



**Needham**  
Public Schools  
Needham, Massachusetts

# PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020







## Dear Neighbors, Friends, and Families:

While we continue to confront the health crisis brought on by COVID-19, we are pausing briefly to reflect on the 2019-2020 school year. This condensed version of the district's Performance Report highlights a number of significant achievements made through March 2020 when teaching and learning took place within the school buildings. It also recognizes how our community faced the challenges of mandated school closure, from April through June 2020, with a commitment to the health and safety of all students, staff, and families.

We include in this report examples of progress made during the 2019-2020 school year toward each of the [district's strategic priorities](#). There was much uncertainty on our path forward due to the pandemic. Working remotely, we still focused on preparing all students to be creative thinkers and problem solvers, communicators and collaborators, socially and culturally responsive contributors, responsible and resilient individuals, and

empowered learners. These are the [Portrait of A Needham Graduate competencies](#) needed for each student's future. As we continue to confront the health crisis, we are guided by the Portrait strategic framework for educational excellence, innovation, and equity.

On behalf of the School Committee and the dedicated faculty and staff of the Needham Public Schools, thank you for your partnership. We look forward to answering your questions and engaging with you as we build on lessons learned from the 2019-2020 school year and embark on a new year of learning, growing, and achieving.

Respectfully,

Two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The first signature is for Daniel Gutekanst and the second is for Andrea Longo Carter. The signatures are fluid and cursive.

**Daniel Gutekanst & Andrea Longo Carter**

*Superintendent & School Committee Chair*

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**ATTENTION:** If you speak a language other than English, language assistance services are available to you free of charge. Contact your child's school for assistance.

