

MERRIMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT
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**Proposed Administrative Budget for the
2024-2025 School Year**

The school administration is pleased to present to you our proposed 2024-2025 school year budget request. This budget was developed from conversations and meetings with many people. In June 2023, the school board conducted a comprehensive goal setting meeting with district administrators. The purpose of this meeting was to understand the strengths and needs of students, staff and the operational needs of the district. Priorities were established in an effort to continue to meet the needs of students, staff, and Merrimack taxpayers.

Over the first few months of the 2023-2024 school year, the district administration conducted many conversations with the members of the Leadership Team and the professional and support staff of every school. Our school staff possess an important level of understanding of our students' academic and social/emotional needs and it is imperative that we listen to and respect their valued insight and input. The staff in every school has expressed its appreciation for the opportunity to share their knowledge of our students, in an effort to continuously improve the developmental opportunities for all students.

As school board members, you have also devoted a significant amount of time over the last year (plus) toward understanding the needs of students, staff and taxpayers. You have worked diligently in establishing goals, objectives and priorities to provide the district with a clear direction for both fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025 (2024-2025 school year). You have been the critical link to the values and priorities of the Merrimack Community and understand the importance of providing residents with a high-quality school district.

At the present time, a 25-member team of school staff, residents and members of the business community are developing a comprehensive 3-year strategic plan that will provide further refinement to our educational goals and objectives over the next several years. The school administration looks forward to presenting this plan to the school board in February/March 2024.

The development of an annual school budget requires much thought and discussion. It is the school district's obligation to meet the developmental needs of every student while always being cognizant of the interests of Merrimack taxpayers. The complexity of developing a school district budget is captured in a quote by noted author and lecturer, Dr. Thomas Armstrong, who stated that a school budget represents:

“The quantification of developing the means and the capacity to facilitate human development with respect for each students' particular style and rate of learning, as well as an appreciation for the varied interests, aspiration, capacities, obstacles, temperaments, and backgrounds that serve as a framework within each child.”

Each successive year brings new challenges to the process of educating students. As we develop the annual budget, we must always analyze the following information in the planning of programs and fiscal priorities, all of which have an impact on the experience that our students have each day:

- Analysis of student assessment data at all grade levels
- Review of all current programs and services to assess opportunities for savings and efficiencies
- Analysis of current and projected student enrollment
- Compliance with state and federal mandates
- Reasonable class size at all grade levels
- Review of transportation needs and cost
- Compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Provide a robust curriculum that aligns with state standards
- Technology devices and network infrastructure to support instruction and administrative functions
- Adequate provision of instructional supplies and materials
- Clean, healthy, safe facilities
- School security
- Competitive compensation and benefits that allow us to attract, hire, and retain highly qualified staff
- Professional development for professional and support staff
- Co-curricular activities and athletics
- Responsible Capital Improvement Plan
- Price indexing

Enrollment Analysis

Our school district's PreK-Grade 12 enrollment is always analyzed and updated so that we can adjust programs, services, and/or staffing levels when necessary. Factors such as the following can impact enrollments from year to year.

- Number of annual births in Merrimack
- In-migration/out-migration trends
- Newly constructed residential units and the nature of the units (free-standing homes, condos, apartments) all of which have a varying degree of impact on the number of children who are new to the school district.

Table 1 presents a 5-year trend in enrollment by grade span. Between the 2019-2020 school year and the current school year (2023-2024) the PreK-Grade 12 enrollment declined by 283 students. Interestingly, nearly 80% of the decline over 5 years occurred between the 2019-2020, and the 2020-2021 school years. Over the last several years, the district's PreK-Grade 4 enrollment is slightly trending upward, which could be a result of the increase in residential development in Merrimack, and the attraction of a quality school district to young families.

In projecting enrollments forward, we have utilized a 6-year Cohort Progression Ratio average as a beginning point for the projections, and when necessary have adjusted the ratio accordingly, with classes that have deviated from the average (a large or smaller class anomaly).

Projected Enrollment for 2024-2025

Grades	Actual Enrollment on 10/1/23	Projected Enrollment 2024-2025	Increase/Decrease
PreK-4	1,414	1,468	+54
5-6	509	531	+22
7-8	511	480	-31
9-12	1,095	1,086	-9
TOTAL	3,529	3,565	+36

