

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE FARMINGTON RIVER REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT:

DATA UPDATE TO LATEST AVAILABLE DATA

27 February 2024

FY23 DOR data updated with recently released FY24 DOR data

School Committee Ratified Facts & Data

Imagine for a moment that Otis and Sandisfield were one town, called Otisfield. The total assessment submitted to Otisfield by the FRRSD would be distributed to all Otisfield taxpayers according to property assessments. This is the way things are done in all municipal (single town) school districts in Massachusetts.

Per data from the MA **Department of Revenue (DOR)**, in this scenario, the measure of Otisfield’s total assessed property value, known as its **Equalized Valuation (EV)**, would be just over \$1B, with **74%** of that comprised by the current Otis EV, and **26%** comprised by the current Sandisfield EV. Based on this, the Otisfield taxpayers formerly from Otis would pay 74% of the assessment from FRRSD, and those formerly from Sandisfield would pay the remaining 26% of the assessment. See *Appendix 1*.

Today Otis pays **60%** of the FRRSD assessment on their 74% of the aggregate EV, while Sandisfield pays the remaining **40%** of the assessment on their 26% of the aggregate EV. See *Appendix 2*.

The current RDA distributes the total FRRSD assessment to the towns via two different apportionment formulas: one for operating costs, and the other for capital costs. The RDA distributes the operating costs to the towns based on the enrollment split between the two towns – currently at **57%** Otis and **43%** Sandisfield – with no material consideration of relative wealth. As for the much smaller capital costs, the RDA distributes these costs using the average of the enrollment and EV splits, which currently stand at **66%** Otis and **34%** Sandisfield. And this is how the current 60% Otis, 40% Sandisfield split of the FRRSD assessed costs is arrived at. See *Appendix 2*.

When the RDA was put into place in 1992 the **difference** between the EV’s of Otis and Sandisfield stood at **\$153M**, while today it stands at **\$494M**, an increase of **3.2x**. The founders of the FRRSD clearly could not have anticipated this drastic change. Unfortunately, the RDA hasn’t been amended once since its inception 32 years ago. See *Appendix 3*.

Equally, and perhaps even more relevant here, the MA **Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE)** computes each year a parameter known as the **Combined Effort Yield (CEY)** for each MA town. The CEY is DESE’s measure of the maximum the town could reasonably afford and be expected to contribute toward its education expenses. It’s computed using a formula that considers both the EV of the town along with the total income of its residents. Currently the total cost assessed to Otis by the FRRSD is **\$1.4M under** its CEY, at **62%** of its CEY, while Sandisfield is **\$266K over** its CEY, at **121%** of its CEY. In short, Otis is paying significantly less than what DESE has determined it can afford, and Sandisfield is paying significantly more than what DESE has determined it can afford. See *Appendix 4*.

As indicated in the table below, the FRRSD assessment to each town comprises a significant portion of the tax levy the town must raise via property taxes. The last column of this table shows the percentage of the town tax levy attributable to the assessment from FRRSD, which is of course also the percentage of each tax bill the town sends out attributable to FRRSD. We refer to this as the **FRRSD Tax Load (FTL)**. The Sandisfield FTL is 6.05 percentage points higher than the Otis percentage, rendering Sandisfield’s FTL **14.75%** greater than the Otis FTL. See *Appendix 5*.

	FY24 Tax Levy	FY24 FRRSD Assessment	Assessment % of Tax Levy
Otis	\$5,617,441	\$2,302,417	40.99%
Sandisfield	\$3,290,075	\$1,547,397	47.03%

Lastly, DOR provides data each year for each town in MA that indicates the property tax load on its residents. This data is shown in the table below for Otis and Sandisfield, along with a link to the DOR data source.

FY24	SF Values (\$)	SF Parcels (#)	Avg SF Value (\$)	Avg SF TB (\$)	SF TB % of Value	Income Per Capita (\$)	Avg TB % of Income
Otis	711,877,500	1,544	461,061	2,988	0.65	41,157	7.26
Sandisfield	225,784,100	595	379,469	3,791	1.00	23,596	16.07
Ratio (O/S)	3.15	2.59	1.22	0.79	0.65	1.74	0.45
Ratio (S/O)	0.32	0.39	0.82	1.27	1.54	0.57	2.21

SF = Single Family
TB = Tax Bill

Source: https://dlsgateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=AverageSingleTaxBill.SingleFamTaxBill_wRange

The columns highlighted in orange provide, for each town, the **Average Single-Family Tax Bill (ASFTB)**, the **Income Per Capita (IPC)**, and the ratio of the ASFTB to the IPC. The last column can be viewed as a measure of the **Town Tax Load (TTL)** on its residents, as it indicates on average what percentage of resident per capita income is consumed by the town tax bill.

