


Please forward to the board

From rich girardatlarge.com <rich@girardatlarge.com>
Date Wed 4/15/2026 1:44 PM
To Matthew Normand <MNORMAND@manchesternh.gov>

 1 attachment (91 KB)
Students First Act.pdf;

Hi, Matt.

I'd appreciate it if you'd forward the attached and message below to the board. Thanks!

Best,

Rich

Members of the Honorable Board:

During last night's hearing, I said I did not think the attached law applied to the city of Manchester. Shortly after giving my testimony, I learned from the law's sponsor that it applied to all school districts in the state. Given that, I urge you to require the district to provide the information it requires prior to making any decisions on the budget.

In addition to this information, allow me to share what I believe would also help inform your thoughts on the district's funding levels. Before I do, though, I'd like to share a couple of thoughts.

- The per pupil numbers used by the district do not include significant and expensive items, such as transportation or debt service.
- The appropriation you consider does NOT include the roughly \$25 million in annual federal Title funds. Those funds go directly to the school district and are not appropriated by the BMA. They also are not counted in the per-pupil cost accounting.
- In Fiscal Years 21, 22 and 23, the district received a total of approximately \$88 million in ESSR Covid emergency relief funds, as substantial percentage of which they dumped into operating expenses. None of this money was counted in the district's per pupil spending.

Now, on to the information I encourage you to request, in conjunction with what is required by state law and over the same period of time:

- Student enrollment. Why? It has been said that enrollment has stabilized. It has not and continues to decline.
 - Ask for the Davis Demographics study presented to the BOSC in 2021. The only flaw in its projections is that enrollment is falling faster than predicted.
- The number of teachers employed by the district. Why? As enrollment has fallen, the number of teachers has actually increased.

- The number of principals and the average salary of the principals, which is separate and distinct from teachers.
- The number of Director and Coordinator positions and above over that same 10 year period of time, along with the average salaries. You will see a significant expansion in the number of positions and their pay.
- The combined amount of money spent on debt service and cash on capital projects.
- The amount of money spent on transportation, not to include special education. Why
 - The district claimed it was saving money by bringing transportation in-house. There was about a \$4 million cost overrun in their first year managing transportation, meaning no money was saved; just the opposite, in fact, as they "forgot" to secure a sufficient number of buses to provide transportation to sporting events and other after school activities.
 - Where transportation used to be a line item in the budget, it is now scattered among several line items, including salaries, benefits, insurance and utilities. It is not possible to look at their budget and see the total cost making any past or prospective claims of savings impossible to gauge.
 - The same goes for the nursing. I'd ask for that, too.

Areas of potential savings, cost recovery:

The district should be required to perform an audit of its benefits programs. Mayor Gatsas did this about a decade ago. Dozens of people were ineligible to receive benefits were removed from insurance programs, saving a whole lot of money. For that matter the city should do the same.

The district should also be required to audit to ensure that every student enrolled in Manchester's public schools is, in fact, eligible. [This story](#), which was published on Monday, is not, I believe, an isolated case. The district relies on building level administrators to review the documents required for registration. They often fail to follow policy or simply look away because a staff member is involved. More stories like this haven't been told because the whistle blowers are scared to death they might caught and suffer reprisals.

Require the district to implement policies that will either recover the almost \$500,000 (and growing exponentially year after year) in school lunch program debt and or stem the losses. The school board has refused the administration's request to implement policies that will prevent students from receiving lunch without paying. As a result, the amount of free lunch that has been paid for by the taxpayers via the district's operating budget is approaching \$500,000 and has been growing exponentially over the past 2 years. Next year, it could top \$1 million. Note well, this debt isn't from students on the free or reduced hot lunch program. In rejecting policies that would limit what food students could receive after being in arrears by a certain amount (I think it was \$75), school board members worried about the "stigma" students would suffer if they couldn't get the food they wanted without paying, which is exactly why the problem has grown from \$30K/yr. to half a million in short order and will continue to explode.

Finally, the district's budget currently includes \$16.6 million in its Long Term Facilities Plan line item. In the past 3 budgets, that number has been \$20 million and has been used for the middle school expansions and Beech St. project. [According to Sharon Wickens](#), only \$7.4 million is required to make the interest payments on the BANs that have been issued and the bonds that will be issued this year. This leaves \$9.2 million that you could be

removed from the school budget without any service impact this year. That \$9.2 million would be added to the bond that is scheduled to be issued in November. Note, if this line item is reduced in this year's budget, it will need to be added back next year when the full amount of the debt service is due during the fiscal year.

I hope this helps. Should you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer.

Best,

Richard H. Girard

Publisher

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