



March 5, 2018

Dear members of the PPS community,

Tuesday, March 6, marks the formal start of our school budget season. I'll be presenting my budget proposal to the Portland Board of Public Education, the first step in the months-long process of determining a budget for the 2018-2019 school year.

We are facing a challenging budget year. Our costs continue to rise while our state revenue is significantly reduced. Contrary to early newspaper reports, our state allocation shows we face a \$3.4 million reduction in our fiscal year 2019 budget compared to our FY 2018 budget.

During the FY 2019 budget process, we must find a way to address that \$3.4 million shortfall and rising expenses. That puts Portland at a crossroads. We will be asking our community to make a clear choice: Do we continue to support great schools and invest in making them even better? Or, do we allow the weakening of our school system by failing to sustain the level of investment needed to maintain quality schools?

Great schools are key to a great city. And Portland has great public schools. Our district is ranked by niche.com as one of the top 10 school districts in Maine. Also, in a national study (<https://cepa.stanford.edu/seda/overview>) that ranks school districts based on the progress that students make on average from grades 3 to 8, the Portland Public Schools again is in Maine's top 10. Our district ranks higher in that database than many of our neighboring school districts, including Falmouth, Scarborough and South Portland.

Our diversity is a great asset. Research shows that students benefit greatly from attending school with students who are different. Exposure to those who have different experiences and worldviews helps prepare our children for our rapidly changing nation and global society.

Portland schools serve a highly diverse student population. Comparisons that show the performance of all students misrepresent the high level of performance by middle-class students in the Portland schools. If we look only at their performance on Maine's educational assessments, Portland's middle-class students compare favorably to similar students in many of those same neighboring communities.

Portland Public Schools' students are fortunate to be able to take advantage of all our great city has to offer. They attend cultural and arts events annually through our partnership with Culture Club-Portland, the Portland Museum of Art, the Portland Symphony Orchestra, Portland Ovations and Portland Stage. Students in our schools access dual enrollment university classes through the University of Southern Maine and Southern Maine Community College.



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

prepared & empowered

Our district is on the move. On November 7, voters overwhelmingly supported a \$64 million bond to modernize Longfellow, Lyseth, Presumpscot and Reiche elementary schools to 21st century standards. Since 2010, the district has been increasing its public pre-kindergarten options and is working to develop an implementation plan, to be completed this fall, to achieve universal access to publicly supported pre-k for any student whose family wants it. We believe these efforts will increase our ability to attract and retain young families.

Also, unlike the performance of our middle class students, there is an opportunity and achievement gap for students from poverty and students of color. We are working to reduce those gaps through our Portland Promise's Achievement, Whole Student, Equity, and People goals. We've set five-year targets to measure our progress towards these goals and strategies to achieve them.

However, achieving those goals and sustaining quality schools will require a significant commitment from the Portland community. This year, the Maine Department of Education made big changes to the school funding formula. Those changes are contributing to the shortfall.

But, more importantly, state education aid is influenced by factors such as the total property valuation of a community. Districts with high valuation, such as Portland, get less state money and are expected to contribute more locally. Given that reality, Portland will continue to see dramatic losses in its state education subsidy for the foreseeable future.

This budget requires an investment of \$113 million in FY 2019, a 7% increase over FY 2018. This is in line with the expected local contribution increase in the state's funding formula. It would add less than \$20 a month to the tax bill for a home valued at \$240,000.

I'll provide more detail during my presentation at the March 6 school board meeting at City Hall, which will begin immediately following a 6pm workshop. Please attend the meeting or stream it live at http://townhallstreams.com/towns/portland_maine.

I urge you to become engaged in the budget process over the next weeks and months, to let us know what you value about education in Portland. A budget timeline is on our website, https://www.portlandschools.org/district_home/school_budget. You also can watch a YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxGv3rxBWB0&t=2s>) of a community budget forum on February 10. That will help provide context for our upcoming budget conversations as we work to continue to provide the quality education that all Portland's children deserve.

Sincerely,

Xavier Botana, Superintendent