

TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent

DATE: May 8, 2026

RE: Buffer Zones Update

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At the February 23, 2026 meeting of the Westwood School Committee, the Committee voted to establish buffer zones for elementary school attendance areas, consistent with the guidelines presented and the discussion at that meeting. Information about buffer zones was shared with families as we opened the kindergarten registration process for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year, and [can also be found on the district's website](#).

As part of our guidelines, we established the following tiered notification system for newly registering families that reside in buffer zones, based upon the date of their registration. Those timelines are:

- Registered by May 1, informed by May 15
- Registered after May 1, but on or before June, informed by June 15
- Registered after June 1, within three weeks or August 20, whichever comes first
- After August 20, on a rolling basis at the time of registration

As of May 1, we had 185 students registered for kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year. The distribution of currently registered students across schools based upon primary school attendance area, and taking into account special education program placements, is as follows:

- Downey: 37 students
- Martha Jones: 49 students
- Pine Hill: 58 students
- Sheehan: 41 students

In the development of the FY27 budget, we identified that the use of buffer zones was designed to maintain kindergarten staffing at a total of 11 sections district-wide: four sections at Pine Hill, and a combined seven sections at Downey/Martha Jones/Sheehan, with three sections at one school and two sections at the others. Given that Martha Jones is already at 49 students, it is clear that there need to be three sections at Martha Jones; as a result, Downey and Sheehan will have two sections each.

Based upon our guidelines, we contemplate enacting buffer zones when class sizes reach a level of at least 18 students. Given our historic kindergarten enrollment and future projections, we anticipate another 20-30 registrations between now and the start of school in the fall. As a result, we are enacting a buffer zone from the Sheehan School, given that class size based

upon current registrations would be 20/21 students, and that our goal is to maintain class size guidelines of 22 students or fewer in kindergarten as we open the year.

In determining which buffer zone to enact, our process adhered to our guideline principles of maintaining neighborhood connections for students and families, minimizing bus detours, and prioritizing bus-eligible zones over walker zones. As a result, the buffer zone that is enacted is the zone in the area of Dover Road/High Rock Street/Hartford Street. Within this zone, all five (5) eligible students within that buffer zone will attend Pine Hill beginning in Fall 2026.

All families who reside in buffer zones were notified of their status on Thursday, May 7, and follow-up phone conversations were had with families within the enacted buffer zone.

Thank you, and I look forward to discussing this further with the Committee at our meeting on May 14.