

WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



PROPOSED FY'25 BUDGET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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OF THE WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

January 12, 2024

Dear Westwood School Committee and Westwood Residents,

I am pleased to present to you an Executive Summary of the Fiscal Year 2025 Superintendent's Recommended Budget. This document provides an overview of the budget and insight into how budget decisions are made. In addition to this summary, all of our detailed budget documents and spreadsheets are available to the public on the district website. We provide this information so that the community can be confident that our budget ensures a high-quality educational experience for students, while also maintaining a sense of financial responsibility and stewardship for the town's resources.

[In my entry plan findings presented to the School Committee in November](#), I noted the significant strengths in the Westwood Public Schools in high levels of student achievement, high quality teaching, administrative, and support staff in the district, and robust levels of community support. In building the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, we began by looking at the level of financial resources required to maintain the existing educational and personnel infrastructure that has led to such strong performance in the district. This initial build is then modified by strategic additions and reductions that are aligned with the goals and strategic priorities identified through the [WPS Strategy for District Improvement](#).

Education is, by its nature, a "people business". This is reflected in our budget, where salaries account for 85% of the overall FY'25 budget proposal. As a result, when determining the financial impact of maintaining level services, the biggest driver is the impact of contractual obligations for staff salaries. With most of our contracts settled through at least the end of FY'25, we were able to enter the budget development process with greater clarity than last year about the financial impact of contractual increases. In addition to the impact of salaries, we also continue to feel the pressure of cost escalation factors in other non-salary areas, particularly transportation and special education. Fortunately, our transportation costs are predictable for FY'25 as we have existing contracts with our transportation providers, and our special education out-of-district tuition costs are mitigated for the coming year due to our strong in-district programming for students.

In analyzing the financial impact of salary and non-salary increases for Fiscal Year 2025, the WPS budget requires a base increase of 3.54% over Fiscal Year 2024. This percentage increases to a "level services budget" of 3.77% when we account for non-discretionary personnel additions that are required to meet our obligations for students' in-district special educational service delivery.

As a district, we have a responsibility to engage in continuous improvement efforts, which means that we cannot be content with simply maintaining level service programming. At the same time, we must

balance any changes in programming with our fiscal responsibility to the community, ensuring that our budget complements other municipal priorities while staying within Proposition 2 ½.

In the proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget, we believe that we were able to successfully strike this balance. This is accomplished through a series of budget modifications that allow us to address many of our strategic priorities while having **an overall budget increase of 3.69% - less than that of a level services budget.**

The major reason that we are able to accomplish this for FY'25 is due to cost savings realized through the consolidation of Hanlon and Deerfield into Pine Hill. Although the anticipated reduction of classroom sections at Pine Hill was not able to be actualized due to overall increasing elementary enrollment in the district, this budget identifies \$268,000 of personnel savings through the merger. These savings include direct reductions in administrative functions as a result of moving to one campus, as well as indirect savings through the exploration of alternative staffing models aligned with our district goals.

In particular, it has been a long-time district goal to examine our specialist class offerings at the elementary school level, and is a current strategic priority to expand digital literacy and computer science (DLCS) learning opportunities to more students in elementary school. Through this budget, we were able to redesign our elementary specialist model to add DLCS to students' weekly learning experiences while continuing to maintain weekly student opportunities for art, library, music/performing arts, and physical education. This budget also addresses some other long-standing needs for the district - the restoration of the middle school library/media center position, and the creation of a Human Resources Director position. In addition, we are also adding a therapeutic "BRIDGE" program at the high school that is responsive to the growing acuity of student needs.

We are excited that this budget has been able to address a number of priorities in our current district strategy in a fiscally responsible manner. As we reach the end of the timeline of this current strategy, we are excited to begin the work on developing a new vision and strategy for the Westwood Public Schools. This process will start this spring, and will engage stakeholders from across the community in its development. In concert with the creation of a new master facilities plan for the district, these plans will guide our future budget deliberations for Fiscal Year 2026 and beyond.

