To: Dover-Sherborn Staff and Families
From: Beth McCoy, Superintendent
Date: February 4, 2026
Re: District Planning, Budget Constraints & Fiscal Responsibility

The Dover-Sherborn School District is at a pivotal moment. Two comprehensive studies focused on instructional leadership and elementary instructional minutes have recently concluded, identifying areas for strengthened practice and targeted investment. At the same time, the District is contending with declining enrollment and significant fiscal pressures in both towns, including an $850,000 budget deficit in Sherborn requiring a $500,000 reduction in school budgets, and approximately $5 million in upcoming capital projects in Dover. Together, these conditions call for a deliberate, data-informed approach to planning, one that sustains academic excellence while requiring careful prioritization and, in some cases, the phasing or deferral of initiatives designed to advance the District's long-term goals. With improved conditions in the future, the District hopes to resume progress on these priorities.

By aligning staffing and programming with enrollment trends and instructional priorities, the District can maintain high-quality educational experiences while moderating the overall budget request. This approach reflects responsible stewardship, limits disruption for students and staff, and ensures the District is well-positioned to respond to evolving needs while preserving the capacity to advance long-term objectives as circumstances allow.

The proposals resulting from the two instructional studies and declining enrollment are summarized below. Additional details, including implementation plans and their impact on the district budget, are provided in the documents linked throughout.

Resources

- Presentation to the School Committees (03.03.26) - slides
- Presentation to the School Committees (03.03.26) - video

K-12 Instructional Leadership Study (July 2024 - January 2026)

Purpose

Through the Superintendent entry process, input from all stakeholders shaped the Strategic Plan, including the goal of examining the current leadership model to ensure adequate instructional support for 21st-century teaching and learning. In response, the K-12 Instructional Leadership Study assessed whether current leadership structures provide sufficient instructional support,

meaningful supervision and evaluation, and job-embedded professional learning, drawing on feedback from K-12 educators, research on effective instructional leadership, and practices in comparable districts.

Key Findings
The study confirmed that instructional leaders (department heads, curriculum leaders, grade-level leaders and coaches) are essential connectors between district vision and classroom practice. Districts that invest in training, time, and embedded feedback for these roles demonstrate stronger and more sustained instructional improvement. Educators expressed a strong desire for clearer leadership roles, more meaningful supervision and evaluation, and improved K-12 alignment. Persistent challenges include limited time for leadership responsibilities, expanded roles at the secondary level, coaches pulled away from classroom practice, and insufficient vertical articulation.

Proposal
The proposed model refocuses elementary coaches on classroom practice, provides additional time and compensation for middle and high school instructional leaders, and adds two K-12 Curriculum Coordinator positions (STEM and Humanities). These roles will strengthen vertical alignment, support curriculum coherence, coach instructional leaders and educators, and ensure sustained instructional improvement aligned to District goals. Additional information can be found in the presentation to the school committees and FAQs (below).

Additional Information & Resources
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Presentation to the School Committees (01.13.26) - slides
- Presentation to the School Committees (01.13.26) - video

Note
Due to fiscal constraints in both towns, the addition of 2 Curriculum Coordinators will not move forward in the budget at this time.

Elementary Instructional Time Study (January 2025 - February 2026)

Purpose
The Elementary Instructional Time Study addressed how the school day can better support academic achievement and social-emotional development while meeting MA DESE instructional requirements. The study reviewed schedules from comparable districts, actual instructional minutes, and staff survey feedback.

Key Findings
Staff reported that the current schedule feels fragmented and does not adequately support core

academics, SEL, or required frameworks. Students are not receiving sufficient time in science, social studies, health, and technology/engineering, and some experience extended unstructured time.

Planned Changes
The updated schedule standardizes elementary specials, strengthens social-emotional learning, enhances alignment with math and ELA programs, refines WIN blocks, and creates a more cohesive and predictable daily structure. These changes reduce transitions, strengthen core instruction, and improve coverage of required instructional frameworks. As part of this update, the elementary Spanish program will transition from a proficiency-based model (FLES) to an exploratory model (FLEX), resulting in a reduction of three teaching positions. Additional details are available in the presentation to school committees and the accompanying FAQs (below).

Additional Information & Resources

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Presentation to the School Committees (03.03.26) - slides
- Presentation to the School Committees (03.03.26)- video

Note
The proposed changes to the elementary schedule are not driven by budgetary constraints and would have been implemented regardless to increase instructional time.

Declining Enrollment

Context
Student enrollment is declining across Massachusetts and nationally, though the causes and scale vary. In Massachusetts, overall K-12 enrollment is at its lowest level in decades due to long-term demographic shifts, higher housing costs, population movements, and post-pandemic changes, including increases in homeschooling and private school enrollment.

In the Dover-Sherborn Schools, middle and high school enrollment is projected to continue declining. By next year, high school enrollment is expected to have decreased by more than 120 students since 2019, with further declines anticipated over the following five years. Middle school enrollment is projected to have dropped by approximately 65 students over the same period, with additional decreases expected thereafter. Overall, these projections reflect a sustained downward trend in secondary enrollment across the District.

Staff Adjustments
The District's goal is to maintain academic excellence while aligning staff with current and projected student numbers. Adjustments will primarily occur through attrition and retirements rather than layoffs, with positions reduced only when student learning and access are not affected. As part of these adjustments, four positions will be eliminated: one administrator, one high school History teacher, one middle school guidance counselor, and one high school guidance

counselor. In addition, one special education transition teacher will be added to better support student needs. Class sizes and programming will remain consistent, and student-counselor ratios will stay comparable to peer districts and well below expert guidelines. Should enrollment increase in the future, staffing will be adjusted accordingly. Additional information can be found in the presentation to the school committees and the accompanying FAQs (below).

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Note

The proposed personnel reductions are NOT driven by budget cuts; rather, they reflect a fiscally responsible adjustment to declining enrollment.

The next versions of the budgets will be shared with school committees on the following dates:

- Dover School Committee: Tuesday, February 10 @ 6:30 PM (MS Library)
- Sherborn School Committee: Tuesday, February 24 @ 6:30 PM (Zoom)
- Regional School Committee: Tuesday, March 3 @ 6:30 PM (MS Library)

If you have questions or comments related to the above information, please reach out to a building principal, the superintendent or a school committee member.

Thank you for your continued trust and support.