TABLE 1

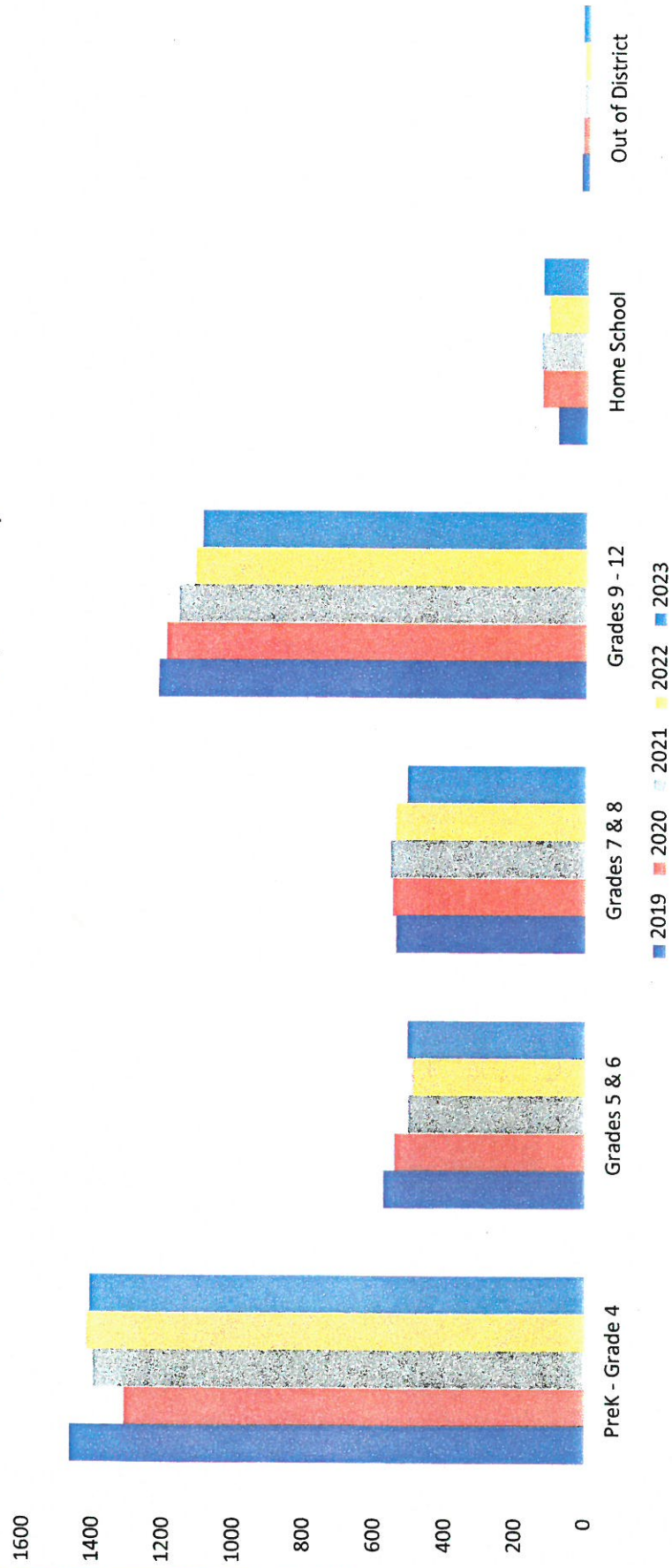
**PreK-12
5 Year Enrollment Trends
2019-2023**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2019-2023	Projected 2024-2025
Grades PreK-4	1,466	1,315	1,406	1,406	1,414	-52	1,468
Grades 5-6	571	535	508	508	509	-62	531
Grades 7-8	542	549	555	555	511	-31	480
Grades 9-12	1,225	1,185	1,154	1,154	1,095	-130	1,086
TOTAL	3,804	3,584	3,623	3,623	3,529	275	3,565
Out of District	24	19	13	13	20	-4	20
Home School	87	136	135	135	130	+43	135

