

TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent

DATE: February 5, 2026

RE: Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Update

At the January 21, 2026 meeting of the Westwood School Committee, we discussed the initial proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget. Given the economic climate that was known at the time, the proposed budget of \$61,296,182 (4.31% increase) contained both required staffing increases to ensure legal compliance for students' needs, and material personnel reductions that would have an impact on student learning and achievement.

At the subsequent School Committee meeting on January 28, 2026, the Committee spoke about changes to the known economic climate, and discussed a desire to be presented with two additional budget scenarios that were increases above the original proposed budget: a \$300,000 increase, and an increase to level services. Below, please find three scenarios - the two that were discussed at the January 28 meeting, and a third that addresses the primary area of staffing concerns and results in an increase at a dollar figure between the two previously discussed scenarios.

In each of these scenarios, with the exception of those items specifically identified below, all other changes in the proposed FY27 budget (both personnel and non-personnel) remain as previously identified.

Scenario 1: \$300,000 increase from Proposed (4.82% above FY26)

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Downey: \$77,000

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Martha Jones: \$91,800

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Sheehan: \$91,800

Add 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Pine Hill: \$91,800

Reduce 1.0 FTE Instructional Aide: -\$35,600

Raise fee increase (bus, athletics, PK) from 4% to 6%: -\$16,800 (increased offset)

In the proposed FY27 budget, one grade level in each of our elementary schools was above class size guidelines (Grade 4 Downey, Grade 1 Martha Jones, Grade 2 Pine Hill, Grade 5 Sheehan). By restoring/adding a classroom teacher at each elementary school, projected class sizes for the 2026-2027 school year are better aligned with School Committee guidelines. These changes also allow us to better implement our district priority of student-centered instruction using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

It is important to note that there may be some logistical challenges with the restoration/addition of the classroom positions, given the lack of a fifth classroom in the Grade 2 wing at Pine Hill and the need to use additional classrooms at Downey and Martha Jones to implement our special education program reorganization. The impact of this is that there may be a need to relocate a special subject area (e.g., art, music, DLCS) out of a dedicated classroom space, in some schools. At Pine Hill, the location of the fifth Grade 2 classroom would need to be in the STEM classroom, which would relocate DLCS specials and would also have the effect of the fifth classroom not being part of the Grade 2 neighborhood. As the STEM room at Pine Hill was not originally designed as a grade-level classroom, there are also additional impacts on student storage (no cubbies outside the classroom) and classroom furniture/storage, as well as office/workspace for the staff who are currently housed in the STEM room.

While we acknowledge that these are challenges, we believe that we are able to address them, and that the restoration of these positions is in the best interest of students for the 2026-2027 school year. There are questions about whether we are able to maintain this level of staffing in 2027-2028 and beyond if the fiscal climate continues to be difficult, and it is something we will need to assess next year in the development of the Fiscal Year 2028 budget.

In the initially proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget, there was one Instructional Aide (IA) position that was held from having a total of twelve (12) kindergarten classrooms districtwide in the current 2025-2026 school year, but was not yet assigned with only eleven (11) kindergarten classrooms projected for 2026-2027. Scenario 1 proposes eliminating this position in the FY27 budget.

It is extremely likely that we will need to add an IA position as we manage enrollment during the next school year, either to help alleviate enrollment pressures or as required to support newly identified needs in students' educational plans. The elimination of the position of the budget would mean that if that need arises, we would need to identify savings within the management of the FY27 budget midyear to fund the additional staffing, as opposed to having a funding source already identified.

In the initial proposed budget, a 4% fee increase was presented for transportation, athletics, and preschool tuition. By changing that increase for 2026-2027 from 4% to 6%, it is projected to bring in an additional \$16,800 in revenue, which can then be used to offset the operating budget.

Fee	FY'26	FY'27 original	F7'27 revised
Bus	\$290	\$300	\$320
Bus Family Cap	\$870	\$900	\$960
Athletic	\$320	\$334	\$340
Athletic Family Cap	\$1280	\$1336	\$1360

Preschool	\$12.16/hour	\$12.65/hour	\$12.89/hour
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Scenario 2: \$352,400 increase from Proposed (4.91% above FY26)

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Downey: \$77,000

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Martha Jones: \$91,800

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Sheehan: \$91,800

Add 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Pine Hill: \$91,800

Scenario 2 is the same as Scenario 1 above, except without the elimination of the Instructional Aide position or the additional increase in fees for transportation, athletics, and preschool tuition. This proposal recognizes the high likelihood of the district needing to allocate the IA position during the next school year, either in response to higher-than-projected Kindergarten enrollment, or shifting special education needs. Additionally, it maintains the originally proposed 4% increase in fees, thereby not creating an additional financial burden on families.

Scenario 3: \$517,850 increase from Proposed (5.19% above FY26)

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Downey: \$77,000

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Martha Jones: \$91,800

Restore 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Sheehan: \$91,800

Add 1.0 FTE Classroom Teacher, Pine Hill: \$91,800

Restore 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher, TMS: \$87,000

Restore 1.0 FTE Mathematics Teacher, WHS: \$78,450

Scenario 3 is the same as Scenario 2, but also restores the special education teacher at Thurston Middle School and the math teacher at Westwood High School that were reduced in the originally proposed budget. While neither of these reductions would have resulted in the loss of educational programming for students, the restoration of these positions would provide for lower student-to-teacher ratios in special education at the middle school and mathematics/science at the high school.