If you have any questions about this budget or any other school related matter, please do not hesitate to reach me by email at tpiwowar@westwood.k12.ma.us or by phone at 781-326-7500 x1340. I am incredibly grateful not only for the support of the community to me as I have begun my journey here in Westwood, but more importantly, for the support of the students that we serve in our district. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Timothy G. Piowar
Superintendent of Schools

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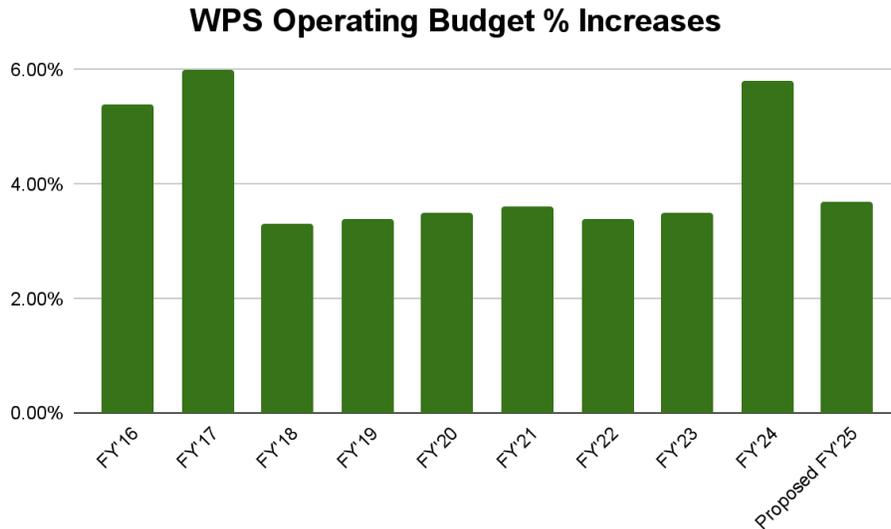


WHAT IS THE FY'25 SCHOOL DEPARTMENT OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST?

As the table below illustrates, our recommended budget for FY'25 totals \$56.8 million which represents a 3.69% increase over FY'24.

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| FY'24 Final Budget | 54,743,565 |
| Proposed FY'25 Budget | 56,763,603 |
| Increase (\$) | 2,020,038 |
| Increase (%) | 3.69% |

After a larger than typical increase in FY'24, the proposed increase in the FY'25 budget is more consistent with the budget growth rates experienced from FY'18 through FY'23.



The larger increases in FY'16 and FY'17 represent years when the new growth from University Station provided substantial increases in tax revenue to the Town. Those large increases to the District's operating budget in FY'16 and FY'17 continue to positively impact the District's financial position today. Notably, the District has managed its budget without an operational override to Proposition 2 ½ for 16 years.

The FY'24 increase was supported in part by a significant increase in Chapter 70 state aid. While this increase in aid to Westwood was largely due the state's efforts to fund the 2019 Student Opportunity Act, the expansion of the District's METCO program to the elementary level also contributed to this increase.

How Do We Build The Budget?