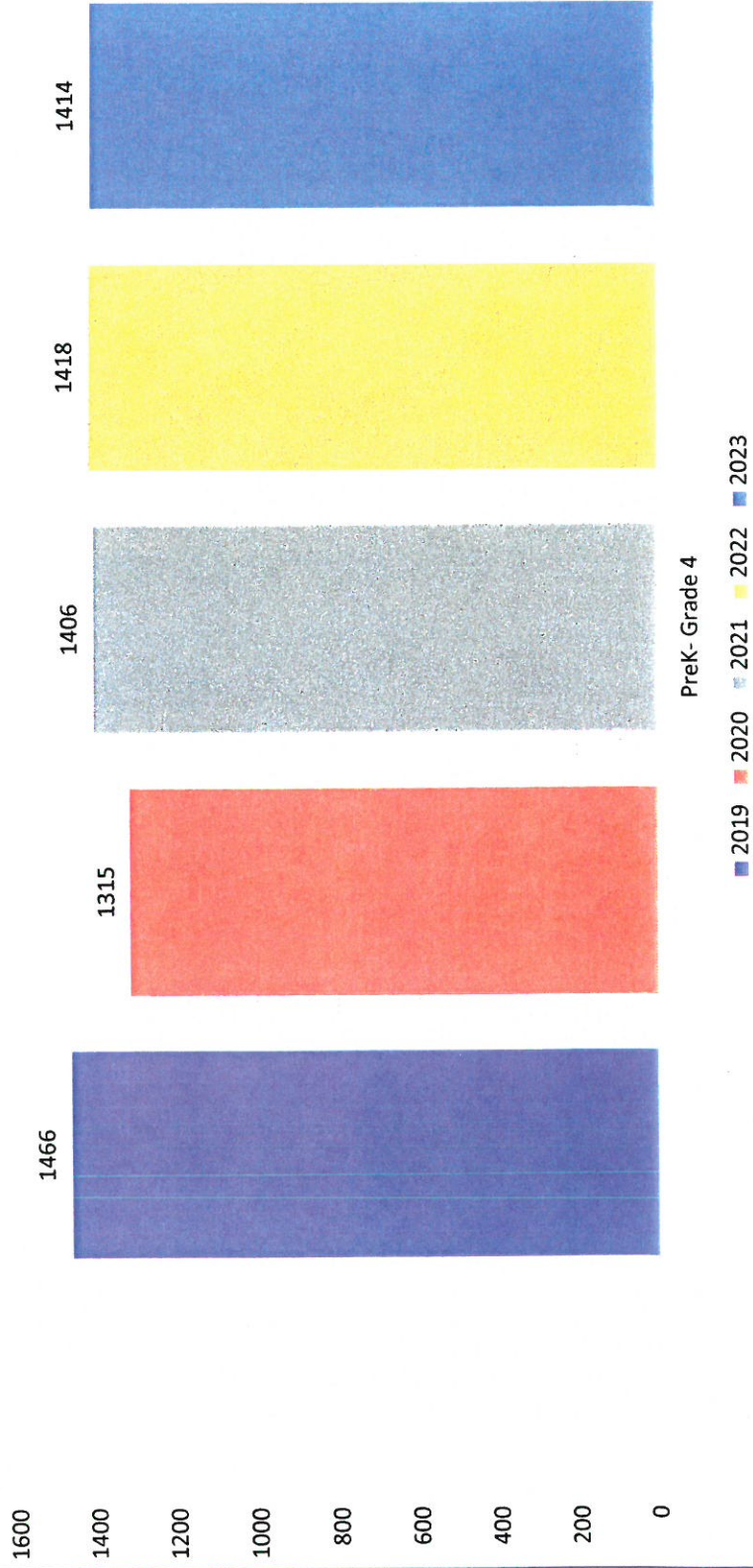
**Projected Elementary District Class Size Ratio (PreK-Grade 4)
2024-2025**

Grade	Number of Students	Number of Teachers	Student/Teacher Ratio
PreK	138 (69/session)	7	10:1
K	265	17	16:1
1	293	17	17:1
2	266	16	17:1
3	268	14	19:1
4	238	13	18:1
TOTAL	1,468	84	18:1

