21 budget. As the virus developed and spread, all our lives grew more impacted with each day that passed. Schools across the state closed down on March 13, 2020 with the anticipation of reopening weeks later. However, that never happened, and the presumed brief hiatus of in-person learning ultimately morphed into a closure for the balance of the 2019/2020 school year.

With the pandemic continuing to wreak havoc locally and across our country, the reopening of schools for the 2020/2021 school year has been incredibly challenging for everyone. The process and learning model was expected to be required and consistent across the state, but that decision was shifted to a local control option over the summer. As a result, the burden of planning and provisioning for our reopening fell entirely on local resources. Countless hours of planning, meeting, adjusting, and fine-tuning was completed by district staff and School Committee members over the summer and early fall. However, as the uncertain nature of this virus lingers, we have experienced a continued shifting between fully remote learning and partial in-person learning as we attempt to balance safety with providing for the needs of all students.

It is in that context that we begin the development of the Fiscal Year 2022 budget, with the consistent level of uncertainty the only constant as we attempt to proactively plan and provision for the balance of the current year and ensure we account for the impacts that may linger into FY22. Overall we have seen a reduction in student enrollment as families have chosen to home school or transfer to a private school based on our model for this year during the pandemic. While student enrollment has dropped for this year, we have had a significant increase in the need for staffing of a fully "remote academy" option for families who do not feel comfortable and safe with in-person learning for their children. Some of those increased staffing needs were offset by enrollment decreases and allowed for reallocation of existing staff. However, there was far more need than available staff, and the remote academy and other supports needed for challenges brought about by the pandemic have largely been new spending. In addition to added staffing for the current year, there were also significant investments made to improve the safety of our facilities, particularly with regard to indoor air quality in all district buildings.

As we look to the development of next year's budget, we continue to live with the challenge of planning with many unknowns. At this point in time we are assuming that September will bring a return to more full in-person learning, likely in a 'new normal' with protections like masks and other measures still in place. Based on conversations with those families that unenrolled their children this year, we anticipate the majority of those students will return in September. Further, based on that return to a 'normal' schedule for the fall, we anticipate that we will not have a need for fully remote classrooms as we currently have them setup.

To that end, we are calibrating our assumptions for enrollments and staffing in this budget to where they were prior to the adjustments made for the 2020/2021 school year, and we are proposing a level services budget in that regard. This budget is based on the assumption that our student enrollment returns to pre-COVID levels, that staffing returns to their more traditional roles, and our class sizes balance back to where they were assumed to be for the 2020/2021 year. However, we still need to remain agile and ready to react to the facts as they emerge with the trajectory of the pandemic this spring and summer, so we also need to plan for continued uncertainty as we finish this year and look to next. To that end, we will rely on Federal COVID relief funding to offset those unknowns in both the current year and into next.

We have received several new Federal COVID relief grants in the current year, but added costs for safety, mitigation, and staffing as noted above for the current school year have largely consumed those funds. The newest round of funding that was approved in December has not yet been confirmed in regards to exact district amounts, but it is anticipated to be roughly \$800,000. The detail below outlines the expended or anticipated expenditures for each of the various Federal relief grants in both FY21 and FY22. For any funds not expended in FY21, the anticipated carry forward into FY22 is noted, whether as an assumed offset to specific costs, or to be used as a source to mitigate further unknowns both in this and in the coming year.

