

To: School Committee
From: Lemma Jn-baptiste, Director of Finance and Operations
Date: March 13, 2026
RE: FY26 Transfers for IA/ABA Expenses

The District has recently been in discussions with the Town Finance Director, Stephanie McManus, to forecast that we will require some transfers to close the fiscal year.

With School Committee support, we will be requesting a transfer of 905K from the ABA and IA salary lines to the contracted services line in Student Services. This would be a transfer internal to the Westwood Schools operating budget that permits us to use available funds in salary lines to offset a deficit in contracted services.

In addition, we will be requesting School Committee support to make a request at Town Meeting for a transfer of 345K from Free Cash to the Westwood Schools operating budget to cover the cost of contracted employees who have filled roles as Applied Behavior Analysts (ABA's) and Instructional Aides (IA's) in Special Education classrooms.

Transfer Amount

In early August, we approached the start of the school year with approximately five to eight vacancies in instructional aide positions. Then, eleven ABA's resigned during one week in late August. The vacancies at the start of the year jeopardized our ability to implement Individualized Education Plans. It was imperative for the district to fill all the vacancies immediately. To do so, we deployed contracted service providers. At the first quarterly report to the School Committee, I anticipated the contracted services budget to be over by as much as 1.5M by year end.

An analysis done in the first week of March suggests that contracted services in Special Education will be over by 1.67M by year end. Of this, 1.25M is directly attributable to the contracted employees specifically filling ABA and IA roles. The purchase orders for the 1.25M are specifically with the contractors ProCare Therapy, Phaxis, Onward Search, and Amergis. There are currently twenty-three contracted providers in ABA and IA positions.

We anticipated that funds would be available in our salary lines to offset much of the anticipated deficit in contracted services, but not all of it. This is because contractors are more expensive than our employees due to the overhead and administrative cost. Our financial system does not permit us to encumber salaries but an analysis of the remaining school year salary expenses suggests that 900K in these budgets will be unused by fiscal end. The bulk of the funds, or about 680K, will be released from the ABA line, which is budgeted at 1.7M and where on average we have had at least 40% of the positions vacant all year. The remaining 225K will be released from the IA line, which is budgeted at 3.69M and where we have had less than 10% of positions vacant.

Budget Context

It was originally anticipated that the Town will see significant net savings in health insurance and retirement contributions due to the vacancies in these lines. However, our Town Finance Director has reported that health insurance spending through February was right on track at 65% expended. This means that a transfer from the Municipal fixed costs budget to the School budget is not feasible.

The request of 345K from Free Cash and the transfer of 905K from the ABA and IA salary lines will cover the 1.25M contractor expense in the Special Education contracted services line. We believe that we can absorb the remaining budget shortfall of 420K in contracted services within the operating budget as we close the fiscal year, but it will be a particularly tight fiscal close.

The amount of the proposed transfer request at Town Meeting has been calibrated to ensure the ability to close the school budget but to minimize the demand on Free Cash resources. It is always our goal to exercise fiscal discipline and stay within our operating budget where feasible.