Chinese (Simplified): 请注意：如果您的母语不是英语，我们将免费提供您语言辅助服务。如需协助，请与您孩子的学校联系。

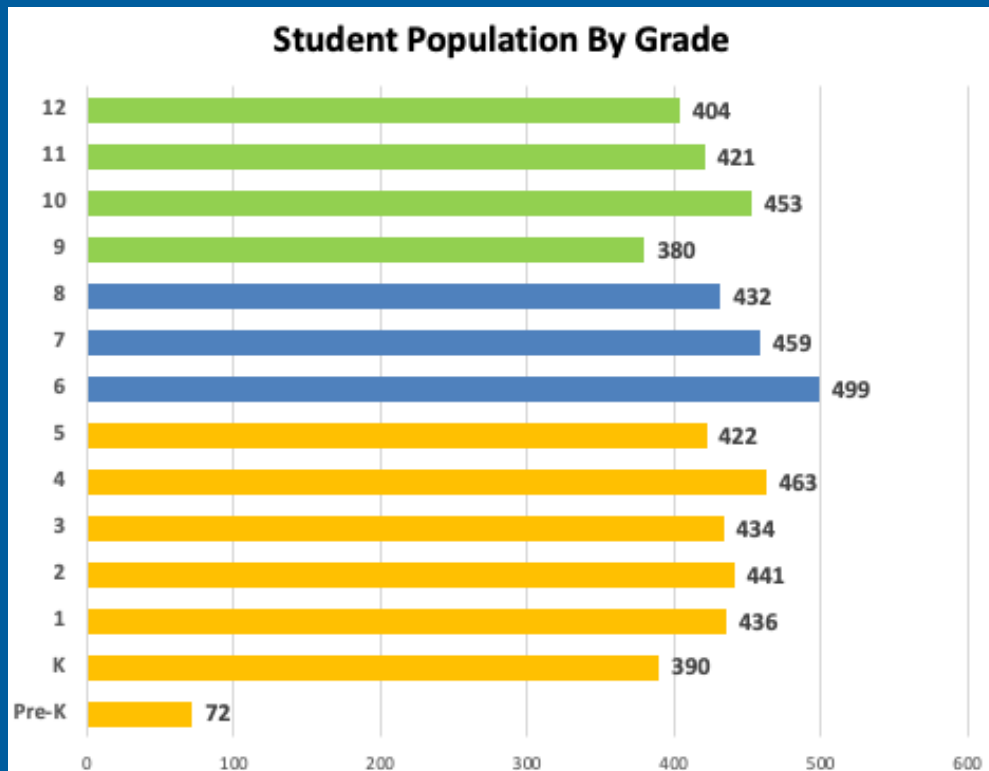
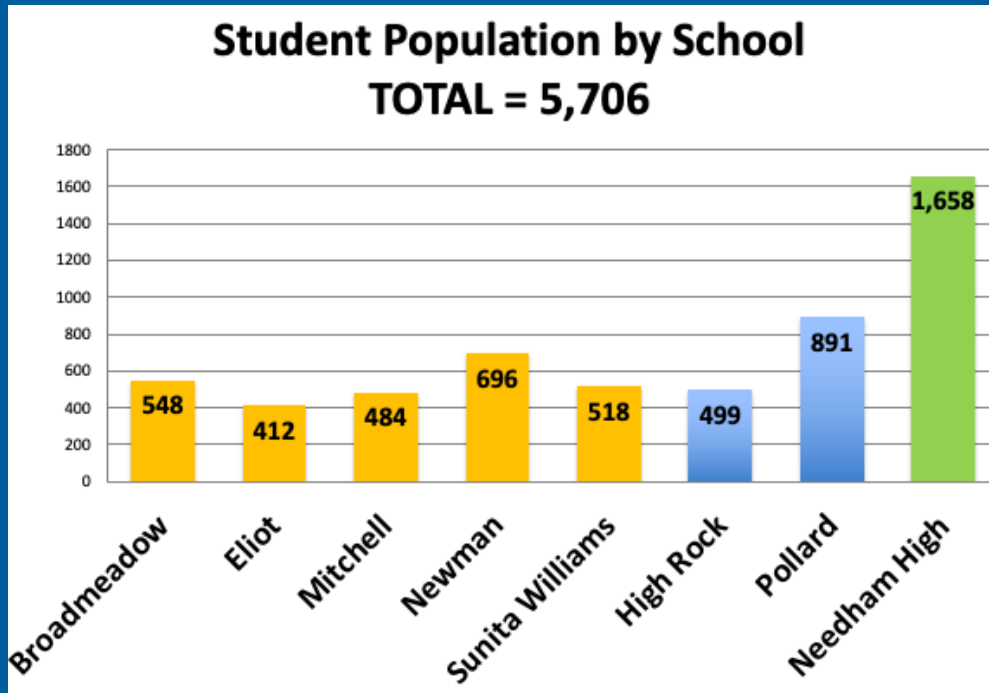
Spanish: ATENCION: Si usted habla un idioma que no sea el inglés, hay servicios de asistencia lingüística disponibles gratis. Contacte la escuela de su hijo para asistencia.

Russian: ВНИМАНИЕ: Если вы не говорите на английском языке, для вас доступны бесплатные языковые сервисы на вашем языке. Обратитесь за помощью в школу, в которой учится ваш ребенок.