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Confirmed and/or Projected Use</b>
Remote Learning Technology Essentials Funding	\$105,096	This competitive grant award was used to offset the first of four lease payments for new student Chromebooks to achieve a 1:1 ratio for all students. This grant was fully utilized in FY21.
CARES Act - ESSER	\$215,388	This grant award has been earmarked for two different purposes, with half budgeted to be used in FY22 for the second of four lease payments on student Chromebooks to achieve a 1:1 ratio for all students. The balance will be used in FY22 to offset an increase in pandemic related out of district special education tuition costs.
CvRF - Covid Relief Funding	\$502,425	This grant will be fully utilized in FY21 on costs incurred as a direct result of the COVID pandemic. \$160,000 was allocated to remote technology and instruction, \$125,000 towards special education services, and \$217,000 towards ensuring that our school buildings are safe environments for our students and staff.
CARES Act II - ESSER II	\$800,000	This grant award is anticipated in FY21 as a result of the COVID Relief legislation approved at a federal level in December 2020. The District will utilize these funds to continue responding to needs arising as a result of the COVID pandemic. The District is awaiting an official allocation from DESE, but current indications suggest the award will be approximately \$800,000.

## *Process: FY22 Budget Development Format*

---

Given the atypical context under which we are developing the budget for next year, we agreed a commensurately different approach on the process was warranted. We normally involve each Principal and School Council Co-Chair by having them make presentations directly to the Committee on the specific needs for their school. That is followed by each district administrator providing a proposal that outlines the needs for their domain or department with a district wide perspective. The final piece to that puzzle is a proposal of the regular cost of doing business to bring our current services into the new year, often referred to as the costs associated with a level services budget. That process will be condensed this year.

The approval process from last year is important context in the development of next year's budget. The formal approval of this year's budget was delayed last spring to June because of the pandemic causing town meetings not being able to convene as they normally would. In working with our towns between March and June, they confirmed their continued support of this current year's budget, even with the proposed significant increases and in light of the challenges the pandemic was creating. It was clear through our discussions that while they supported our FY21 spending plan, they anticipated considerable funding challenges that would emerge in Fiscal Year 2022. With that process fresh in our memory, and with those challenges now having become a reality, we have set our sights on prioritizing a budget request that is primarily based upon the fixed increases needed for a level services budget in FY22, while only proposing new spending in areas of key district-wide, strategic need.

This decision was not made lightly, and was confirmed after careful consideration of all the various inputs that contribute to realizing an accurate and appropriate budget. As we have been discussing and lamenting for many years, the failure of the state to adequately fund education in the Commonwealth and in our district has created many areas of need. Those needs have been discussed each year, including staffing and programs that address the existing academic and social/emotional challenges our students are presenting, as well as innovative new programs and opportunities that will advance our students' success. The decision to streamline the process and not talk about those needs this year was not done to ignore or deny their importance, but in an attempt to respond to the overwhelming financial challenges our towns and communities are facing because of this pandemic. We need to get back to talking about innovation and improvement, and we will in future years, but in the short term we need to be responsive to the extraordinary circumstances we are all working and living under.

To condense the process, we have combined the first two steps of the budget development this year, incorporating the initial presentations (usually 2-4 meetings) and the weekend Committee workshop into a single workshop. This document will provide the basis of the discussion for that meeting, reviewing all current spending along with those areas we are proposing strategic new spending. For any new spending being proposed, it is done with an understanding of the impact but a sense of urgency with the needs outlined.

Unless otherwise noted below, all spending and budget lines are assumed to be **level funded** to FY21 levels for the coming year. This is true for all school based budgets, as well as all district wide spending in the areas of Curriculum & Instruction, Technology, Athletics, Facilities Operations, and Special Education. The primary cost increases for each year across all schools and departments are personnel costs, and those are represented in the aggregate as total district increases below. Line by line detail for expenditures assumed in all school and district wide supplies, materials, and contracted services lines are not included in this presentation in an effort to streamline the process, especially since they are proposed to be level funded unless noted below. However, that level of detail for costs that contribute to all lines is contained in FY21 proposals and can be found on our website at <http://bit.ly/36aJLJn>.

The next two sections outline the fixed costs we are obligated to incur to provide the same level of services in the current year, followed by details about strategic new spending we are proposing to address imminent needs.