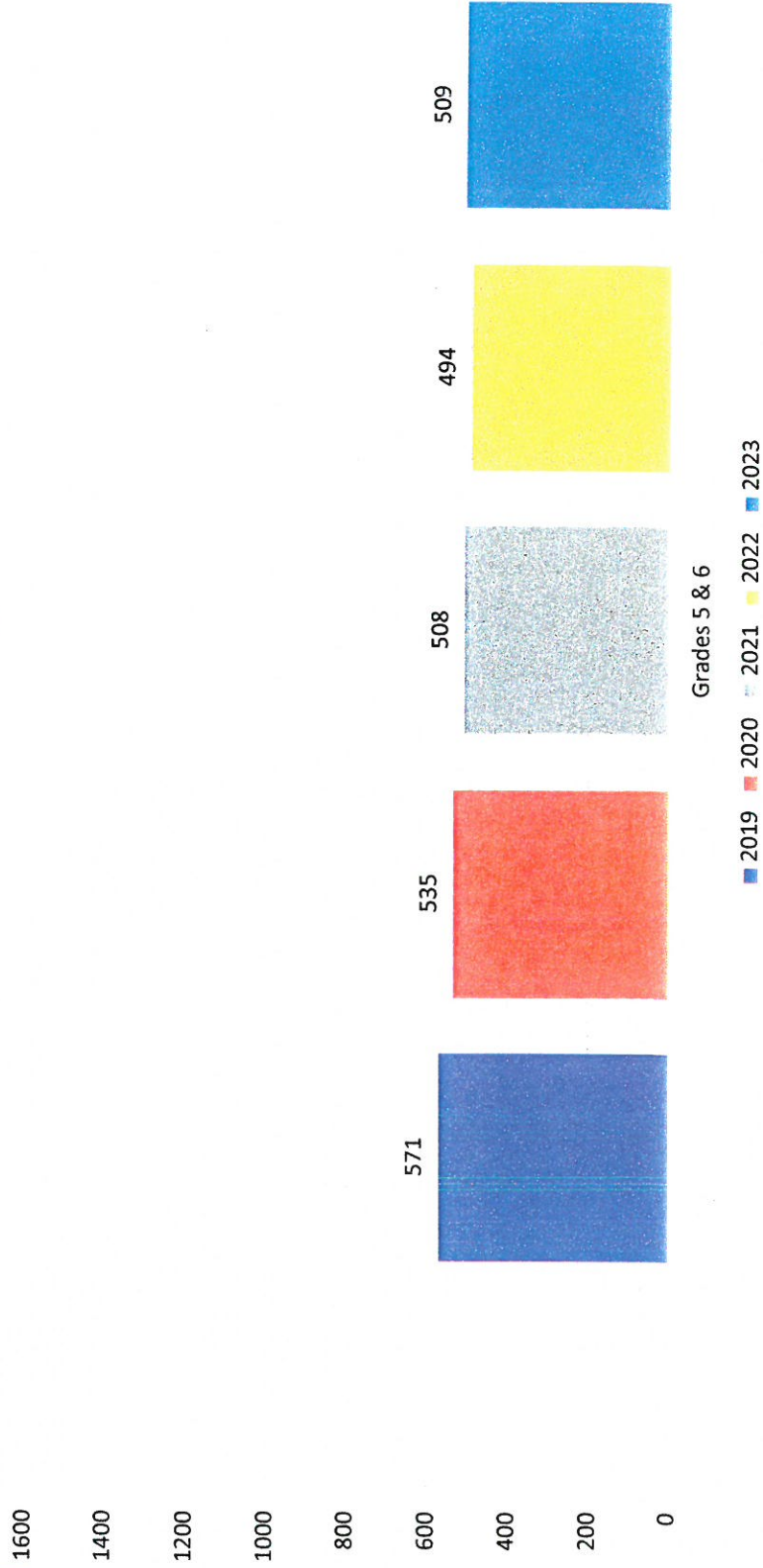
PreK-12 5 Year Enrollment Trends by Grade Span



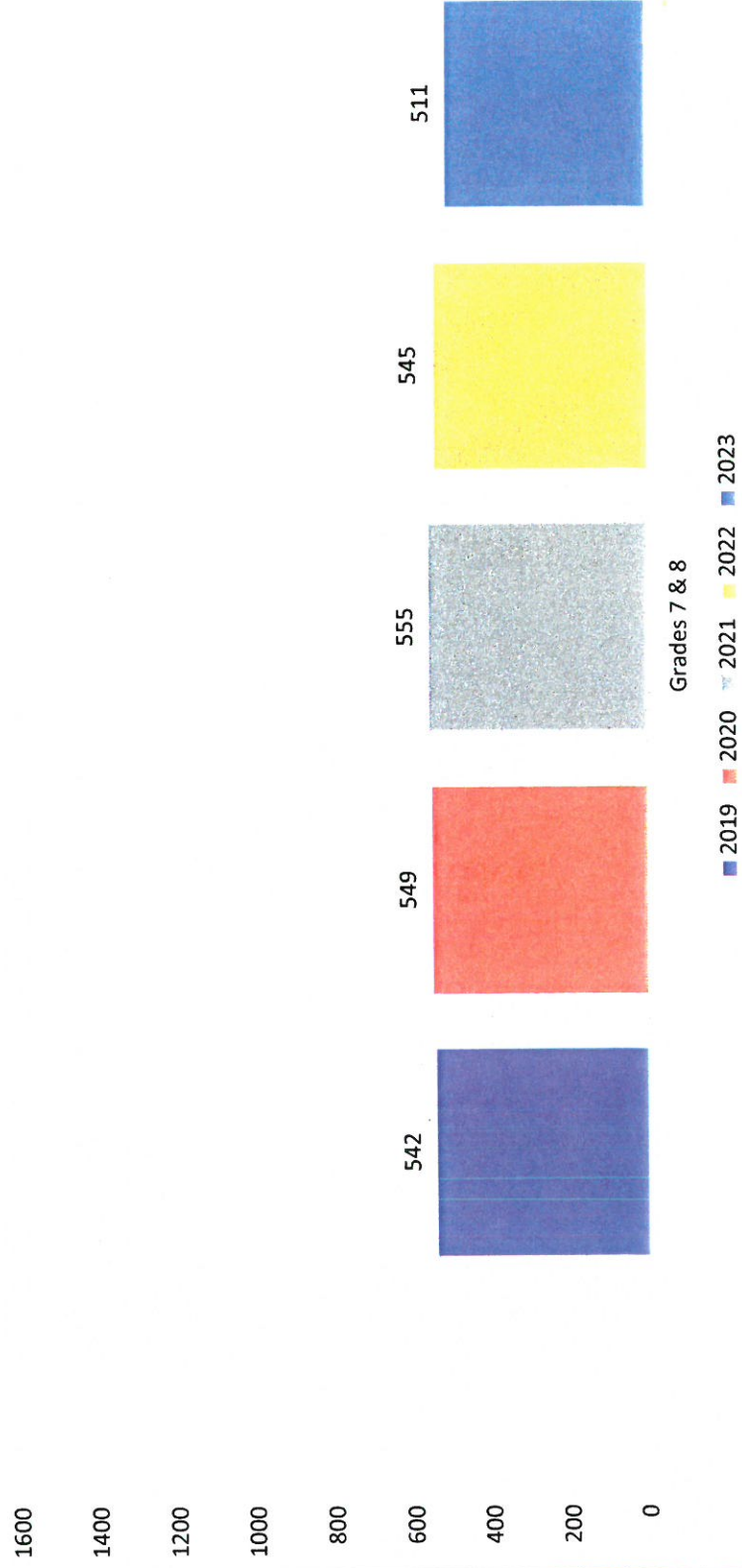
Pre-K to Grade 4 5 Year Enrollment Trends