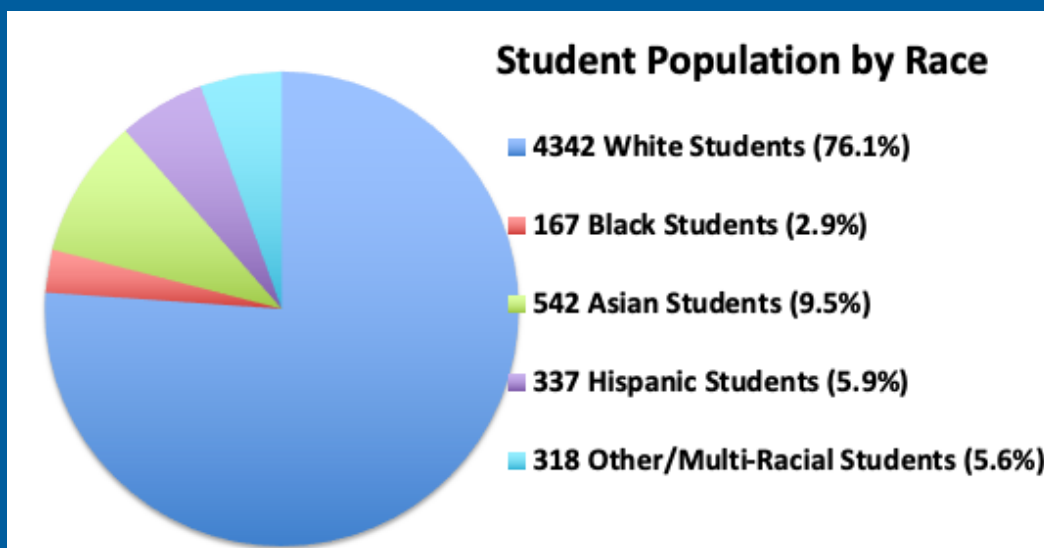
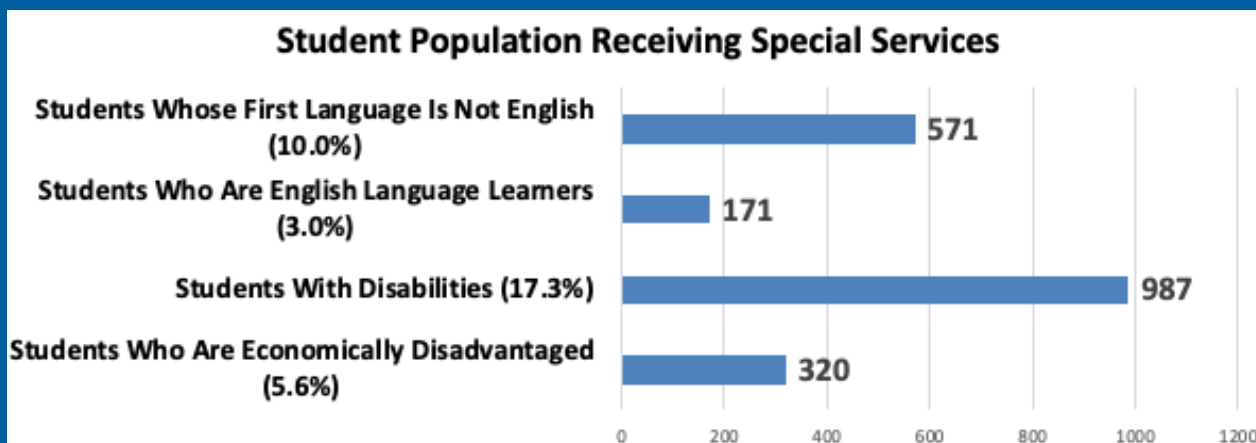


# BY THE NUMBERS

Census Data on Our Schools for the 2019-2020 School Year







| OTHER SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR NEEDHAM RESIDENTS | NUMBER OF STUDENTS (NOT ATTENDING NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS) |
|--|---|
| Out-of-District (1)                        | 13  |
| Home Schooled                              | 13  |
| Charter Schools                            | 4   |
| Collaboratives (2)                         | 21  |
| Vocational Technical (3)                   | 23  |
| Private Schools (4)                        | 1,151   |

- (1) Needham students are enrolled in regional schools including [Norfolk County Agricultural High School](#) & other schools supported by public funds.
- (2) Needham is a member of [The Education Cooperative \(TEC\)](#) and the [ACCEPT Education Collaborative](#), consortiums of surrounding school districts. Our partnership with these collaboratives provides opportunities for high quality professional development, innovative programming for students with disabilities, joint purchasing of school supplies, and the TEC Connections Academy for a virtual online school.
- (3) Among the options for Needham residents are the opportunity to attend [Minuteman Career and Technical High School](#).
- (4) Needham students are enrolled in private and parochial schools anywhere inside or outside of Massachusetts, including Special Education schools.

# Priority 1: All Students Are Drivers of their Own Learning



**At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, we enthusiastically launched the long-awaited full-day kindergarten program.** We welcomed 390 children to the student-centered kindergartens at our five elementary schools. Kindergarten teachers worked throughout the summer months to plan, set up their classrooms, and prepare the new programming that incorporated student choice, independent learning, and personalized pathways. Even our youngest learners were being taught to become "drivers of their own learning" in alignment with this district priority.