## ***Fixed Costs: The cost of providing level services in FY22***

---

As noted above, we have assumed a level services budget as our starting point. The following pages detail all of the increases currently projected for next year. These totals are outlined in the aggregate by category, and not shown with line by line, school by school detail. Because we are assuming level services from last year, the FY21 budget document requests provide full detail of all line item details and projected expenditures for this coming year. The detail on the following pages reflects all projected increases. If a spending category or line is not listed with an increase below, then those lines are proposed as level-funded in the FY22 budget. Full line by line detail of all increases and changes will be provided with the Tentative Budget when presented on February 10th, and reflective of feedback and input from the School Committee through discussions in the coming weeks.

The majority of the spending outlined below includes the basic fixed operating costs of the district, ranging from salaries and benefits to transportation and facilities operations. As fixed costs due to necessary operations or contractual salary increases, we have to assume these increased costs as we enter the budget discussions about what we are able to provide in regards to new services.

For each spending category on the following pages we have included the change in spending along with a brief description of the rationale for the expected change.

**Adjustments to General Fund Spending from FY21 Budget Totals:**

General Fund Expense Line	Total Projected Increase	Notes
Steps - All Unions	\$315,547	This includes all contractually obligated steps on the salary schedule for all five (5) collective bargaining associations ( <i>teachers, IA's, cafeteria, custodians, and head custodians</i> ).
COLA - All Unions	\$464,705	This includes all contractually obligated Cost Of Living Adjustments in the five (5) collective bargaining associations noted above, with an assumption being carried for cafe, and custodial unions currently in negotiations.
COLA - All Non-Union Employees	\$73,506	This includes a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment for all non-union employees (all Admin and Support staff) which are not obligated by contracts.
Projected Column Movement	\$108,925	This includes the total anticipated costs for column movement for teachers and IA's who notified us as required by their contracts.
Salary Reserve	\$52,562	This increase represents the funds needed to increase the salary contingency back to \$140,000, reflective of roughly 0.5% of the total payroll costs to be used to offset unexpected changes throughout the year.
FY21 Staffing Reductions	<b>(\$167,533)</b>	Savings within the FY21 budget were identified after the budget was finalized in March as we grappled with potential cuts. The majority of those were one time savings, including a premium holiday for health insurance, and delayed hiring of needed positions (custodians, half time ETC, etc) that are now being filled. However, there were two elementary classroom positions (Gr. 6 at PGS, Grade 2 at SES) that were able to be reduced through attrition, and we anticipate not having to replace those positions for the coming year.
<b>Salary Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$847,712</b>	
Medical/Dental Insurance	\$104,416	This increase assumes a 5% increase to all medical and dental premium costs, the highest possible increase, but with a chance that will be confirmed lower in the weeks ahead.
Liability/Workers Comp Ins	\$21,281	This increase includes the projected cost increases for general insurance coverages for next year.

Unemployment Insurance	\$10,000	This increase includes the projected cost increase in unemployment costs next year.
Retirement & Taxes	\$137,046	This increase includes the cost increases for both payroll taxes and Essex Regional Retirement System
<b>Benefits Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$272,743</b>	
SPED Out of District	\$206,732	<p>This increase in Out of District Tuitions is directly related to the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in more out of district placements this spring and into next year. In addition, some students who would have been prepared to graduate are struggling academically and emotionally. Therefore the district may be obligated to provide services beyond age 18.</p> <p>This increase reflects the current projected high water mark and is based on the current circumstances and the information available at this moment in time. As we work through the budget process we will likely see changes over the next several months. As noted above, this increase is offset by \$103,631 of the Federal ESSER Grant.</p> <p><b><i>Unlike previous years, it is worth noting that we are projecting level funding needed for Special Education Transportation and Contracted Services.</i></b></p>
General Transportation	\$46,500	Increases in this line reflect contractual increases in daily rates for all runs, and includes late buses 2 days per week at the Middle & High School campus.
School Choice Tuitions	\$5,680	This increase is reflective of the enrollments confirmed as of December, 2020, offset by seniors anticipated to graduate in June, 2021.
Charter School Tuitions	\$0	We expect some changes in enrollment, and this figure will be further clarified with the release of the Governor's budget on January 27th. .
General Technology	\$0	We expect some reallocation of costs, but overall there is no anticipated increase across the combined technology lines.