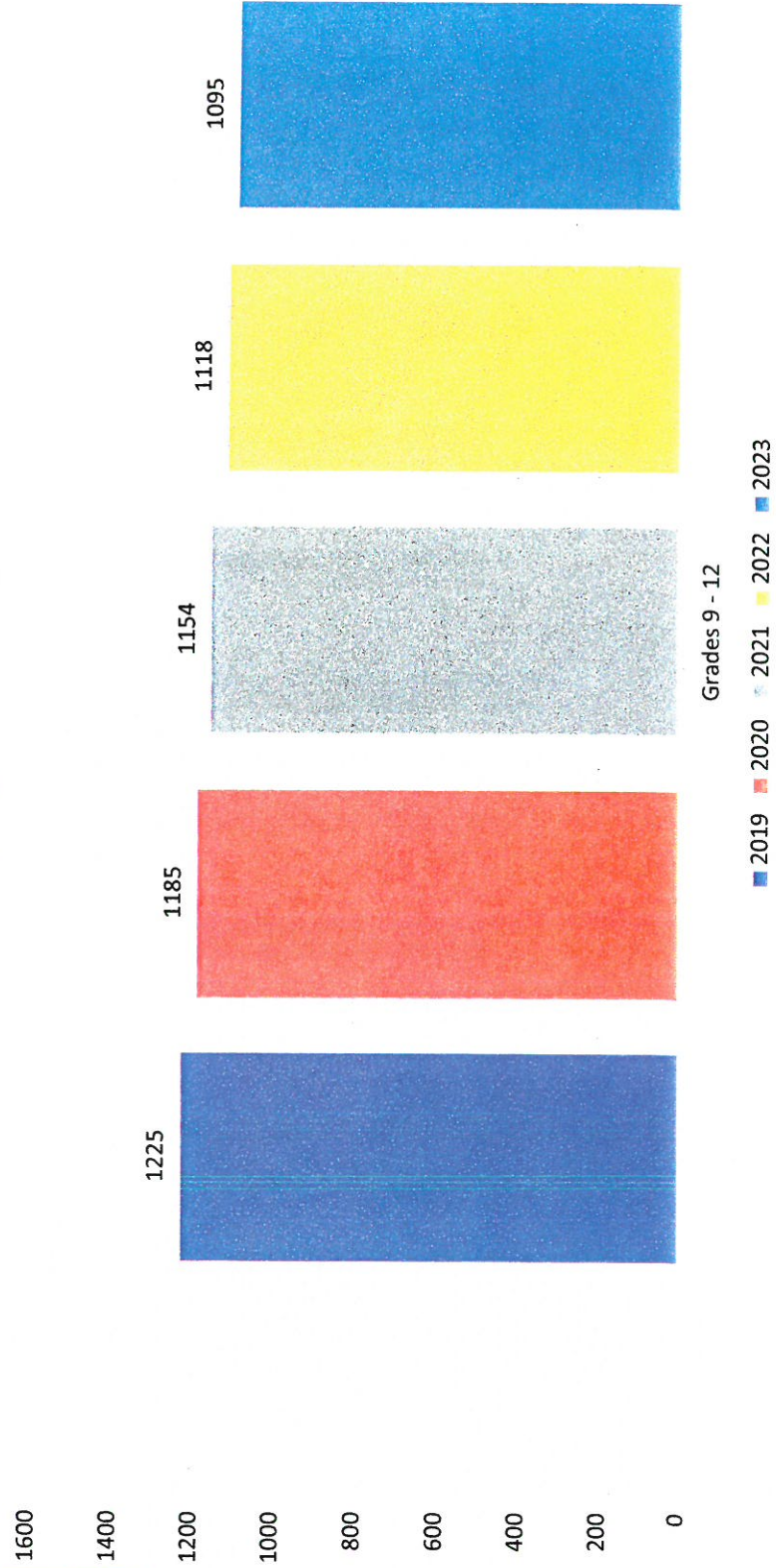
Grades 5 and 6 5 Year Enrollment Trends



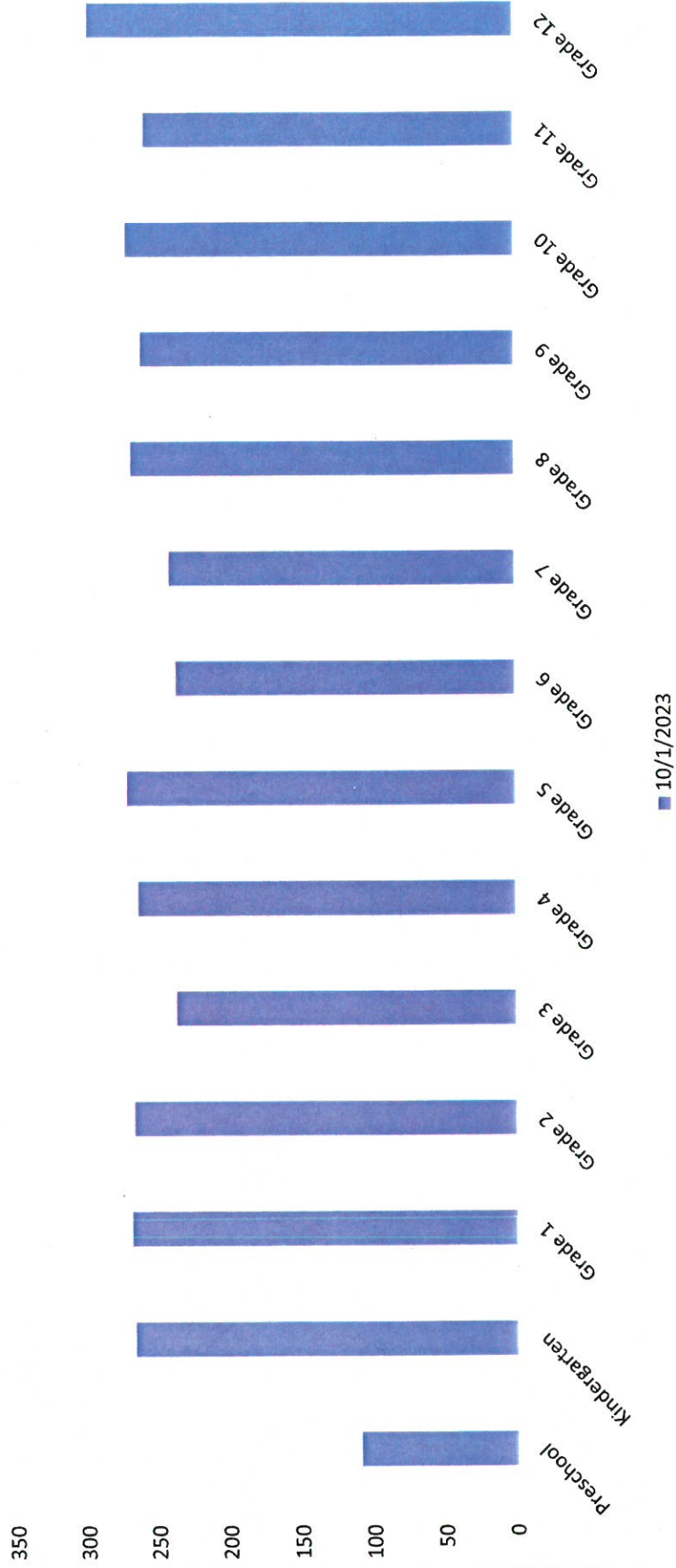
Grades 7 and 8 5 Year Enrollment Trends



Grades 9 - 12 5 Year Enrollment Trends



Merrimack School District Enrollments as of 10/1/2023
2023-2024



**Projected Upper Elementary Class Size Ratio (Grades 5 and 6)
2024-2025**

Grade	Number of Students	Number of Teachers	Student/Teacher Ratio
5	264	12	22:1
6	267	12	22:1

The academic success of students, particularly at the elementary level, very much depends on the quality of the classroom teacher and a manageable class size. To this end, we have made every effort to maintain reasonable class size for the 2024-2025 school year. We have projected a PreK-Grade 4 average class size of 18 students per teacher. At the upper elementary level, (grades 5 and 6) our average class size is projected to be 22 students per teacher. A reasonable/manageable class size allows a teacher to more thoroughly understand the strengths and needs of each student and adjust instruction, and support services accordingly.