The difference between the Otis and Sandisfield TTL is quite substantial, with the Sandisfield TTL, at **16.07%**, being a factor of **2.21x** greater than the Otis TTL, at **7.26%**. This is of course a direct consequence of the Otis IPC being a factor of 1.74x greater than the Sandisfield IPC, combined with the Sandisfield ASFTB being a factor of 1.27x higher than the Otis ASFTB.

The same DOR data source used above can be used to compare the TTL's of Sandisfield and Otis to those of other nearby Southern Berkshire County towns, as well as to all other towns in MA. Doing so yields the table below:

FY24 Average Single Family Tax Bill % of Income Per Capita				
Town	%	MA Rank	MA percentile	Area Rank
Otis	7.26	10	3%	1
Tolland	10.51	33	9%	2
Becket	10.95	42	12%	3
Blandford	11.11	46	13%	4
Granville	11.72	62	18%	5
Monterey	12.39	90	26%	6
New Marlborough	12.76	108	31%	7
Sheffield	13.05	119	34%	8
Sandisfield	16.07	247	70%	9
Great Barrington	16.58	257	73%	10
Tyringham	18.32	293	83%	11

The local towns listed in this table are ordered by TTL %, from lowest to highest TTL %. Otis has the lowest TTL of all the local towns listed, while Sandisfield has the third highest. Relative to MA, only **3%** of MA towns have a **lower** TTL than Otis, and Sandisfield has a TTL **higher** than **70%** of MA towns.

Perhaps even more relevant, by multiplying, for each town, the ASFTB by the FTL percentage, we obtain the portion of each ASFTB attributable to the FRRSD assessment, as shown in the table below. As can be seen, on average a single-family taxpayer in Sandisfield pays **\$558**, or **46%** more a year towards FRRSD than a single-family taxpayer in Otis.

	FY24 FTL	FY24 ASFTB	FY24 FRRSD ASFTB Portion
Otis	40.99%	\$2,988	\$1,225
Sandisfield	47.03%	\$3,791	\$1,783
Difference (S-O)			\$558
Ratio (S/O)			1.46

Closing Comments

In closing, we underscore that the data & facts presented here pertain only to the financial sustainability of the FRRSD as a **regional district, as it is currently constructed and operated**. No attempt has been made here to provide a compendium of all the facts & data needed to consider alternatives to a regional district, or to consider alternatives to the way the FRRSD is currently operated and constructed **other than changing the RDA apportionment method**. See *Appendix 6*.

APPENDICES NOW FOLLOW ON THE SUBSEQUENT PAGES

EACH APPENDIX IS A SEPARATE PAGE WITH A LABEL AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE

APPENDIX 1

LA-19
Equalized Valuation Report
SANDISFIELD - 260 2022

Jurisdiction Sandisfield - 260 EQV Year 2022

LA19 (FINAL)

CLASS	Assessed Value	Assessment Ratio	Estimated Full Value
RESIDENTIAL	218,919,010	0.98	223,386,700
OPEN SPACE	0		0
COMMERCIAL	6,174,276	0.99	6,265,400
INDUSTRIAL	238,200	0.98	243,100
PERSONAL PROPERTY	30,134,612	1.00	30,134,600
TOTAL REAL/PERSONAL PROPERTY	255,466,098	0.98	260,029,800
ESTIMATED GROWTH		0.76%	1,976,200
PROPOSED EQUALIZED VALUATION			262,006,000
CHAPTER 121A VALUE			0
2022 FINAL EQUALIZED VALUATION			262,006,000

25.75 %

LA-19
Equalized Valuation Report
OTIS - 225 2022

Jurisdiction Otis - 225 EQV Year 2022

LA19 (FINAL)