Athletics	\$4,610	This increase reflects contractual increases in coaching stipends per the TRTA agreement. All other costs/lines are level funded, with some reallocation between lines expected.
<b>Programming Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$263,522</b>	
Custodial Supplies & Contracted Services	\$0	We expect some reallocation of costs within the custodial supply and contracted services line items, but with no overall increase.
Utilities & Services	<b>(\$85,000)</b>	This decrease is reflective of contracted gas and electrical rates, adjusted for projected usage.
<b>Operations Subtotal:</b>	<b>(\$85,000)</b>	
<b>Total Projected Increases</b>	<b>\$1,298,977</b>	

### *Strategic Needs: New spending based on highest priority needs*

There are five key areas outlined below that are new areas of need brought about by the COVID pandemic, or that are a continuation of key strategic priorities that we have identified in recent years. Each of these spending proposals are outlined below, but they are not arranged in order of importance or priority. Further, some of this spending is one time in nature and may be eligible for pandemic related grant funding as outlined above. As such, this proposal includes total projected costs with the overall financial impact to be reviewed and confirmed in the weeks ahead.

**1. Tuition – PHASED IN Free Full Day Kindergarten (Year 2)** *(Increase of \$75,000)*

This additional funding continues the commitment to a phased approach to provide Free Universal Full Day Kindergarten by 2023. This commitment began in the FY21 budget as the first of a three (3) year phased reduction in tuition and corresponding increase in district costs. This additional \$75,000 is the 2nd of three budget increases and keeps us on track for a completely free Kindergarten program by September, 2023. The FY21 tuition rate was reduced from \$2,950 to \$2,000, and the additional funding proposed would reduce tuition to \$1,000 for the program starting in September, 2022.

The District has offered tuition based Full Day Kindergarten for many years along with most other cities and towns in Massachusetts. However, while we have routinely discussed finding creative ways to offer full day Kindergarten free of charge, we have not kept pace with the vast majority of school districts across the state in doing so. More than ninety percent (90%) of school districts across the state offer free full day Kindergarten, including our neighboring towns, and there is increased talk each year about legislation that would require a full day tuition free program across the state.

## **2. SPECIAL EDUCATION - SPECIALIZED PROGRAMMING**

*(Increase of \$100,00)*

Over the past several years the Triton School District has seen an increase of children with complex disabilities. These students require intensive therapies, specialized programming, assistive technology, medical care, and assistance with all daily living skills. There is currently a need to develop a specialized program with a Teacher who has specific training to meet these student's needs.

As we continue to review the staffing and program needs for the district as a whole, there may be some capacity to create this new program within our existing staff. While that is not anticipated to be possible, any adjustments would be confirmed by March.

Students who would qualify for this program would require a 1:1 Instructional Assistant, but these students already have one assigned to them in their current setting, so there would be no added cost for that staffing. The cost for this program assumes a single Teacher with benefits, as well as some cost for materials and equipment to set up the program.

This would be a long term funding commitment and not one time spending, so they would not be a viable expenditure to charge to the COVID grant funding. However, this investment would provide programming for multiple students, where a single student would likely incur costs in excess of this figure for an outside placement.

## **3. CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION**

*(Increase of \$42,000)*

We are now into our 6th year with implementing the Math in Focus curriculum in all Kindergarten through grade 8 classes. The current version of the program has received several upgrades, we continue to use the original version of the curriculum that we purchased 6 years ago. The most recent update came in 2020 and includes a substantial upgrade to the available online resources that have become vital during our shift to remote learning, and we anticipate they will be as critical as we look towards a return to routine in-person learning. In addition to the online component, the newest version of Math in Focus has significantly improved print materials in the Kindergarten through Grade 6 programs. In addition, they are no longer producing the consumables that align with the current version of our program. To that end, we need to update our program for the 2021/2022 school year to MiF 2020 for grades K through 6. Grades 7 and 8 will remain with the legacy program.