Our publicly funded full-day Kindergarten rolled out with a fresh approach and a hands-on curriculum that ran through March 2020. Then the school buildings were forced to close abruptly in response to the pandemic and we shifted the kindergarten program, along with the curriculum in every grade level, to remote learning. With dedication and concern for the wellbeing of all students and families, teachers and administrators developed the initial plan and implemented remote learning in accordance with preliminary guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

By the end of the school year, remote learning had provided students with important opportunities and some tough challenges as reported in the [district survey](#) administered in June 2020. We captured data about the remote learning experience from 2,642 families (46% response rate) and 1,800 of our students in grades 3 to 12. Parent responses described the level of success their children had in being independent learners during this health emergency. The survey data also indicated the level of social isolation experienced by the majority of children, and their difficulties staying focused and motivated. Whether it was completing work remotely or being responsible and conscientious from a health and safety perspective, students needed to drive their own learning more than ever before.

**Another example of a new program supporting this district priority was the high school course, Courageous Conversations on Race (CCOR).**

Students applied what they learned about how racism operates on a systemic level, both in society and in our schools, to design a two-session interactive workshop that they delivered in all 9th grade biology classes. The CCOR students modeled the importance of being an upstander and demonstrated to their peers different strategies to use when they recognize a racist remark or action.





## Priority 2: All Students Experience Integrative Teaching and Learning



**During the 2019-2020 school year, we developed a new interdisciplinary learning program for 9th grade,** and the first offering of this honors level program began in September 2020. It is designed around four core subjects (Biology, English, Math, and World History), connecting these disciplines to shared themes in order to build bridges across content. Real-world applications and project-based learning are the approaches chosen to explore the interdisciplinary themes of Observations and Patterns, Systems, Power and Influence, Disease, and Revolutions. The course design added data analysis from various sources and opportunities to develop students' communication and collaboration skills across disciplines.

This same approach proved successful for a Senior Interdisciplinary Studies course, the Greater Boston Project, offered for the past several years. It is important to develop more of these courses and extend Interdisciplinary Learning if we are to make progress toward this district priority.

**In addition, we worked on developing a framework for integrative teaching and learning** that synthesizes the district's multiple plans, initiatives, and assessments. We researched Universal Design for Learning, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and Culturally Responsive Teaching since all of these evidence-based practices focus on individual students' differences and provide each student with access to the supports and resources they need. Our intent is to adopt an Integrative Framework district-wide in FY21.

Providing integrative learning experiences became more challenging in March 2020 when the school buildings closed. Since teachers needed new tools, we piloted large group video conferencing, 1:1 phone or video calls, online platforms, and novel apps to engage with students. While technology was a supportive tool, we also integrated such offline experiences as hands-on projects, artistic creations, and explorations of the natural world.



**GIRLS VOLLEYBALL TEAM WON THE 1ST SECTIONAL TITLE IN SCHOOL HISTORY**

## Priority 3: All Students Learn and Grow Within Adaptable Environments



**The Sunita L. Williams School opened in the 2019-2020 school year.** This beautiful new building was designed to provide our students with the adaptable environment we envisioned in our Strategic Plan, including modern classrooms, a sensory garden, cafeteria with quiet rooms, extended learning room with reading nooks, an accessible playground, discovery pond, an amphitheater, and even more areas that foster collaboration and innovation.

Within each of our other school buildings, staff identified or developed adaptable spaces, including this example: **Sensory Pathways were installed at Broadmeadow and Mitchell for students in grades K to 2.** This initiative was funded by the Needham Education Foundation. Each path was designed to help students focus on academic visuals while moving their bodies in a specific order. By jumping, bouncing, bending, pushing, and breathing, our young students released their energy and then returned to their classwork with improved attention and motivation.

