

# Methuen mayor, School Committee divided over district budget

By **Maria Probert** Globe Correspondent, Updated June 13, 2025, 3:21 p.m.



The Methuen school district serves about 6,500 students, two-thirds of whom are classified as high needs. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

The Methuen School Committee and Mayor David P. Beauregard, are stuck in a weeks-long battle over next year's budget, with the two sides at odds over how to fund the city's schools.

The fight boils down to proposed cuts to schools, which could lead to as many as 80 staff layoffs.

The mayor has proposed a \$110.5 million spending plan, a 5.5 percent increase over the existing budget. Meanwhile, the School Committee is asking for [\\$113.7 million](#). The School Committee and the district's teacher union want the mayor to dig into its \$20 million in reserves, or savings, to cover contractual expenses and save more positions.

The city council is expected to vote on the budget on [June 23 or June 24](#).

The impasse prompted the committee to seek an emergency injunction in Essex Superior Court Thursday to stop the mayor from consolidating the school district's IT department with the city's, one of his cost-cutting measures.

School Committee members said the district needs its own department to support student and staff devices, and that Beauregard doesn't have the authority to unilaterally combine the two departments. Beauregard, however said, he is just seeking such cuts to prevent further teacher layoffs.

"My mission here is to ensure that we limit the number of teacher layoffs to the maximum step possible," Beauregard said. "We simply cannot be reducing mission critical student-facing classroom positions."

The mayor's proposed budget has also rankled parents, teachers, and students, who gathered at a recent City Hall meeting, demanding the councilors reconsider the proposed budget.

Beauregard said his proposed budget ensures that other essential city departments, like fire and police, aren't cut.

The Methuen Education Association said the city should prioritize school funding.

"What we are doing now is just going backwards in time again, and the mayor wants to move forward, well this isn't it," said Kara Blatt, co-president of the Methuen Education Association.

Like Methuen, school districts across Massachusetts — including Brookline, Milton, and Newton — have been [grappling with strapped budgets amid inflation](#), rising [special education](#), and transportation costs, and the [loss of federal pandemic relief funds](#).

The Methuen school district serves about 6,500 students, about two-thirds of whom are classified as high needs, meaning they are low income, English learners, or have disabilities, according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

“I think my son’s social development and his behavioral development is a huge part of his education as well. So I don’t think any position is expendable by any means,” said John Drew, a Methuen parent who spoke out at last week’s city council meeting. Drew has a son who benefited from a district special needs program for two years before integrating into the Comprehensive Grammar School.

The mayor also has proposed freezing contractual teacher raises to free up cash.

While the district has seen a declining student enrollment, losing nearly 500 students in the past decade, new students who have been added to attendance rolls are largely high needs and require additional services that cost more, said Laurie Keegan, School Committee co-chair. Keegan said the per-student cost rose by about 25 percent from 2020 to 2023. Despite cuts to some staff positions, including 40 last year, staffing increased during the last five years to about 540 as of last school year.

“The students that we’re losing are not the students that we’re gaining, all of these populations cost a lot more money to educate. So while our actual enrollment may look like it’s slightly down, the per-pupil cost is actually much higher because the needs of the kids are much greater,” Keegan said.

Merging the city’s IT department and other school utilities, would free up more than \$800,000, Beauregard said, and would be enough to save more than 20 teaching positions.

Parent Nicole Pereira said she is open to the idea of consolidating the IT department if it means saving staff positions and limiting class sizes. However, she added the current IT department is already overwhelmed, and that it took months for IT to fix her fourth grade son's Chromebook.

"I just don't know how a teacher is supposed to teach all 20 plus students effectively while making sure half of those students are receiving all of their accommodations," Pereira said.

Keegan raised doubts over how equipped the city is to handle the 7,000 plus devices in the students' one-to-one technology program. The mayor has also proposed consolidating the district's legal department, but Keegan said the district needs specialized legal counsel in working with students in special education that she believes the city cannot provide.

State lawmakers five years ago [overhauled the state's school funding formula](#), but the high rate of inflation in recent years [has outpaced the adjustments](#) used in the new funding formula, leaving districts to cut programs or ask taxpayers for more money.

Parents and teachers said there needs to be changes to the way aid is distributed, like raising the minimum funding requirement of Chapter 70, the primary state funding program for Massachusetts public schools.

"When you hear that Massachusetts has the best schools in the United States, I would really be just shocked to see what happens in other states and other schools," Pereira said, "because I just feel really let down with the way that people talk about what we can offer at school and how much we can be willing to take away from our schools."

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