The additional cost for the upgraded curriculum is \$85,000 for next year. However, there are several adjustments within the 2400 Text/Instructional Materials line, including a decrease of roughly \$84,000 as the final payments are being made for the following programs this year in FY21.

- Civics Course Text 8th Grade (\$7,250)
- HS Biology Text (\$16,000)
- Empowering Writers Narrative (\$10,000)
- History and Social Sciences Resources (\$50,677)

Those decreases offset by added costs of \$41,000 for expanded online interventions and resources including:

- STEMScopes Subscription Cost Increase (\$9,000)
- Additional i-Ready Math Benchmark and added tools (\$9,000)
- Empowering Writers online Subscription for all staff (6,000)
- Reflex and Gizmo Math - Online Instruction & Intervention (\$12,000)
- Added Remote Setting Curriculum Materials (\$5,000)

With the savings of \$84,000 in this line and offsetting those with the increase of \$41,000 for the resources noted above, that leaves \$43,000 to be used to offset the Math in Focus increase of \$85,000, bringing the new funding request down to \$42,000. In subsequent years there will be an annual ongoing cost for subscription services, but it will fall within the current budget. As such, the \$42,000 increase is a one time increased cost that does come with a funding commitment for subsequent years.

**Note:** As a one time cost, this is a qualifying and justified use of ESSER II Grant funding as noted above. This may be able to be offset by the Grant once we have final confirmation of the grant amounts and funding restriction.

#### 4. TECHNOLOGY

*(Increase of \$156,107)*

The focus of this technology request is to continue to be innovative, efficient, and resourceful. We must invest today in a way that will allow for adoption of best practices and training of educators to ensure widespread use of appropriate technologies and effective impact on student learning. That requires a commitment to the hardware and support needed to innovate, as well as the support for educators as we rethink how learning happens best.

As a significant step forward for our district, the District recently implemented a 1:1 program where all students now have access to a personal Chromebook device, and this was supported by pandemic related funding. This purchase added roughly 1,000 new devices and the added need for additional support for both students and staff so that we can maximize the benefits of these devices on student learning. The technicians manage the day to day maintenance and repairs necessary to keep all district technology hardware/software current, along with assisting staff with issues they may encounter.

There are currently three Network/PC Support Technicians who service the entire district. This is an increase of one over prior years as we were able to add one new technician in the current year through savings in other areas of the budget. While we were able to support the increase in the existing budget, we have seen a very clear need to add an additional technician with the significant added technology this year/ The current Network/PC Support Technicians cannot adequately keep up with the demand. For this reason we are requesting the addition of one additional full-time technician so that there is a dedicated technician for each school campus within the District. The cost for this added position, including salary and benefits is \$73,000.

While the top priority for new spending is the technician noted above, a Technology Integration Specialist is also necessary. Since becoming a Google for Education district a few years ago, all 5 schools have adopted the daily practices of using Google Classroom and are utilizing the full suite of applications offered. The District has also increased the use of digital curriculum as well as increased the amount of computer hardware such as Chromebooks, iPads, and Smart Boards. We see a significant benefit to having a Technology Integration Specialist on staff who would be onsite at the elementary schools during the weekly Tech Time and would be available at the HS/MS campus. This individual would provide the essential support needed by staff to integrate their digital curriculum, and become more proficient with Google suite, Chromebooks, iPads, smartboards and future technology. The cost for this added position, including salary and benefits, is \$83,107.

Both of these positions would be long term commitments, and not one time spending, so they would not be a viable expenditure to charge to the COVID grant funding.