CLASS	Assessed Value	Assessment Ratio	Estimated Full Value
RESIDENTIAL	653,481,095	0.93	702,667,800
OPEN SPACE	0		0
COMMERCIAL	15,330,205	0.93	16,458,500
INDUSTRIAL	3,395,700	0.93	3,651,300
PERSONAL PROPERTY	26,812,001	1.00	26,812,000
TOTAL REAL/PERSONAL PROPERTY	699,019,001	0.93	749,589,600
ESTIMATED GROWTH		0.80%	5,996,700
PROPOSED EQUALIZED VALUATION			755,586,300
CHAPTER 121A VALUE			0
2022 FINAL EQUALIZED VALUATION			755,586,300

74.25 %

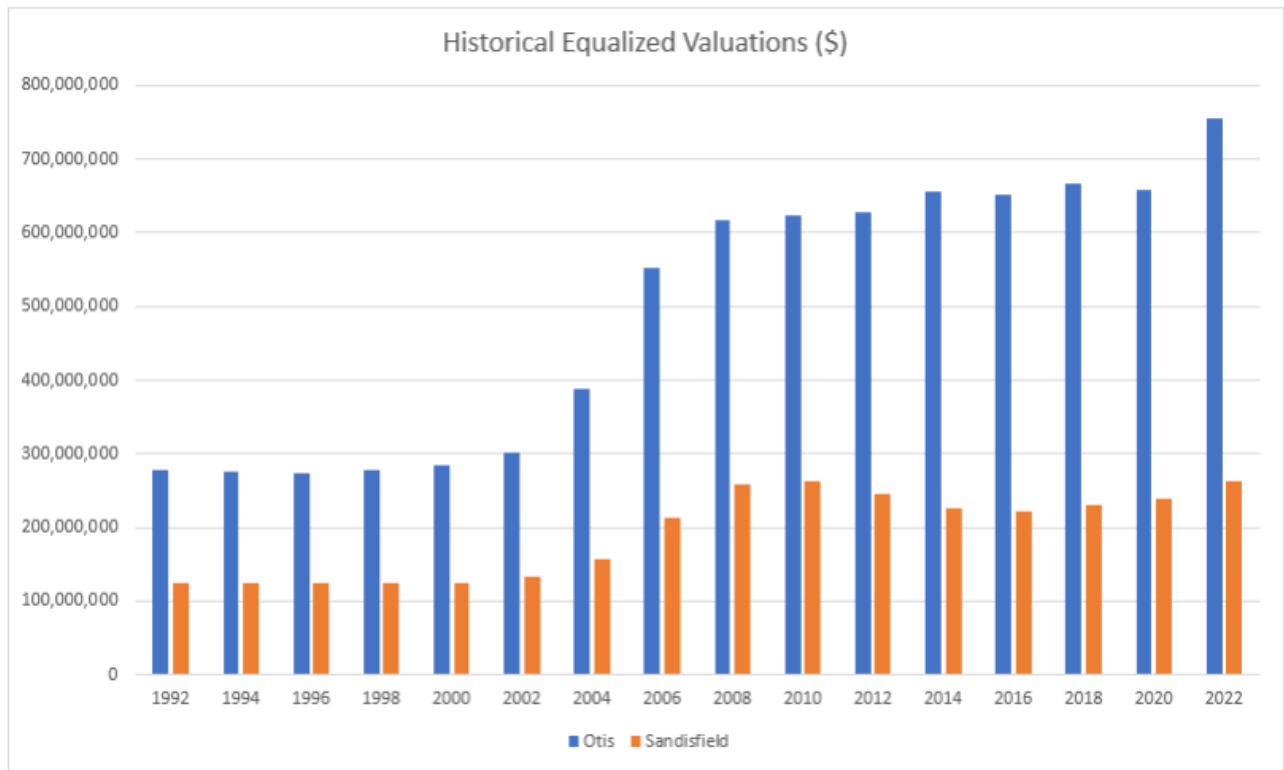
Reference: <https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/gateway/DLSPublic/LA19>

APPENDIX 2 (page 1 of 2)