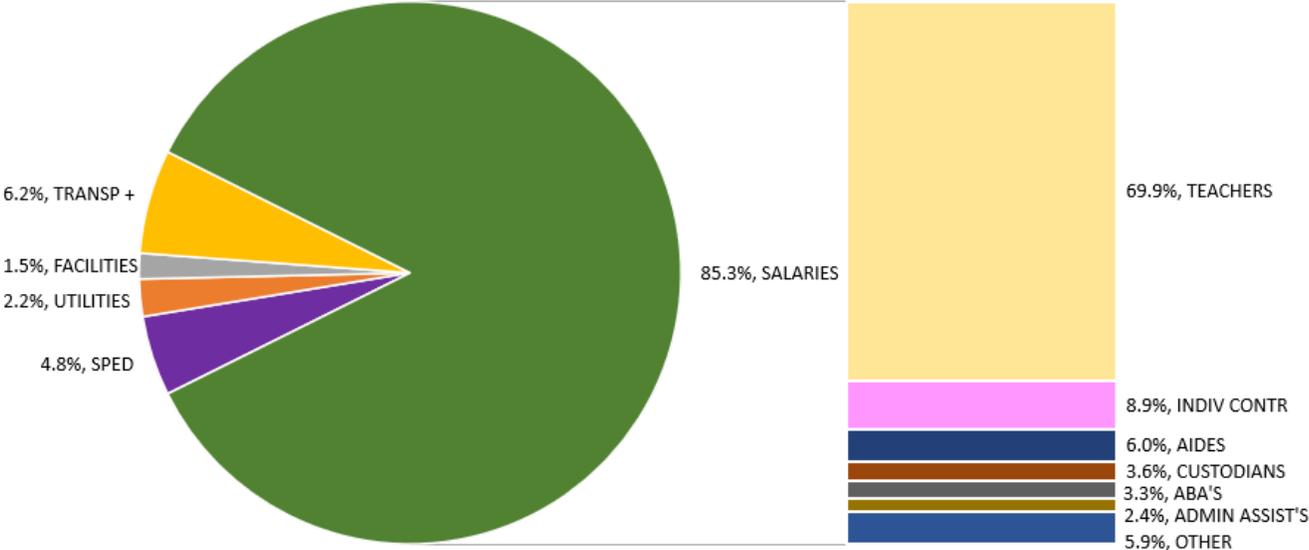
The Westwood Public Schools is committed to providing a high-quality educational experience for all of the students we serve. As we build our budget each year, that commitment needs to be demonstrated through the manner in which we allocate our financial resources. In that process, we examine the impact of maintaining our existing services, respond to changes in enrollment patterns and student needs, identify areas to implement district goals and priorities, and do this in the context of understanding the financial picture of the Westwood community as a whole.

Maintenance of Existing Services

As a starting point, we assess our contractual salary obligations and other fixed costs to maintain our existing services, such as transportation, utilities, and legally required special education services.

Salaries

The WPS budget, like all school districts, is primarily about people. We know that students’ daily experience is most powerfully influenced by the quality and skill of the teachers they work with in the classroom. Salaries comprise 85% of our operating budget and teachers account for the largest share of salaries.



The WPS has collective bargaining agreements with seven bargaining units, all of whom provide valuable services for students’ educational experiences. We will soon be entering into negotiations with Custodians for a contract that expires in June 2024; all other contracts are settled either through 2025 (Teachers, BCBA, Administrative Assistants) or 2026 (Instructional Aides, ABA Tutors, Cafeteria).

Transportation

The District is currently in the third year of a three-year service contract with our yellow bus transportation company. In FY'25, the cost of daily bus routes increased by 3.6%. In addition, the cost of late buses escalates at 3.3% (Boston late buses) and 5.4% (Westwood late buses). The late buses comprise about 6% of the regular transportation expenses in the District.

The District is currently in the second year of a three-year service contract with our Special Education van company. For FY'25, our contract cost for these vans increases by 6%. Together with a change in the student transportation requirements, this rate increase is a driver in the Special Education transportation cost that is discussed later in this document.

Utilities

Last year, the district increased its utilities budget for electricity by \$87k. This reflected a substantial rise in the cost of electricity over prior years. This year, the District is more appropriately funded and has only shifted utility dollars from Deerfield and Hanlon in order to reflect the Pine Hill consolidation. A comprehensive study of the district's utility budget will be conducted in preparation for the FY'26 proposed budget. At that time, the district will have at least six months of usage history in order to understand the costs of operating the new building.

Special Education

In budgeting for out-of-district special education tuition costs, we must account for both annual tuition rate increases and the updated list of student placements projected for the coming school year. The state's Operational Services Division, which sets tuition rates for private special education schools (i.e. out-of-district placements) has instructed districts that they should budget for a 4.69% increase in tuition costs next year, which represents approximately \$75k for Westwood in FY'25. To provide context, this increase was 14% for FY'24, but over the prior 20 years, had never been more than 2-3%.