**5. EXTENDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

*(Increase of \$300,000)*

**\*\*\*PANDEMIC MITIGATION\*\*\***

These proposals are general in nature as we are in the early stages of reviewing student needs as well as a structure to deliver extended learning opportunities. Extended learning opportunities would begin in the summer and possibly continue into the 2022 SY. Extended learning opportunities would be available to students who need additional time to master grade level standards. This would not replace the Special Education summer program. The Special Education summer program would continue to run at all schools. In contrast to the small number of students who participate in the special education summer program, the extended learning opportunity would be able to support the participation of many students. This is in part because of the flexibility of the program.

The current proposal is to offer a variety of virtual learning modules. Each module will have a specific learning objective that is taught by a certified teacher that runs 3-4 weeks. Offering live virtual learning modules will allow more students to take advantage of the extended learning because of the flexibility it can offer in regards to scheduling. We believe that students and staff will both be more readily available and committed to this type of programming if they are able to connect remotely, regardless of where they are over the summer.

The types of extended learning opportunities still need to be developed in cooperation with our leadership and educators district wide.

*K - 8 Extended Learning Opportunities: (\$100,000 - One Time Cost - FY22)*

At the elementary and middle school level, we are looking to provide live virtual small group instruction in core content areas. These instructional groups called modules would be taught by certified teachers and address specific learning standards. Each module would run 3-4 weeks, for one hour per day(or age appropriate). Teachers would use data from i-Ready and school based assessments to develop modules that would address areas of need in student learning. Students may be involved in multiple modules throughout the day depending on their need. The proposed spending of \$100,000 is a ballpark figure that assumes 100 students per school participating in 5 or 6 four week modules over the summer or into the school year.

*High School Interventions: (\$100,000 - One Time Costs - FY22)*

At the high school level we are anticipating the need to provide full core courses for students who were not able to complete them this year because of challenges they faced with the pandemic. The normal path for students to achieve credit for courses they were not able to complete would be credit recovery. However, due to the more extensive need for students to have these courses available, we are proposing running these courses with Triton educators as full core courses. We anticipate the courses running over the summer on an intensive schedule, but it could also linger into the 2021/2022 school year outside the regular school day. This funding would provide roughly 6 or 7 courses when assuming a 0.2 FTE staffing (on contractual section) assumption.

*Health and Wellness Coordinator (Recurring Cost - Long Term)*

Over and over again we hear the message that if students' social and emotional needs are not met their ability to learn and to engage in an educational setting is greatly impacted. Prior to the pandemic, students nationwide were already showing signs of depression and anxiety but now living through a pandemic this number has hit an all-time high. In response to this need, Triton is requesting a full-time health coordinator who will review our current resources( people, structures, programs, and

curriculum) to develop a wellness plan that will provide the blueprint to improving the well-being of our students. In addition, the coordinator will work closely with staff and administration to bring a deeper understanding of strategies and practices through professional development. This new position is imperative to the success of our ability to mitigate the impact of covid. The cost of this position with salary and benefits is projected to be \$100,000.

**Note:** As one time costs, \$200,000 of this proposed spending for the academic interventions are a qualifying and justified use of ESSER II Grant funding as noted above. This may be able to be offset by the Grant once we have final confirmation of the grant amounts and funding restrictions.

***TOTAL PROPOSED STRATEGIC NEW SPENDING: \$673,107 (\$242,000 One Time)***

### ***Summary: Total Proposed New Costs in FY22***

---

<b>Total Projected Fixed Costs Increases:</b>	<b>\$1,298,977</b>
<b>Total Proposed Strategic New Spending:</b>	<b>\$673,107</b>
<b>Total FY22 Operating Budget Request:</b>	<b>\$1,972,084</b>

The cost increases that are proposed for consideration in the FY22 operating budget include both the fixed costs to provide level services, as well as the strategic investments as outlined above. Those strategic investments include new spending that will avoid higher costs for anticipated needs (Special Education), spending that continues prior commitments (Full Day K), and spending that is not required but is a newly identified need.

This document will be presented and reviewed on January 27, 2021 with greater detail about our current spending, the fixed costs increases, as well as the new expenditures that are being proposed for next year.