

TO: School Committee Members

FROM: Emily Parks, Superintendent

DATE: May 8, 2019

RE: Proposed staffing changes in FY'20 budget

I am following up on my budget/staffing update and subsequent discussion at the April School Committee meeting. As you know from that update, since the budget was voted, we have had some changes in staffing. As a result, we have an opportunity to return to our list of priorities identified during the FY'20 budget development process and consider moving something off the priority list that didn't make it into the approved budget. As we discussed during the budget process, the next two positions that the Administrative Council contemplated during our internal budget meetings were a middle school guidance counselor and a full-time high school guidance counselor. (The FY'20 budget includes a new .6 FTE high school counselor; but we had considered adding 1.0 FTE.)

My recommendation is as follows:

Add 1.0 FTE Middle School Guidance Counselor

The FY'20 proposed budget included 1.0 FTE Preschool Director. Since the budget was voted, our Preschool Director has announced her retirement. We have decided to restructure this position by reducing the Preschool Director position to .5 FTE and including the Integrated Preschool under the auspices of an elementary principal. Under this restructuring plan, we are realizing a \$60K savings. Since this \$60K is included in the approved FY'20 Budget, it is available to be reallocated. We can reasonably hire a full-time guidance counselor within a parameter of \$60K.

Thurston currently has 2 guidance counselors, an adjustment counselor, and a school psychologist. Next year we are projected to have 713 students at TMS. The adjustment counselor position was added in FY'13 to address increased enrollment. At that time, we considered adding a third counselor, but chose to hire an adjustment counselor based on some trends in student needs.

At the April meeting, the SC asked for comparison data to better understand our student services staffing ratios. (See attachments A and B.) In these charts, we compare student enrollment to staffing levels of licensed mental health professionals. As you will see, different schools have different student services models. To provide the most rigorous assessment, we presented the data both with and without psychologists included, as the current model for the psychologist at TMS focuses mostly on special education testing, with limited counseling

responsibilities. This data was gathered by contacting other TEC districts and represents their responses to our inquiries.

Mr. Redmond's request for guidance staffing is not framed around student to staff ratios. In fact, student enrollment at the middle school is dropping. Rather, he would like to restructure the Guidance Department so that there is a counselor for each grade level. Under the current model, counselor assignments are made alphabetically across all three grades. Counselors, therefore, communicate with teachers on all 6 teams and attend team meetings for all 6 teams. Attaching a counselor to a grade streamlines the role, requiring less meeting time and more time in the schedule to work with students. If we move to this model, to the extent possible, we would want to maintain staffing levels even as enrollment inevitably fluctuates.

Add .4 FTE High School Guidance Counselor

The role of high school guidance counselor is similar to that of a middle school counselor in terms of social/emotional counseling work and programming with students. It differs in that it also includes a great deal of academic counseling/scheduling issues and, of course, college admissions counseling. For these reasons, we have historically kept our high school counselor caseloads lower than at the middle school. Since the SC approved the FY'20 budget, we have received a resignation from a high school counselor who had been on a leave of absence this year. The FY'20 budget includes that individual's salary. At this point, we are able to calculate the turnover related to this position (a delta of approximately \$24K), again providing a opportunity to "go back to the priority list." I recommend that we apply this known savings to increasing the FTE of the new high school guidance position from .6 FTE to 1.0 FTE, as it was our identified priority during the budget process.

Unless the School Committee has objections to making these changes within the "bottom line" number of the FY'20 budget, we would like to proceed quickly with the hiring process. Additional guidance staffing will require making changes in counselor assignments. We would like to begin planning for those changes and be able to communicate changes to families in a timely fashion.

Attachment A
Licensed Mental Health Staff - Middle Schools

| Town | Number of Students | Number of Lic MH staff | Ratio (lowest to highest) | Notes |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Dedham | 647 | 4.5 | 144:1 | 2.0 Guidance Counselors 2.0 Psychologists 0.5 Adjustment Counselor |
| Walpole Bird MS | 449 | 3.0 | 149:1 | 1.0 Guidance counselor 1.0 Psychologist 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |
| Medfield | 598 | 3.5 | 171:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors, 1 per grade-level. They loop with the students. 1.0 Adjustment Counselor shared with High School |
| Westwood | 713 | 4.0 | 178:1 | 2.0 Guidance Counselors, 1 Adjustment Counselor, 1 Psychologist Psychologist primarily does testing |
| Needham | 831 | 4.5 | 184:1 | 2.5 Guidance Counselors 2.0 Adjustment Counselors |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|------|-------|---|
| | | | | [1.0 Transitions Academic Coordinator (TA position)] |
| Dover Sherborn | 522 | 2.75 | 189:1 | 2.0 Middle School counselors 1.5 Adjustment Counselors (shared between middle and high school) |
| Walpole Johnson MS | 437 | 2.0 | 219:1 | 1.0 School Counselor (formerly Guidance Counselor) 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |
| Wayland | 669 | 3.0 | 223:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors ¹ |
| Hopkinton | 848 | 3.0 | 283:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors |
| Millis | 376 | 1.0 | 376:1 | 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |

¹ In Wayland, it appears that they have counselors who are psychologists who can complete special education testing, rather than a separate psychologist position.

Attachment B
Licensed Mental Health Staff - Middle Schools
With Psychologists Excluded

In this chart, we excluded psychologists, as at TMS the school psychologist primarily is responsible for special education testing and a limited counseling role.

| Town | Number of Students | Number of Lic MH staff | Ratio (lowest to highest) | Notes |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Medfield | 598 | 3.5 | 171:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors, 1 per grade-level. They loop with the students. 1.0 Adjustment Counselor shared with High School |
| Needham | 831 | 4.5 | 184:1 | 2.5 Guidance Counselors 2.0 Adjustment Counselors {1.0 Transitions Academic Coordinator (TA position)} |
| Dover Sherborn | 522 | 2.75 | 189:1 | 2.0 Middle School counselors 1.5 Adjustment Counselors (shared between middle and high school) |
| Walpole Johnson MS | 437 | 2.0 | 219:1 | 1.0 School Counselor |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-------|--|
| | | | | (formerly Guidance Counselor) 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |
| Wayland | 669 | 3.0 | 223:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors ² |
| Walpole Bird MS | 449 | 2.0 | 225:1 | 1.0 Guidance Counselor 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |
| Westwood | 713 | 3.0 | 237:1 | 2.0 guidance and 1.0 adjustment |
| Dedham | 647 | 2.5 | 259:1 | 2.0 Guidance Counselors 0.5 Adjustment Counselor |
| Hopkinton | 848 | 3.0 | 283:1 | 3.0 Guidance Counselors |
| Millis | 376 | 1.0 | 376:1 | 1.0 Adjustment Counselor |

² In Wayland, it appears that they have counselors who are psychologists who can complete special education testing, rather than a separate psychologist position.