We were not able to replicate the in-school experience during the state-mandated remote learning period. Yet there was an urgency to adapt to the situation. Some of our teachers rushed to drop off laptops to students without one at home. Nutrition Services staff provided free meals for pickup. Principals, administrators, and teachers met late into the night and throughout the weekend to prepare for a very different learning environment, with flexible schedules to accommodate families' needs. We were inspired by students like our high school representative on the School Committee, Aidan Michelow, who shared this comment in March 2020: "I think it's important to keep in mind the bigger picture....be flexible...and make sure we're staying healthy."

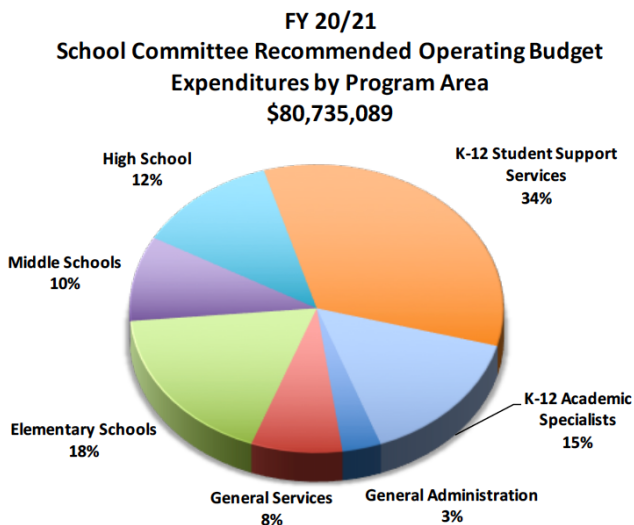
**The district refined our [Remote Learning Plan](#) in April 2020 to provide accessible learning through the end of our school year.** We appreciated families' willingness to jump in to assist their children at home even while parents juggled multiple and demanding responsibilities. As a community, we also needed to reimagine [graduation](#) as a series of events that honored 404 members of the NHS Class of 2020.





# Priority 4: Infrastructure Supports Needs of All Students

**Needham Public Schools [FY21 Operating Budget](#) was approved by Town Meeting on May 1, 2020 for \$80,735,089** - an increase of 6.2% over the FY20 operating budget. The budget request was made in order to support existing staff contractual obligations, enrollment growth, special education needs, and the strategic plan.



This budget was prepared before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic which means that we need to work creatively and collaboratively to use the resources we have to address this unprecedented situation.

The School Committee identified FY21 Capital Project priorities of which \$913,223 was funded including \$556,575 for technology and the balance for equipment replacement and facility-related requests. In addition, the **District continued to work with the Permanent Public Building Committee to complete a [School Master Plan](#)** addressing facility capacity and educational programming needs.

The COVID-19 health emergency necessitated a new [infrastructure to support the reopening](#) of our schools. **We created 5 Task Forces in the areas of Technology, Teaching & Learning, Student Support Services, Operations & Human Resources, and Health & Wellness** -- all working together under the guidance of a **COVID-19 Advisory Committee** comprised of staff, parents, town officials, and public health experts. Their work made it possible for the district to continue providing the Remote Learning Plan while completing a feasibility study to identify the best model for our schools to reopen in September 2020.

**There were 839.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff who adopted an "all hands on deck" approach during FY20.** Teachers, clerical/ technical staff, teaching assistants, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and administrators focused on responding to the learning, family, and nutritional needs of our students. Staff participated in ongoing professional learning to keep up with curriculum adjustments and novel use of technology to reach our students. We were fortunate to employ 65.2 FTE BIPOC staff (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color), a 34% increase compared with 2016, among those committed to bringing learning, creativity, joy, and personal connection to the students they care for so deeply.



# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

There are 4 areas, summarized below, that the district identified as opportunities and challenges for the new school year of 2020-2021.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY:** We must continue to focus first and foremost on the health, safety, and wellbeing of each student and staff member. Nothing else is more important. All the [Health and Safety protocols](#) and [Facility and Maintenance protocols](#), developed in anticipation of reopening our school buildings, need to be implemented with fidelity as we welcome back our students to in-person learning in September 2020.