Fiscal 2025 Curriculum Instruction and Assessment Priorities

In the 2024-2025 Merrimack School District budget, funds are being requested to invest in the core infrastructure of our curriculum, instruction, and assessment at all grade levels. This includes resources to solidify our core literacy program at the elementary level, provide high quality professional development to all staff members, and continue our efforts to ensure we have effective assessment tools that support our efforts to be responsive to the strength and needs of students.

Over the past two school years, we have worked to intentionally shift from a balanced literacy to a structured literacy approach to teaching reading and writing in kindergarten through grade 6. This included purchasing and implementing a new core program in kindergarten through second grade, *Wilson's Foundations*, to systematically and explicitly teach critical foundation skills like phonics and word study, letter formation, handwriting, and spelling. We also used district resources to purchase decodable readers, *Geodes*, which are information-rich books that provide emerging readers with an opportunity to build knowledge while practicing foundational reading skills. We also adopted *Spelling Connections* in grades 3-6 to structure word study at those grade levels. The purchase of these core programs, and the accompanying professional development provided to teachers, support staff, interventionists, and administrators, has made a considerable impact for our students.

For the 2024-2025 school year, we are seeking financial support to purchase and implement the critical next step in realizing a comprehensive literacy program in the MSD; purchasing the knowledge-building curriculum, *Wit & Wisdom*. Aligned with the science of reading, *Wit & Wisdom* is a framework to guide teachers and students through reading, writing, listening, and speaking about exceptionally rich and diverse texts, including many award-winning favorites. Strong instructional protocols dive deeply into thoughtful inquiry using a variety of text, including short stories, essays, and novels, with painting, photographs, and music thoroughly integrated and seamlessly connected to lesson studies. Of note is that *Wit & Wisdom* and *Geodes*, both published by the company Great Minds, and *Foundations* are aligned in their scope and sequence.

In the coming school year, funds are requested for the continued use of *iReady* as our academic assessment and progress monitoring tool in kindergarten through grade 8. We look forward to entering our second year using this assessment and its individualized learning paths to provide opportunities for students to receive differentiated practice, intervention, and enrichment. During the 2023-2024 school year, the PSATs were added as an assessment measure for freshmen at Merrimack High School. The 2024-2025 budget requests funding to administer the PSATs to both freshmen and sophomores. This will support our efforts to measure the knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics students learn in the high school classroom.

In our continual pursuit of instructional excellence, funds are being requested to provide high quality professional learning to all our staff. These activities will be in alignment with our district initiatives to improve academic outcomes for all students, build strong and responsive learning communities, and meet the evolving needs of our students and staff. Specifically, these funds would be used to offer *Responsive Classroom* training, continued support for our use of *iReady* in kindergarten through Grade 8, continued work with the *New Hampshire Learning Initiative* on Professional Learning Communities and competency-based learning, and implementation of new programs and curriculum requirements.

Finally, one of our district goals is to attract, hire, and retain highly effective teachers. To that end, we are requesting funds to provide stipends to the mentors in our very successful Torchbearers Program. The Torchbearers work tirelessly to provide ongoing support and collegial connection to teachers new to our district throughout their first school year. These stipends will provide compensation for the mentors and program facilitators as they invest in the professional growth and development of staff that leads to the development of positive relationships, implementation of the best instructional practices, and, in turn, increased student achievement.

**Elementary Changes in Staffing
2024-2025**

School	Grade	# Class Sections 2023-2024	# Class Sections 2024-2025	Difference (#Classes)
MES	K	4	5	+1
RFS	K	7	6	-1
TFS	K	6	6	0
MES	1	5	4	-1
RFS	1	5	7	+2
TFS	1	6	6	0
MES	2	4	5	+1
RFS	2	5	5	0
TFS	2	5	6	+1
MES	3	4	4	0
RFS	3	4	5	+1
TFS	3	5	5	0
MES	4	4	4	0
RFS	4	5	4	-1
TFS	4	5	5	0

Fiscal 2025 New Funds Requested for Staff, Programs, and Services

As we conducted budget meetings throughout the fall with the administration and staff of every school, we learned about the current and emerging academic and developmental needs of students at all grade levels. As a result of these staff conversations, the analysis of academic assessment data, and the impact of changes in enrollment in all grades, we are requesting new (additional) funds for the following staff, programs and services.