Farmington River Regional School District						
FY24 Assessment Calculation - Excess E&D applied to FY23 - Presented 3/23/23						
		2023		2024		
Step 1	Operating Budget	0.41%		4.77%		
	Total Budgeted Expenditures	\$ 4,672,432.00	\$ 4,895,205.00			
	Less Transportation Budget	\$ 399,677.00	\$ 416,104.00			
	Adjusted Operating Budget	\$ 4,272,755.00	\$ 4,479,101.00			
Step 2	Chap 70	\$ 612,111.00	\$ 618,910.00			
	E&D Utilization	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 237,135.00	E&D > 5%		\$134,213.00
	Earnings on Investments	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 2,500.00			
	Local Fees	\$ 1,000.00	\$ -			
	Total Anticipated Revenues	\$ 814,111.00	\$ 858,545.00			
	Balance to be Assessed	\$ 3,458,644.00	\$ 3,620,556.00			
Step 3	FY24 Required Local Contribution			Change		
1a	Otis	\$ 1,370,021.00	\$ 1,443,945.00	\$ 73,924.00		5.40%
1b	Sandisfield	\$ 861,252.00	\$ 907,243.00	\$ 45,991.00		5.34%
	Total	\$ 2,231,273.00	\$ 2,351,188.00			
	Balance to be assessed	\$ 1,227,371.00	\$ 1,269,368.00			
Step 4				2023	2024	
2a	Otis	\$ 703,385.00	\$ 726,459.00	57.31%	57.23%	
2b	Sandisfield	\$ 523,986.00	\$ 542,909.00	42.69%	42.77%	
	Total	\$ 1,227,371.00	\$ 1,269,368.00			
Step 5	Transportation					
	Regular Transportation	\$ 367,677.00	\$ 317,604.00			
	SN Transportation	\$ 32,000.00	\$ 98,500.00			
	Total Transportation Budget	\$ 399,677.00	\$ 416,104.00			
	Less Reg Transportation Aid	\$ (226,979.00)	\$ (196,846.00)			
	Trans Amount to be assessed	\$ 172,698.00	\$ 219,258.00			
Step 6				2023	2024	
3a	Otis	\$ 98,973.00	\$ 125,481.00	57.31%	57.23%	
3b	Sandisfield	\$ 73,725.00	\$ 93,777.00	42.69%	42.77%	
	Total	\$ 172,698.00	\$ 219,258.00			
Step 7	Total Op & Trans Assess.					
	Otis (1a+2a+3a)	\$ 2,172,379.00	\$ 2,295,885.00	5.69%	\$ 123,506.00	
	Sandisfield (1b+2b+3b)	\$ 1,458,963.00	\$ 1,543,929.00	5.82%	\$ 84,966.00	
Step 8	Capital Budget - Doors & Gym Ceiling	\$ 70,270.00	\$ 10,000.00		2024	
	Otis 50% Enrollment	\$ 20,135.00	\$ 2,862.00		57.23%	
	Otis 50% Equalized Valuation	\$ 25,781.00	\$ 3,713.00		74.25%	
	Otis Total	\$ 45,896.00	\$ 6,575.00			
	Sfld 50% Enrollment	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 2,139.00		42.77%	
	Sfld 50% 50% Equalized Valuation	\$ 9,374.00	\$ 1,287.00		25.75%	
	Sfld Total	\$ 24,374.00	\$ 3,426.00			
Total Annual Assessment						
	Otis (Step 7 + Step 8)	\$ 2,218,275.00	\$ 2,302,460.00	3.80%	\$ 84,185.00	
	Sandisfield (Step 7 + Step 8)	\$ 1,483,337.00	\$ 1,547,355.00	4.32%	\$ 64,018.00	
Enrollment		2021	2022	2023	Combined Total	FY24
Otis		125	136	127	388	57.23%
Sandisfield		96	100	94	290	42.77%
Total		221	236	221	678	
Equalized Valuation	FY2022 DLS Final Equalized Valuation	Total		% for Each Town		
Otis	\$ 755,586,300			74.25%		
Sandisfield	\$ 262,006,000	\$ 1,017,592,300		25.75%		