**HYBRID LEARNING MODEL:** We recognize that there is some level of risk involved in returning to school buildings and we understand that families and staff are justifiably concerned about their health and wellness. There are some staff and students we will need to support outside of the schoolhouse and in a remote environment to protect their health and the health of their loved ones, and we will do that. However, we believe there is an even greater risk to our students if we keep schools closed for an undetermined period of time when it is possible, with the appropriate levels of health and safety measures in place and guided by trusted and local public health professionals, to reopen schools in the [hybrid model](#) as approved by the School Committee.

**DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN:** As we responded to the changes brought on by COVID-19, we never lost sight of the need to support student growth and prepare students for their future. We will be looking at the Hybrid Plan through the lens of the [Portrait of A Needham Graduate](#) so that the District Plan for FY21 ([Year 2 of the Strategic Plan](#)) continues our commitment to equity and the long-term needs of all students.

**COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM:** How did we as a community of learners respond during the 2019-2020 school year to the national events involving racial violence? Our teachers and staff prioritized lessons, readings, and difficult conversations about equity and racial hatred. Our high school students led a Black Lives Matter rally involving hundreds of students, staff, and community members that culminated in a period of silence honoring George Floyd of Minneapolis and all who are victims of racial hatred. Our students were eloquent, passionate, and poised as they shared stories about racist experiences they have had in our schools and in our town. That is why our district has re-committed to our students that the district can and must do better by them.

We have in place offerings, like Pollard's Launching Scholars Program (see class from 2019-2020 program pictured below), that begin to address opportunity gaps. However, there is much more for us to do systemically. We will share actions and updates throughout the 2020-2021 school year, including the launch of a K to 5 Racial Literacy Curriculum and alignment of PreK to 12 anti-racist instructional practices. For more information, please check out the district's website: [Equity in the Needham Public Schools](#)





# AT A GLANCE

## How Needham Compares



People often ask how Needham compares with similar communities. These charts contain data on taxes, school expenditures, and student performance for comparison. The figures are the most recent available for each of these towns. Shaded numbers represent the rank order of the corresponding community in each category.

