

St. George Municipal School Unit

Excellence. Community. Engagement.



Tuesday, May 26 at 5:00 p.m.

Key Points

- The School Board voted to adopt a [Proposed FY21 St. George MSU Budget](#) for next school year that **reduces the assessment** to the Town by about \$40,000.
- The proposed budget is part of a **long-term strategy** to protect our district from the financial impacts of the pandemic. This strategy includes controlled expenditures, thoughtful use of the school fund balance, and establishing several reserve accounts.
- We have begun planning for a return to school in the fall. The School Board approved a [St. George MSU Return to School Roadmap](#) to help provide the structure and framework to facilitate that planning.
- **Together, as a school-community**, we will develop a plan for next year. Some things will look different in the fall and some things will remain the same. Who we are – our commitment to our kids, community, and one another – will remain constant. **We will remain Dragon Strong.**

Dear Families and Community Members,

This Memorial Day, we remembered the men and women who died serving our country. They remind us that freedom is founded upon service and sacrifice. Every Memorial Day, we pause to remember this costly lesson and honor those who sacrificed so much for so many. This Memorial Day Weekend, we also remembered the almost 100,000 people who have died because of Covid-19 and the ongoing pandemic. Among these 100,000, are medical workers and first responders, grocery store employees and mass transit workers, who died caring for, feeding, and transporting their neighbors. These men and women also remind us of the service and sacrifice that every nation and community depend upon.

This weekend, I couldn't stop thinking about the service and sacrifice that binds our nation and community together. We see this on grand levels as well as in the simple moments that make up most of our lives. As I've gotten older, those small and simple acts of service, sacrifice, and kindness have come to mean more and more. They give me hope that – as a community – we can meet any challenge and emerge stronger on the other side. Those acts of kindness – both great and small – provide me with inspiration as we begin planning and preparing to return to school in the fall.

Dragon Strong

St. George School is a community-school and the heart and strength of our school is the Town of St. George. Our mission is simple – to do whatever it takes to ensure that every single student thrives and to contribute to the vibrancy and resiliency of the Town of St. George. We believe that for students to *thrive* – to demonstrate mastery and find meaning in education – they must share their learning in ways that positively impact their community. As a school-community, we focus on students' academic growth, character development, and health/wellness. We recognize that health/wellness – which we define as students' physical & mental health, social-emotional well-being, and food security – is a prerequisite for academic growth and character development.

In times of adversity, like now, we refocus and recommit to that vision. Some things will change as we adapt and overcome the challenges that we currently face. However, who we are – our commitment to our kids, community, and one another – will remain constant. We will remain Dragon Strong.

Proposed Budget for the 2020/21 School Year

When the pandemic struck in March, the School Board – working with staff and administration and in consultation with town officials – reworked the proposed budget for the 2020/21 school year. In earlier versions, there were increases in the budget and local assessment to pay for the cost of adding a Pre-K Program. While we remain committed to adding Pre-K at some

point in the future, the Board, staff, and Early Childhood Education Working Group decided to wait given the financial impact of the pandemic on our community and the uncertainty as to what school will look like next year.

As we revised the proposed budget through March, April, and May to account for the still uncertain effects of the pandemic, several things became clearer. **First**, next school year will look different as we adapt to a “new normal” that incorporates social distancing and other steps to mitigate the spread of the virus. This, in turn, could require increased costs in certain areas (e.g., more regular and intensive cleanings of the school building and buses, smaller class sizes, outdoor learning areas, etc.). **Second**, as a school-community, we will need to address students’ academic and health/wellness needs arising from this pandemic. Some [studies](#) show “that students could return in the fall having progressed only 70 percent of a grade in reading and less than 50 percent of a grade in math during the 2019-20 school year.” In addition, many students will return with increased social-emotional and health/wellness needs due to extended school closures, stay-at-home orders, economic hardship, and the stress of living through a global pandemic. **Third**, the pandemic will impact our state and local economies. Due to projected state revenue shortfalls caused by the pandemic, there is a risk that school districts could see a reduction, or “curtailment,” in state subsidy.

