



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

January 24, 2018

Dear Westwood Residents:

We are writing to invite you into an important community conversation. As you know, our School District is widely recognized as among the best in Massachusetts, and we aim to maintain that standing to best serve generations of our children to come. This reputation in large part reflects the investment that Westwood has made in its schools and the importance it places on educating our children. We are proud to continue this work.

Continuing that investment, we need to turn our attention to three of our elementary school buildings built between 1948 and 1953. Given their age, these buildings have needs that must be addressed. Although well-maintained, much of the existing plumbing and HVAC piping and components are original and nearing the end of useful life. The buildings are not fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They lack sufficient and suitable space for programs like art and music; small group instruction and intervention services; and even general storage and custodial functions. In short, they need to be modernized, both as a practical matter and to support today's educational programs.

To be clear, we are not in dire straits. Our schools are safe, and students are learning. However, complications from deteriorating building conditions will escalate, as will the related negative impact on learning.

With an eye on our children's future, the District has begun to explore potential solutions. We are determined to make fiscally responsible decisions to transform our schools into modern places of learning—capable of utilizing new technology and adapting to new curricula in order to continue providing the highest quality education.

Recently, the District took initial steps toward receiving partial funding from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), a state-funded program, to help pay for construction, renovations and repairs to our elementary schools. We are very excited that the MSBA recently voted to invite Westwood into its eligibility period, during which time specific plans will be formulated with input from the community. Unlike many school districts that have applied for eligibility multiple times without success, Westwood succeeded in its first attempt. This is a tremendous opportunity for us to carefully plan how we will invest in educating the Class of 2030 and beyond. The resulting project will be an investment in the future of our community and the children to come whose education we are charged with safeguarding.

The District is committed to keeping all residents informed and engaged, so that everyone understands the choices and challenges we will face and has the chance to contribute to the conversation. Over the next several months, we want to engage with you in a visioning process that looks toward the immediate future, while also considering the community's needs for the next 30 to 50 years. We want to hear your concerns and opinions, understand what we as a community value in education, and ultimately determine the scope and direction of our capital projects.

To that end, we are launching a new website—www.westwoodschoolbuilding.com—where we will post the latest information as soon as it becomes available. In addition, we will offer multiple, ongoing opportunities—like school tours, forums and Q&A sessions, and surveys—to allow for community participation and feedback.

Lastly, we'll regularly issue communications like this one to draw attention to specific issues and developments. These messages will be sent to the District's email list, local newspapers, the Council on Aging, and the town newsletter. They will also be posted on the new website and promoted through the Westwood Schools social media channels.

We believe that only by collaborating respectfully and thoroughly as a community can we achieve the outcomes our children deserve. We hope you feel the same, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Emily J. Parks
Superintendent of Schools

Carol S. Lewis
School Committee Chairperson