| COMMUNITY      | FY20 AVERAGE SINGLE FAMILY TAX BILL (1) |           | FY19 PER PUPIL EXPENDITURE (2) |           | FY20 TEACHER SALARY Lowest Step, Masters Lane (3) |           | FY20 TEACHER SALARY Highest Step and Lane (3) |           | FY20 STUDENT:TEACHER RATIO (2) |           |
|----------------|---|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|---|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|
|                | AMOUNT                                  | RANK      | AMOUNT                         | RANK      | AMOUNT  | RANK      | AMOUNT  | RANK      | RATIO                          | RANK      |
| Belmont        | \$14,130                                | 8         | \$14,820                       | 19        | \$54,776  | 9         | \$110,422                                     | 10        | 16.5 to 1                      | 21        |
| Brookline      | NA                                      | NA        | \$20,543                       | 7         | \$58,285  | 3         | \$111,144                                     | 9         | 11.7 to 1                      | 3         |
| Concord        | NA                                      | NA        | \$21,180                       | 4         | \$59,394  | 2         | \$122,964                                     | 1         | 11.9 to 1                      | 6         |
| Dedham         | \$7,418                                 | 16        | \$20,821                       | 6         | \$59,447  | 1         | \$107,625                                     | 12        | 11.6 to 1                      | 2         |
| Dover          | \$15,679                                | 4         | \$23,107                       | 2         | \$54,080  | 11        | \$113,007                                     | 5         | 12.1 to 1                      | 7         |
| Framingham     | \$6,586                                 | 17        | \$19,544                       | 9         | \$53,119  | 14        | \$98,463                                      | 19        | 12.9 to 1                      | 15        |
| Holliston      | \$8,870                                 | 13        | \$14,762                       | 20        | \$50,445  | 19        | \$97,297                                      | 20        | 13.7 to 1                      | 19        |
| Hopkinton      | NA                                      | NA        | \$15,086                       | 18        | \$42,165  | 21        | \$99,362                                      | 18        | 14.4 to 1                      | 20        |
| Lexington      | \$15,547                                | 5         | \$18,687                       | 13        | \$51,913  | 17        | \$112,204                                     | 8         | 11.7 to 1                      | 4         |
| Medfield       | \$12,062                                | 11        | \$16,829                       | 15        | \$52,629  | 15        | \$104,301                                     | 16        | 13.3 to 1                      | 17        |
| Natick         | \$8,410                                 | 14        | \$16,195                       | 17        | \$53,327  | 13        | \$104,626                                     | 15        | 12.8 to 1                      | 14        |
| <b>NEEDHAM</b> | <b>\$12,272</b>                         | <b>10</b> | <b>\$18,827</b>                | <b>12</b> | <b>\$54,652</b>                                   | <b>10</b> | <b>\$107,289</b>                              | <b>13</b> | <b>13.5 to 1</b>               | <b>18</b> |
| Newton         | \$12,849                                | 9         | \$20,220                       | 8         | \$55,090  | 6         | \$109,910                                     | 11        | 11.8 to 1                      | 5         |
| Norwood        | \$5,367                                 | 18        | \$17,293                       | 14        | \$49,451  | 20        | \$91,814                                      | 21        | 12.4 to 1                      | 9         |
| Sherborn       | \$16,259                                | 2         | \$21,224                       | 3         | \$54,080  | 12        | \$113,007                                     | 6         | 12.4 to 1                      | 10        |
| Walpole        | \$7,973                                 | 15        | \$16,472                       | 16        | \$55,000  | 8         | \$102,085                                     | 17        | 12.7 to 1                      | 13        |
| Wayland        | \$14,214                                | 7         | \$19,443                       | 10        | \$51,459  | 18        | \$119,826                                     | 2         | 12.3 to 1                      | 8         |
| Wellesley      | \$15,760                                | 3         | \$21,016                       | 5         | \$55,076  | 7         | \$116,955                                     | 3         | 12.4 to 1                      | 11        |
| Weston         | \$20,922                                | 1         | \$25,846                       | 1         | \$57,131  | 4         | \$113,898                                     | 4         | 11.3 to 1                      | 1         |
| Westwood       | \$11,789                                | 12        | \$19,378                       | 11        | \$52,528  | 16        | \$112,438                                     | 7         | 12.4 to 1                      | 12        |
| Winchester     | \$14,298                                | 6         | \$14,710                       | 21        | \$56,387  | 5         | \$105,395                                     | 14        | 13.1 to 1                      | 16        |

(1) Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Revenue website. Brookline, Concord and Hopkinton do not submit data.

(2) Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

(3) Source: Unit A Contracts posted on District websites. NOTE: Holliston, Hopkinton, Norwood, Westwood not posted for FY20; FY18/19 salaries reported.

NOTE: The MCAS Next Generation scores for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math are reported as the average for students in grades 3 to 8, and for grades 5 and 8 for Science, on a scale of 440 to 560 (from Not Meeting Expectations to Exceeding Expectations). The SAT scores are computed by the College Board's Educational Testing Service as the average combined scores for the last exams taken by students in Evidence Based Reading & Writing and Math. This data is from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

