

TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent

DATE: February 3, 2025

RE: Preschool Structure and Proposed FY2026 Budget Revisions

At the January 16 School Committee meeting, the two main topics of discussion were a proposed change to the structure of the Westwood Integrated Preschool for the 2025-2026 school year, and the initial presentation of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. I appreciate the feedback from the Committee during those discussions, and our administrative team has been working since that time to modify our proposals in both areas to reflect the direction expressed by the Committee.

It is my recommendation that at the February 16 School Committee meeting and public budget hearing, the Committee vote to accept the following revisions to what was presented at the January meeting:

- A fourth preschool classroom is added for the 2025-2026 school year
 - The location of the fourth classroom will be in the kindergarten wing at Pine Hill
 - There is no change to the structure of preschool classes for 2025-2026
 - The FY26 budget allocation for special education contracted services is increased to support the creation of this classroom
- The FY26 budget increase for Wellness at Westwood HS is reduced from 1.0 to 0.6 FTE
 - This provides for a gradual phase-in of increased Wellness classes for 2025-2026
- The FY26 budget for Mandarin at Westwood HS is increased from 0.2 to 0.4 FTE
 - This provides staffing to enable current students in all levels of Mandarin to continue their studies in 2025-2026

Each of these are discussed in greater detail below.

Preschool

As discussed at the January 16 meeting, the proposed structural change for preschool for the 2025-2026 school year was driven by a desire to increase the number of available seats for students with disabilities so that the school can meet its mission of providing instruction to those students in a balanced, integrated learning environment with peer models. It was also

discussed that the lack of physical space for program expansion in the current preschool location was a significant limiting factor for meeting this need.

Unfortunately, there is no immediate, viable solution for increasing the physical footprint of the preschool within Westwood High School in order to create an additional classroom that would increase program capacity. However, a review of space across the district indicates that one of the five kindergarten classrooms at Pine Hill is not projected to be required for use in 2025-2026, as current census numbers for incoming kindergarten students for next year are lower than they were at this point a year ago.

Our revised proposal is to utilize this classroom at Pine Hill as a fourth preschool classroom, increasing our preschool capacity while maintaining the current schedule structure. This new classroom will require staffing, most of which can be accomplished in a budget neutral manner by reallocating other staff within the district. Given the decentralized nature of this classroom, there will be some additional support required in related services for students beyond current staffing levels, and the budget for this line item will be increased from the savings through the high school revisions outlined below. We will monitor the effectiveness of this satellite classroom structure, and continue to evaluate space and capacity needs and possible remedies for our preschool program over the course of the next school year.

Wellness

As part of our commitment to a well-rounded education for all students, the increase to wellness staffing at Westwood High School will provide an opportunity for every student in the Class of 2027 and beyond access to wellness classes throughout all four years of their high school experience. This was identified as a significant gap in our high school curriculum in our recent review, particularly given the rising need to support students' mental health.

While the initial FY26 budget proposal called for a 1.0 FTE increase to Wellness staffing at the high school, a more phased-in approach to this increase can be done with a 0.6 FTE. For the 2025-2026 school year, all juniors will take one term of Wellness opposite their Financial Literacy class. An increase of 0.4 FTE for high school wellness staffing will be required in the FY27 budget to complete this transition, and in the 2026-2027 school year, seniors will take a term of Wellness opposite their Civics class.

Mandarin

We proposed to maintain 0.4 FTE for the teaching of Mandarin. After our conversations with students following the January 16 School Committee meeting, we are confident that this level of staffing will provide sufficient resources to support all students currently enrolled in Mandarin in continuing their studies in the language in the 2025-2026 school year. In future budget cycles, we will propose maintaining adequate budgetary resources to allow students that have begun their Mandarin language study at Westwood High School to complete a four-year sequence in the language.