To address these challenges – the uncertainty of next year, increased student and family needs, and the financial impact of the pandemic – on Monday, May 18, the School Board voted to adopt a Proposed FY21 St. George MSU Budget for next school year that **reduces the assessment** to the Town by about \$40,000 and **adopts a longer-term strategy** to prepare for the financial uncertainty that may extend beyond next year.

By reducing expenditures by about \$23,000 and utilizing money from the school’s fund balance (i.e., money left over from past budgets), we were able to cut our anticipated state subsidy by 20% *and* reduce the assessment to the Town by about \$40,000. This means we are less reliant on state subsidy and better able to adapt if, later this summer or in the fall, the state reduces funding for public education.

The budget approved by the School Board also establishes several reserve funds to cover unanticipated costs that could arise as we continue to prepare for next year. If these funds are not needed, they will be available to help offset costs in future budget years.

Through controlled expenditures, responsible use of the school’s fund balance, and the establishment of reserve accounts, the proposed FY21 budget addresses known, immediate needs; accounts for unanticipated needs; prepares for the uncertainty of upcoming fiscal years; and keeps the local assessment down. More information about the proposed FY21 school budget is available on the [school website](#). If you have any questions about the budget, please contact Superintendent Mike Felton (m.felton@stgeorgemsu.org) or Business Manager Cassie Kilbride (c.kilbride@stgeorgemsu.org).

Planning for the 2020/21 School Year

There have been an increasing number of reports and articles in the media discussing what school will look like in the fall. As you may know, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recently released [detailed guidance](#) for schools, and other organizations, on when and how to reopen. In addition, the Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) published [guidelines and recommendations](#) for school-sponsored summer programs. The Maine DOE is currently working on a document to help school districts plan for the fall.

After consulting with public health, medical, and state officials; meeting (virtually, of course) with other superintendents; talking with staff, families, Board, and community members; and reading and reviewing news articles and research, it’s become clear that no one knows exactly what school will look like next year. We are fortunate that, as of May 26 at 11:30 a.m., the [Maine CDC](#) reports that there have only been 20 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Knox County, with 18 people recovered, 2 current cases, and no deaths. It is imperative that we – **together, as a school-community** – begin working now to develop a plan for next year that is (1) tailored to our school community’s needs and (2) informed by educators and school staff, families, community members and organizations, town officials, public health officials, medical providers, and state and federal requirements and recommendations.

To guide our planning process, the School Board adopted a [St. George MSU Return to School Roadmap](#), which is modeled on a [document](#) that was developed with feedback from epidemiologists, child infectious disease physicians, psychologists, district superintendents, and school leaders to help plan for a safe, efficient, and equitable return to school. We adapted the document to better address the unique needs, structure, setting, and demographics of our school-community.

As part of our roadmap, **six working groups** will focus on the following key areas as we plan for next year: (1) Facilities & Transportation, (2) Operations & Communications, (3) Instruction, (4) High School & Postsecondary, (5) Technology, and (6) Wellness. Each working group will elect a representative to sit on the **Return to School Committee**, which will coordinate the work of the subcommittees and develop a comprehensive return-to-school plan for the School Board's review and approval.

This will be a community effort. During the spring and summer, working groups will reach out to students, families, staff, town officials, and community members and organizations for input, feedback, guidance, and advice. We recognize that the process is as important – if not more important – than the final plan. In our planning, we will prioritize transparency and be honest about what we know and don't know. We will make difficult decisions that consider student, staff, and community health; the costs, benefits, and potential disruption resulting from social distancing and other strategies to mitigate the risk of viral spread during the school day; and the importance of classroom-based learning to students' academic growth, social development, and overall health and wellbeing.

There will be many difficult decisions, but ***we will make them together***, as a school community. We will emerge from this stronger having faced this crisis together, as a community, with compassion and courage. Some things will look different in the fall. However, some things will remain the same. Who we are – our commitment to our kids, community, and one another – will remain constant. We will remain Dragon Strong.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Felton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Felton

St. George MSU Superintendent

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