RSU 38 MARANACOOK AREA SCHOOLS

FY27 Budget — Community Q&A

Updated May 8, 2026 • Reflects the May 6, 2026 Board Amendment

This reference answers common questions about the FY27 budget for residents across our four towns. The responses below are plain-language summaries of the district's position. For additional details, contact the Superintendent's Office directly or visit Maranacook.org to access all FY27 Budget Materials.

> **Note:** On May 6, 2026, the Board voted to amend the one-year plan and maintain Kindergarten in all four elementary buildings for 2026–27. The FY27 budget approved by the Board on April 15 is unchanged. This Q&A has been updated to reflect that decision.

🎒 Elementary Schools for 2026–27

Q I heard Kindergarten was being consolidated. Is that still happening?

A No. On May 6, 2026, the Board voted to amend the one-year plan. Kindergarten will be maintained in all four elementary buildings — Manchester, Mount Vernon, Readfield, and Wayne — for the 2026–27 school year. The original plan to offer Kindergarten only at Manchester and Readfield will NOT take effect. The FY27 budget approved by the Board on April 15 is unchanged.

Q How is Kindergarten being staffed for 2026–27?

A Kindergarten will be offered at all four elementary buildings: 2 sections at Manchester Elementary (10 and 9 students), 2 sections at Readfield Elementary (13 and 14 students), 1 section at Mount Vernon Elementary (10 students), and a multi-age K/1 classroom at Wayne Elementary serving approximately 4–5 Kindergarten students alongside 11 grade 1 students. The plan was made possible by a combination of voluntary teacher movement and natural changes in incoming class sizes. No teacher is being laid off; the staffing reduction the Board approved is still in effect, and the FY27 budget remains unchanged.

Q What about Pre-K?

A Pre-K programming continues at Manchester Elementary and Readfield Elementary, as before. Projected enrollment at Manchester Elementary may support only a single AM session for 2026–27, with the flexibility to add a PM session if registration warrants. Readfield Elementary Pre-K programming is unchanged. Maine statute caps Pre-K at 16 students per class with a teacher and an education technician.

Q What is happening at Wayne Elementary in 2026–27?

A Wayne Elementary will continue to serve students in Kindergarten through grade 5. As part of reaching the staffing reduction the Board approved, grades K and 1 at Wayne will be combined into a single multi-age classroom for this one year only. The Wayne teacher will move into the open position at Mount Vernon Elementary. The Administrative Team has been transparent that this one-year plan includes elements that aren't ideal — workable for 2026–27, but not as a long-term model. Questions about the long-term direction of our elementary schools will be addressed through the strategic planning process.

Q What support will the Wayne multi-age classroom have?

A Wayne Elementary has a full-time general Ed Tech III, as do all four elementary schools. That position can support the K/1 multi-age classroom. The Ed Tech III will work with the teacher to support differentiated instruction across both grade levels and provide additional small-group and individualized attention to students, along with the building Interventionist and special education teacher as needed. Equitable educational experiences, strong peer groups, grade-level teacher collaboration, and balanced class sizes across PK–5 are at the heart of serving all of our students well — and these are exactly the questions the strategic planning process is designed to take up together over the coming year.

Q Does the change in plan affect the budget?

A No. The FY27 budget approved by the Board on April 15 is unchanged. The figures towns will see at the May 13 Annual Budget Meeting are the same figures already reviewed and shared with Select Boards. The staffing plan that supports keeping Kindergarten in all four buildings fits within the budget the Board already approved. The same approximately $180,000 in personnel savings that the original Kindergarten plan was projected to produce is still being realized through staffing reductions, achieved through a different combination of voluntary movement and configuration changes.

Q Is the district planning to close schools?

A No. All four elementary schools will continue to serve their students in 2026–27. Long-term decisions about the district's direction — including any questions about elementary configuration — will be made through a community-driven strategic planning process that engages residents, parents, and elected officials from all four towns. That process takes place during the 2026–27 school year, with adoption of a finalized strategic plan in Spring 2027.

👥 Staffing Changes

Q Why are we reducing teaching positions?

A Personnel make up approximately 80% of the district's operating budget. The FY27 budget reduces eight positions in total — five through retirements, resignations, and unfilled positions, and three through a formal Reduction in Force. These reductions reflect declining enrollment. Maintaining the same number of teaching positions for a significantly smaller student population is not fiscally responsible. Class sizes remain within contractual and programmatic standards. In addition to these personnel cost reductions, the FY27 budget includes further reductions in administration, maintenance, and transportation.

Q Is anyone being laid off?

A No teacher is being laid off. The staffing reduction is being achieved through a combination of retirements, voluntary movement, and configuration changes.

Q What does a Reduction in Force mean if no one is being laid off?

A A Reduction in Force eliminates a position, not necessarily a person. The Administrative Team committed early on to finding a path that achieved the approved staffing reduction without layoffs — anticipating Middle School retirements, working with teachers willing to move into those vacancies voluntarily, and building the cascade of internal moves described above. The position count is reduced; the people remain employed.

⚙️ Budget Drivers

Q Why is the budget going up if enrollment is going down?

A Enrollment determines how much state aid the district receives, but it does not reduce fixed costs at the same rate. Heat, electricity, insurance, building maintenance, and administrative coverage do not decrease proportionally when a building loses students. Running four elementary buildings for 439 students carries much of the same fixed overhead as running them for 580. That gap — between declining enrollment and stable fixed costs — is a core driver of the district's financial pressure.