Despite the increased tuition rates, relative to the FY'24 budget the District is experiencing a net decrease in projected out-of-district tuition costs of \$196k for FY'25. This decrease is not typical, and is attributable to a change in the composition of student placements for the 2024-2025 school year.

All of the above is discussed in more detail later in this document.

Responding to Changes in Enrollment Patterns and Student Needs

After identifying the financial resources required to maintain existing services, we consider shifts in enrollment and maintaining reasonable class sizes. While shifts in enrollment can be a significant driver in school budgets, for the reasons discussed further below, it is not a significant driver for the FY'25 budget.

In addition to staffing requests that are part of our approach to implementing district goals and priorities, we also need to examine how our staffing levels align with our legal obligations to meet students' service delivery needs. The FY'25 budget includes additional part-time staffing in related service provider positions at Thurston, as well as additional special education instruction assistants (IAs) in response to identified needs for our in-district students.

District Goals and Priorities

Our continuous improvement as a school district is predicated on our ability to implement our district goals and priorities. The [WPS Strategy for District Improvement](#) articulates the current strategic priorities for the district, and the identified changes in the FY'25 budget are designed to address many of these priorities. In particular, the proposed budget includes the following:

- Expansion of elementary special offerings to include digital literacy/computer science and restoration of the middle school library program (Priority 2.3)
- Creation of a therapeutic “BRIDGE” program at the high school for at-risk and high-needs students (Priority 3.4)
- Addition of a Human Resources Director to support the recruitment and retention of staff, including staff that is more representative of the diversity of our student body (Priorities 4.2, 3.1)
- Addition of stipends for SEL Team Leaders (Priorities 1.3, 3.4)

In accomplishing progress towards these goals, we also have to be cognizant of our financial responsibility to ensure that the school department budget works in concert with other municipal needs within the Town of Westwood. While other budget additions would support further progress towards other district priorities, some of these will be deferred to consideration in future budgets. These are identified as future budget priorities, and are detailed later in this summary.

To support the proposed budget additions, we need to identify strategic reductions that can offset the cost impact of those requests. Each year, we first look for areas where we can increase our financial efficiency without impacting our core mission of teaching and learning, and the FY'25 budget identifies a new delivery model for technology support in the district that has an associated cost savings.

The FY'25 budget is unique in providing an opportunity to identify cost savings associated with the consolidation of Hanlon and Deerfield into the Pine Hill School. While our current projected enrollment figures do not provide for an opportunity to reduce the number of general education classrooms, the consolidation does allow us to create some greater efficiencies in some administrative functions. In addition, we are able to be strategic in the design and delivery of our elementary specialist offerings to both increase the offerings to students, and to do so while realizing a net cost reduction.

More detailed information about these budget additions and reductions can be found in the following pages.

The *WPS Strategy for District Improvement* is posted on the home page of the District's website:
www.westwood.k12.ma.us



WHAT ARE THE MAJOR BUDGET CATEGORIES?

The following table breaks down the total budget into five categories, and represents Town funds, exclusive of external funds or grants.¹ As is evident, in school budgets, salaries are by far the greatest budget driver. In the proposed FY'25 budget, salaries account for 85% of the overall budget and 95% of the proposed budget increase. Embedded within our budget is a proposed net increase of 0.7FTE on Town funds, with most new positions funded through other position reductions. The position changes are outlined in the next section of this Executive Summary. The remainder of the budget increase comes primarily from rising Special Education costs and contractual increase in the yellow bus transportation contract (included in the “all other non-salary” category below).