CURRENT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY		<i>Page 1 of 11</i>			
	District Totals	Breakdown by Towns		% Breakdown by Towns	
		Otis	Sandisfield	Otis	Sandisfield
District Foundation Enrollment (last 3 years average)	226	129	97	57.23%	42.77%
Equalized Valuations	\$1,017,592,300	\$755,586,300	\$262,006,000	74.25%	25.75%
50/50 Equal Weighting (Avg) of EV % & Enrollment %				65.74%	34.26%
Adjusted Operating Budget to be assessed	\$3,620,556				
Required Local Minimum Contribution	\$2,351,188	\$1,443,945	\$907,243	61.41%	38.59%
Remaining Adjusted Operating Budget to be assessed	\$1,269,368	\$726,423	\$542,945	57.23%	42.77%
Transportation Budget to be assessed	\$219,258	\$125,475	\$93,783	57.23%	42.77%
Capital Budget to be assessed	\$10,000	\$6,574	\$3,426	65.74%	34.26%
TOTAL ASSESSMENT	\$3,849,814	\$2,302,417	\$1,547,397	59.81%	40.19%
Tax Burden Factor: (% Total Assessment / % Total EV) - 1				-19.46%	56.11%

APPENDIX 3



\$153M delta

\$494M delta
(3.2x increase)

Reference: <https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=PropertyTaxInformation.EQV.EQV>

APPENDIX 4

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
FY24 Chapter 70 and Net School Spending Formula Spreadsheet**



08/10/23

1		3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		From DOR		From DOR				
		1. Calculation of effort goal (target local share)						
			uniform property percentage		uniform income percentage			
			0.3534%		1.5331%			
LEA	Town	total EQV 2022	local effort from property wealth	DOR total income 2020	local effort from income wealth	combined effort yield	FY24 foundation	
225	Otis	755,586,300	2,670,262	67,044,000	1,027,851	3,698,113	1,750,236	
260	Sandisfield	262,006,000	925,936	23,171,000	355,235	1,281,171	1,219,862	
Totals		\$1,017,592,300	\$3,596,198	\$90,215,000	\$1,383,086	\$4,979,284	\$2,970,098	
% Otis		74.25%	74.25%	74.32%	74.32%	74.27%	58.93%	
% Sandisfield		25.75%	25.75%	25.68%	25.68%	25.73%	41.07%	
Otis FY24 Assessment						\$2,302,417		
Sand FY24 Assessment						\$1,547,397		
Otis Ass't % CEY						62.26%		
Sand Ass't % CEY						120.78%		
Otis Ass't Under CEY						\$1,395,696		
Sand Ass't Over CEY						\$266,226		

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE
 DIVISION OF LOCAL SERVICES
 BUREAU OF ACCOUNTS

Otis
 TOWN

TAX RATE RECAPITULATION
Fiscal Year 2024

I. TAX RATE SUMMARY

la. Total amount to be raised (from page 2, IIe)	\$ 8,612,568.09
lb. Total estimated receipts and other revenue sources (from page 2, IIIe)	2,995,126.69
lc. Tax Levy (Ia minus Ib)	<u>\$ 5,617,441.40</u>
ld. Distribution of Tax Rates and levies	

CLASS	(b) Levy percentage (from LA5)	(c) Ic above times each percent in col (b)	(d) Valuation by class (from LA-5)	(e) Tax Rates (c) / (d) x 1000	(f) Levy by class (d) x (e) / 1000
Residential	93.8452	5,271,699.12	813,534,010.00	6.48	5,271,700.38
Net of Exempt					
Open Space	0.0000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Commercial	1.8616	104,574.29	16,137,590.00	6.48	104,571.58
Net of Exempt					
Industrial	0.4971	27,924.30	4,309,700.00	6.48	27,926.86
SUBTOTAL	96.2039		833,981,300.00		5,404,198.82
Personal	3.7961	213,243.69	32,907,806.00	6.48	213,242.58
TOTAL	100.0000		866,889,106.00		5,617,441.40

MUST EQUAL 1C

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE
 DIVISION OF LOCAL SERVICES
 BUREAU OF ACCOUNTS

Sandisfield

TOWN

TAX RATE RECAPITULATION
Fiscal Year 2024

I. TAX RATE SUMMARY

la. Total amount to be raised (from page 2, IIe)	\$ 4,570,769.44
lb. Total estimated receipts and other revenue sources (from page 2, IIIe)	1,280,694.79
lc. Tax Levy (Ia minus Ib)	\$ 3,290,074.65
ld. Distribution of Tax Rates and levies	