Q Why did the Anthem health insurance projection change between drafts?

A The First Draft budgeted a 10% increase based on preliminary projections. Updated recommendations for the Second Draft pointed to 15%, while the most recent actuarial data for the Third Draft showed it down to 7.28%. Budgeting conservatively early and reducing the projection as better information arrives is more fiscally responsible than raising costs just before final adoption.

Q Why was summer school cut and then added back?

A Summer school was removed from the First Draft as part of an initial effort to reduce costs. After further review, the Administrative Team determined that eliminating it entirely would disproportionately affect the district's highest-need students — those requiring elementary intervention, middle school math support, and high school credit recovery. It was restored in the Second Draft at a reduced scope and cost, focused on those students most dependent on the program.

🏘️ Tax Impact and Town Assessments

Q Why is Mount Vernon's increase so much higher than the other towns?

A Mount Vernon's property valuations increased proportionally more than those of the other three towns, which pushed a larger share of the required local match onto Mt. Vernon under the state formula. This is a formula outcome — not a per-school spending decision. The district does not allocate budget by town.

Q Why does it cost so much more per student in some towns than others?

A Each town's per-pupil figure is driven by property values, not by what the district actually spends per student. Maine law requires each member town to contribute to the shared budget based on its state-certified property valuation. A town with high property values pays a larger share of the budget; when that amount is divided by a smaller PK–12 enrollment, the result is a higher per-pupil figure. The opposite is equally true: a town with lower property values and more students will show a lower per-pupil cost. In either case, the figure shows how the budget burden is distributed—**not what the district actually spends per child**.

Q How does this affect my actual property tax bill?

A Your property tax bill depends on your town's total assessment obligations — for schools, municipal services, and county taxes combined. The school assessment is one part of that total. Your town's Select Board and assessors set the mill rate based on the full budget picture. For the specific impact on your individual tax bill, contact your town office.

Q Why can't you use the fund balance to reduce the assessment?

A We are. The FY27 budget includes a $987,398 carry forward from prior-year savings, which reduces your assessment dollar-for-dollar. Beyond that, the fund balance is allocated to capital reserves and a special education reserve, leaving an unassigned portion of only 3% of the total fund balance, well below the 9% statutory ceiling under Maine law. Spending it down further would leave the district without a financial cushion and is not fiscally responsible.

Q If the district has savings, why is my assessment going up?

A The district is already using its savings to reduce your assessment. The FY27 budget includes a $987,398 carry forward from prior-year unspent funds, which reduces local property taxes dollar-for-dollar. The remaining fund balance is allocated to capital reserves and a special education reserve. The unassigned portion — funds not designated for a specific purpose — is only 3% of the total fund balance, well below the 9% statutory ceiling under Maine law. The fund balance is not a surplus available for general spending; it is a managed financial reserve.

🧭 Looking Ahead: Strategic Planning and the Future of Maranacook

Q What will the strategic planning process look like?

A This coming year, we will begin a community-wide strategic planning process — our "Building Stronger Together" initiative. The goal is straightforward: to make thoughtful, informed decisions together about the future of this district, rather than in isolation.

The challenges we face — enrollment trends, aging facilities, shifting state funding, and the broader pressures reshaping public education at the state and national levels — are real and require honest conversation. Society is changing. The economy is changing. The needs of students and families are changing. Addressing those changes well means drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people closest to this work every day.

Maranacook is a community with deep roots and a genuine commitment to its children. Keeping this district strong for the next generation requires that we face hard questions honestly and work through them together. The strategic planning process is how we do that, and every voice in this district has a role to play.

The process takes place during the 2026–27 school year, with adoption of a finalized strategic plan in Spring 2027, and will be facilitated by an external consultant to ensure objectivity. A Strategic Planning Committee of 12–18 members will include board members, administrators, teachers, parents, local government representatives, and high school students from all four towns. Community engagement will happen through surveys, focus groups, and public forums in Manchester, Mt. Vernon, Readfield, and Wayne. The committee will examine the district's enrollment trends, facilities, finances, and programming, and develop a multi-year plan that reflects the community's priorities. No major decisions about the district's long-term direction will be made outside of this process.

Following the Annual Budget Meeting on May 13, the plan-to-plan committee membership will be finalized and communicated to the community. The committee will then meet to select a qualified strategic planning consultant to lead the district's 2026–2027 planning process.

By the end of June, you will receive, along with the rest of the community, an invitation to join the full strategic planning committee, as well as information on community forums and other ways to participate in this process.

🗳️ How to Participate

Q When is the budget vote, and how do I weigh in?

A There are two opportunities to participate. The Annual Budget Meeting is May 13, 2026, at 7:00 PM in the RSU 38 Middle School cafeteria — this is an open meeting where residents can speak and vote on the budget. The Individual Town Referendum is June 9, 2026, when voters in each town cast a formal ballot. Both are public processes, and all residents are encouraged to participate.

Q What is the Annual Budget Meeting, and does my vote matter?

A The Annual Budget Meeting is a public meeting required by Maine law at which voters deliberate and vote on the school budget by warrant article. It is not advisory — the votes taken that evening shape the budget that goes to the referendum. Attendance and participation directly influence the outcome. The meeting is open to all voters in the four member towns.

💬 Questions not covered here?

Contact the Superintendent's Office. We are committed to providing our community with accurate, timely information.

Dr. Karen G. Smith, Superintendent

RSU 38 Maranacook Area Schools

A *Caring School Community Dedicated to Excellence*