Staff (Additions and Reductions)

MES

Net +1.0 Classroom Teacher (Enrollment)
+1.0 Kindergarten Instruction Aide (Enrollment)

RFS

Net +2 Classroom Teachers (Enrollment)
+1.0 Unified Arts Teacher (PE/Health) (Enrollment)
+1.0 Kindergarten Instructional Aide (Enrollment)

TFS

+1.0 Classroom Teacher (Enrollment)

JMUES

Net +1.0 Social/Emotional Specialist
+1.0 Reading Interventionist

MMS

No New Staff Requested

MHS

Net -2.0 Teachers (To Be Determined)

Student Services

-1.0 Student Services Assistant Administrator
+1.0 BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst)

SEL (Social Emotional Learning)

We will reallocate existing funds from the Home School Liaison position to the following positions that are more direct service to students, in nature.

-1.0 Home School Liaison Funds —→ +1.0 K-8 Social Worker
-1.0 Home School Liaison Funds —→ +1.0 K-8 Section 504 Coordinator
-1.0 Home School Liaison Funds —→ +1.0 Special Education Counselor
(MMS/MHS)

Positions That We Had to Add During the 2023-2024 School Year to Meet Specific Student Needs

+1.0 Kindergarten Teacher at RFS
+1.0 Special Education Reading Specialist at JMUES
+1.0 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

New Funds Necessary to Improve Curriculum, Professional Development of Staff, and Direct Services to Students

\$75,000	K-12 Curriculum Materials (District Account)
\$100,000	Professional Development related to District Initiatives and New Curriculum Programs
\$30,000	Summer High School Band Activities
\$6,000	Transportation Services (general education) for Students Attending Summer Programs
\$100,000	Staffing Contingency (enrollment increases, ESOL, emerging priorities)
\$40,000	Elementary Summer Extended School Year (ESY)
\$35,000	Middle School Summer Extended School Year (ESY)
\$85,000	High School Summer Extended School Year (ESY)
\$280,000	Wit & Wisdom English/Language Arts Curriculum

Financial Summary

Planning and budgeting to meet the needs of our PreK through grade 12 students represents the classic economic dilemma of trying to meet the increasing needs of students with available resources. It is the very reason that we conducted thoughtful communications with our staff, Leadership Team and School Board. We needed a broad-based, systemwide perspective on our current and emerging priorities to guide our appropriation request for the 2024-2025 school year.

I want to particularly thank Assistant Superintendents Matthew Shevenell and Amanda Doyle, Director of Human Resources Melissa Fazlic along with the Principals, and our Student Services Director Sarah Reinhardt, for their excellent work in developing this budget request.

We look forward to our budget discussions over the next two months with you (School Board) the School Budget Committee and the Merrimack Community. It is important that we provide as much information and data as possible to support our Fiscal 2025 budget request. Our students deserve nothing less!

It is important to note that in the development of the Fiscal 2025 budget we carefully reviewed our staffing and operations in our effort to reallocate existing

funds to meet new staff and program priorities. We are no different than any other organization, and family that have been experiencing the impact of rising costs of goods, services and labor.

To meet the staff, program and service needs of our students and provide safe, healthy facilities, we are requesting an appropriation of \$94,296,497 which is 3.92% increase to our fiscal 2024 appropriation of \$90,742,458.

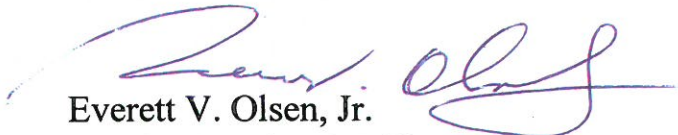
2024-2025 Proposed Administrative Budget	\$ 94,296,497
2023-2024 Approved Administrative Budget	<u>\$ 90,741,458</u>
	\$ 3,554,039

The proposed administrative budget is 3.92% (\$3,554,039) more than the 2023-2024 approved operating budget.

The 2024-2025 default budget as required under RSA 40:13 is \$91,301,349. The proposed administrative budget is \$2,995,148 above the default budget. Our FY 2025 budget request is 3.28% above the FY 2025 default budget.

Our efforts to meet the current and emerging needs of our students along with being cognizant and respectful of the Merrimack taxpayer will always shape our priorities and funding requests. The District Administration greatly appreciates the careful review that you will devote to the review of our budget request prior to it transitioning to the Budget Committee, and the Deliberative Session.

Respectfully submitted,


Everett V. Olsen, Jr.
Chief Educational Officer