

TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent

DATE: June 6, 2025

RE: Class Size Update

Each year as we build the operating budget, one of our key drivers is class size, particularly at the elementary level. Class size is driven by the combination of enrollment and staffing, and projecting enrollment in Grades 1-5 is highly predictable as Westwood does not have a great deal of student mobility either in or out of the district on an annual basis. Projecting the number of kindergarten students, however, has become much more challenging over the past few years as the town census is no longer a reliable indicator of enrollment in the coming fall.

When we built the Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget, we level-staffed kindergarten from FY25, given the tight fiscal constraints we faced elsewhere in the budget. This staffing included four sections at Pine Hill, and two sections each at Downey, Martha Jones, and Sheehan. However, as we are approaching the end of the school year, confirmed kindergarten registrations at both Downey and Martha Jones are at 49 and 45 students, respectively - in excess of our kindergarten guidelines, and with more registrations potentially coming throughout the summer. As such, we need to increase the number of sections of kindergarten at Downey and Martha Jones by one section each for the fall. This necessitates not only an additional teacher in each building, but an additional instructional aide as well.

As the budget for FY26 is already set, we need to be able to make these changes in a budget-neutral manner. Although we are able to address the majority of the necessary funds through turnover savings and the reallocation of a budgeted instructional aide position based upon student need, as the chart below shows, we need to reduce one elementary classroom elsewhere to remain budget neutral.

Additions

2.0 FTE Kindergarten teachers	\$170,000
2.0 FTE Instructional aides (IAs)	<u>\$60,000</u>
Subtotal:	\$230,000

Reductions/Reallocations

Turnover savings	\$115,000
Reallocation of 1.0 FTE IA	\$30,000
Reduction of 1.0 FTE ES classroom	<u>\$85,000</u>
Subtotal:	\$230,000

The chart below shows, as of June 6, 2025, what the enrollment is for each elementary school by grade level, and what the number of sections and average class size would be based on the previously approved FY26 budget:

2025-2026 Projected Enrollment, based on FY26 approved budget, as of 6/6/2025

	Downey	Martha Jones	Pine Hill	Sheehan
Kindergarten	49 24/25	45 22/23	72 18/18/18/18	38 19/19
Grade 1	38 19/19	41 20/21	89 22/22/22/23	35 17/18
Grade 2	47 15/16/16	53 17/18/18	80 20/20/20/20	56 18/19/19
Grade 3	52 17/17/18	40 20/20	79 19/20/20/20	43 21/22
Grade 4	44 22/22	46 23/23	87 21/22/22/22	50 16/17/17
Grade 5	46 23/23	58 19/19/20	76 19/19/19/19	51 17/17/17

The two cells highlighted in green are the two kindergartens in question; the addition of a third kindergarten classroom at Downey brings the class sizes to 16/16/17, and at Martha Jones to 15/15/15, with additional registrations anticipated during the summer months.

The School Committee has established class size guidelines of no more than 22 students in Grades K-3, and 24 students in Grades 4-5. The number of classrooms in each building for Grades 1-5 were designed to maximize the efficient use of available budget, and so there is no reduction in classrooms that can be made without exceeding guidelines.

It is important to note that the guidelines are not hard caps, and may need to be exceeded when situations arise. An example of this was the decision in the summer of 2023 to consolidate the Grade 5 Deerfield into one classroom of 25 students due to enrollment pressures elsewhere. It is important in these conversations to work with principals to identify where these reductions would have the least impact on students.

In discussion with our leadership team, we are in agreement that the appropriate course of action is to reduce the number of sections of the rising Grade 5 class at Sheehan from three to two. The Grade 5 teaching team at Sheehan has two very experienced and strong educators,

and a high level of literacy and math support will be provided in Grade 5 for all students. Principal Evans has communicated this internally to her staff at Sheehan, as well as to Sheehan families.

I look forward to speaking with you further about this, and to answering any questions at our meeting on June 12.