CLASS	(b) Levy percentage (from LA5)	(c) Ic above times each percent in col (b)	(d) Valuation by class (from LA-5)	(e) Tax Rates (c) / (d) x 1000	(f) Levy by class (d) x (e) / 1000
Residential	87.0313	2,863,394.74	286,626,115.00	9.99	2,863,394.89
Net of Exempt					
Open Space	0.0000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Commercial	2.6052	85,713.02	8,579,958.00	9.99	85,713.78
Net of Exempt					
Industrial	0.0847	2,786.69	278,900.00	9.99	2,786.21
SUBTOTAL	89.7212		295,484,973.00		2,951,894.88
Personal	10.2788	338,180.19	33,851,829.00	9.99	338,179.77
TOTAL	100.0000		329,336,802.00		3,290,074.65

MUST EQUAL 1C

APPENDIX 6

Examples of other possible significant changes to the way the FRRSD is currently constructed and operated include:

To reduce FRRSD costs, one could consider changing the current model of one classroom per grade in the elementary school, resulting in multi-grade classrooms. This would of course lead to a smaller number of classes of larger size, which could potentially negatively impact the learning experience. It would also lead to staff reductions, for which the ramifications of the union contract would have to be given careful consideration.

To reduce costs further, one could also consider ceasing operation of the elementary school altogether and putting in place a tuition agreement(s) with an out-of-district elementary school(s), analogous to how it proceeds today with middle and high school pupils. This would likely result in significant cost savings, as the tuitions paid for the pupils would no doubt be considerably less than the current per pupil expenditures in the elementary school. However, in this case the elementary school pupils would no longer be “close and under local control”. And since this approach would result in very significant staff reductions, the ramifications of the union contract would again have to be given careful consideration here.

The following provide some limited but useful perspective regarding the second option above:

The second option above would render the FRRSD what is known as a non-operating school district, meaning that there are no in-district physical schools. This model is currently in use in MA, with just under 10 non-operating school districts currently in existence.

If Sandisfield was unable to continue with the FRRSD, it would likely form the Sandisfield School District as a non-operating municipal school district, and tuition all its pupils to out-of-district schools under tuition agreements, as this would no doubt reduce its education expenses appreciably from what they are today.

An example of deviation from a regional district is described below:

If Sandisfield was unable to continue with the FRRSD, one could consider reverting the district to a municipal district run by Otis, continuing operation of the elementary school, with all the district costs borne by Otis.

The following provides some limited but useful perspective regarding the above option:

In this option one would have to consider funding lost in the form of Sandisfield’s assessment (**\$1.5M**) and their apportionment of Chapter 70 state aid (**\$313K**), as well as state regional transportation aid (**\$197K**), since the state doesn’t provide transportation aid to municipal districts, only regional districts. It would also have to consider savings accrued by the district no longer having to pay tuitions for Sandisfield pupils (**\$486K**). And it would also have to account for funding potentially gained from choicing in 38 additional pupils to the elementary school (**\$190K**) – the same as the number of Sandisfield pupils currently enrolled in the elementary school – as a best-case scenario unlikely to be achieved near term, and perhaps never. It is estimated that this scenario would require Otis paying, in a best-case scenario, approximately **\$1.4M** a year more than it currently assessed by the FRRSD. *See Appendix 7.*

APPENDIX 7

CURRENT OTIS ASSESSMENT	\$2,302,417	
Funding Lost By Sandisfield Withdrawal	\$2,056,862	
Sandisfield Assessment		\$1,547,397
Sandisfield Share of Chap 70		\$312,619
Reg Transportation Aid		\$196,846
Savings Accrued By Sandisfield Withdrawal	-\$485,811	
Tuitions for Sandisfield Pupils (est)		-\$485,811
Funding Potentially Gained By Sandisfield Withdrawal	-\$190,000	
Additional FRE Choice In (best case)		-\$190,000
NEW OTIS ASSESSMENT	\$3,683,468	
\$ INCREASE	\$1,381,051	
% INCREASE	79.08%	
<i>FY24 Total Tuitions Paid</i>	<i>\$1,142,278</i>	
<i>FY23 % Sandisfield Enrollment</i>	<i>42.53%</i>	
<i>Estimate of Sandisfield Tuitions</i>	<i>\$485,811</i>	
<i># Sandisfield FRE Students</i>	<i>38</i>	
<i>Additional FRE Choice In (best case)</i>	<i>38</i>	
<i>Choice In Revenue per Pupil</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>	
<i>Choice In Revenue (best case)</i>	<i>\$190,000</i>	