| COMMUNITY      | FY19 Next Generation MCAS ELA |           | FY19 Next Generation MCAS MATH |           | FY19 Next Generation MCAS SCIENCE |           | CLASS OF 2019 COMBINED SAT |           |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|
|                | SCORE                         | RANK      | SCORE                          | RANK      | SCORE                             | RANK      | SCORE                      | RANK      |
| Belmont        | 517.5                         | 3         | 519.5                          | 2         | 521.8                             | 1         | 1236                       | 11        |
| Brookline      | 515.2                         | 11        | 514.0                          | 8         | 509.8                             | 13        | 1265                       | 4         |
| Concord        | 513.8                         | 13        | 512.3                          | 12        | 511.1                             | 11        | 1271                       | 3         |
| Dedham         | 501.4                         | 19        | 501.1                          | 19        | 497.6                             | 19        | 1123                       | 19        |
| Dover          | 517.5                         | 4         | 518.9                          | 3         | 516.4                             | 2         | 1252                       | 9         |
| Framingham     | 494.5                         | 21        | 492.8                          | 21        | 492.0                             | 21        | 1121                       | 20        |
| Holliston      | 505.8                         | 18        | 505.2                          | 18        | 506.4                             | 17        | 1192                       | 16        |
| Hopkinton      | 516.4                         | 7         | 516.7                          | 6         | 511.3                             | 10        | 1225                       | 13        |
| Lexington      | 518.0                         | 2         | 521.0                          | 1         | 515.5                             | 6         | 1324                       | 1         |
| Medfield       | 511.1                         | 15        | 511.1                          | 15        | 509.7                             | 14        | 1206                       | 15        |
| Natick         | 509.5                         | 16        | 508.9                          | 16        | 506.1                             | 18        | 1168                       | 17        |
| <b>NEEDHAM</b> | <b>515.4</b>                  | <b>10</b> | <b>512.2</b>                   | <b>13</b> | <b>510.3</b>                      | <b>12</b> | <b>1226</b>                | <b>12</b> |
| Newton         | 512.5                         | 14        | 512.5                          | 11        | 508.4                             | 15        | 1263                       | 5         |
| Norwood        | 501.0                         | 20        | 500.5                          | 20        | 497.2                             | 20        | 1111                       | 21        |
| Sherborn       | 515.6                         | 9         | 512.0                          | 14        | 516.2                             | 3         | 1252                       | 10        |
| Walpole        | 508.7                         | 17        | 508.4                          | 17        | 507.7                             | 16        | 1138                       | 18        |
| Wayland        | 514.8                         | 12        | 515.2                          | 7         | 513.5                             | 8         | 1256                       | 6         |
| Wellesley      | 517.3                         | 5         | 513.2                          | 10        | 512.3                             | 9         | 1253                       | 8         |
| Weston         | 520.4                         | 1         | 518.8                          | 4         | 515.9                             | 4         | 1279                       | 2         |
| Westwood       | 516.0                         | 8         | 513.5                          | 9         | 514.0                             | 7         | 1207                       | 14        |
| Winchester     | 516.9                         | 6         | 516.7                          | 5         | 515.6                             | 5         | 1253                       | 7         |

**Pollard and Hillside**  
(now Sunita Williams)  
named among the  
Commonwealth's  
"Schools of  
Recognition" for the  
2019 MCAS; Pollard  
for high growth of all  
students, Hillside for  
exceeding its targets,  
with their overall  
performance better  
than 97% and 94%,  
respectively, of other  
similar schools  
across the state.



**October 2019 Dedication:  
Sunita L. Williams Elementary School**



Astronaut Sunita L. Williams (center) pictured with students, Principal Michael Kascak, and School Committee members: Heidi Black, Susan Neckes, Michael Greis, Andrea Longo Carter (chair), Aaron Pressman, Matthew Spengler, Aidan Michelow (student representative), & Connie Barr (co-chair)



**Elementary Schools**  
**Broadmeadow School**  
Emily Gaberman, Principal  
781-455-0448

**Eliot School**  
Karen Bourn, Principal  
781-455-0452

**Mitchell School**  
Greg Bayse, Principal  
781-455-0466

**Newman School**  
Jessica Peterson, Principal  
781-455-0416

**Sunita Williams School**  
Michael Kascak, Principal  
781-455-0461

**Middle Schools**  
**High Rock School**  
Jessica Downey, Principal  
781-455-0455

**Pollard Middle School**  
Tamatha Bibbo, Principal  
781-455-0480

**High School**  
**Needham High School**  
Aaron Sicotte, Principal  
781-455-0800

**Central Administration**  
781-455-0400

**Daniel Gutekanst, x11203**  
Superintendent

**Mary Lammi, x11212**  
Assistant Superintendent,  
Student Support Services

**Alexandra McNeil, x11209**  
Assistant Superintendent,  
Human Resources

**Theresa Duggan, x11226**  
Assistant Superintendent,  
Student Learning

**Anne Gulati, x11206**  
Assistant Superintendent,  
Finance and Operations