The table below represents the changes in five major budget categories from FY'24 to FY'25.

| Major Budget Category | Voted FY'24 Budget | Proposed FY'25 Budget | Incremental Change (\$) | Incremental Change as % |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Total Salaries | 46,497,322 | 48,406,465 | 1,909,143 | 4.11% |
| Non-Salary | | | | |
| Special Education | 2,625,520 | 2,711,168 | 85,648 | 3.26% |
| Utilities | 1,287,182 | 1,262,182 | (25,000) | (1.94%) |
| Facilities | 864,335 | 864,335 | - | - |
| All other non-salary | 3,469,206 | 3,519,453 | 50,247 | 1.45% |
| TOTAL | 54,743,565 | 56,763,603 | 2,020,038 | 3.69% |



¹ For a study of the same numbers *including* external funds and grants, please refer to the Appendix of this Executive Summary.

| | | | |
|--|----------|----------------|---------------------|
| Add 1.0 FTE HS BRIDGE Program Teacher | \$85,000 | | |
| Add 0.5 FTE MS Speech Language Pathologist | \$42,500 | | |
| Add 0.3 FTE MS Occupational Therapist | \$25,500 | | |
| Add 2.0 FTE Special Education Instruction Assistants (IAs) | \$59,600 | | |
| Add Stipends for SEL Team Leaders | \$4,800 | | |
| Net increase to various non-salary accounts | | | \$110,895 |
| Total Change | | 0.7 FTE | \$2,020,038 |
| FY'25 Superintendent's Recommended Budget | | | \$56,763,603 |



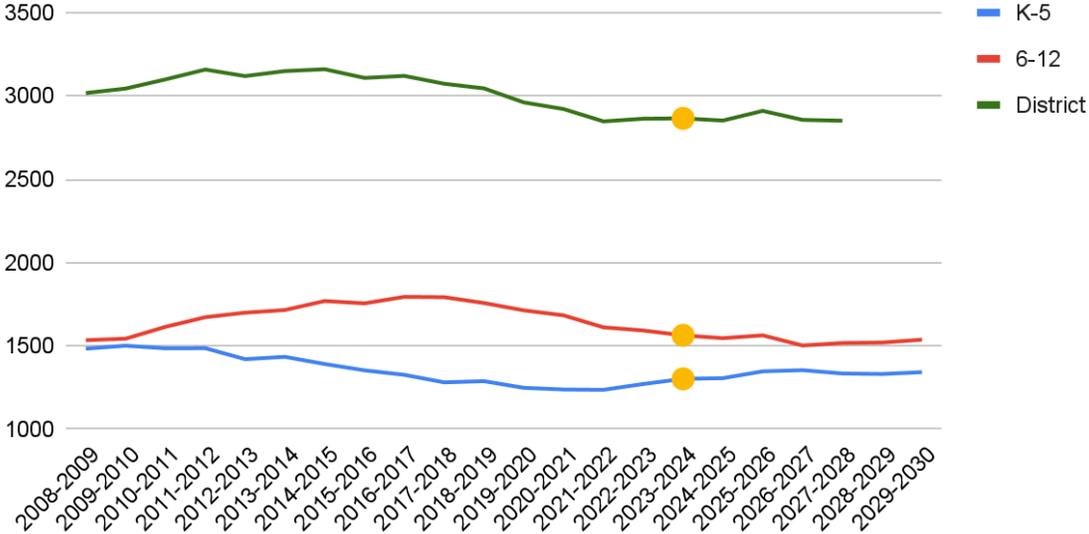
HOW DO ENROLLMENT TRENDS IMPACT THE PROPOSED FY'25 BUDGET?

Enrollment Trends

During the budget process we look at enrollment trends with a particular focus on how our student population is distributed across the levels. As illustrated below, during the last several years, there have been shifts in the population of students at each level in the District. As anticipated in our enrollment projections, for 10 years beginning in 2008, the number of students at the middle and high schools steadily increased. During this period, the District increased staff in those buildings to accommodate the climbing enrollment. Enrollment peaked at the middle school and high school in FY'18 and FY'19, respectively, and began to slowly decline. As a result, over previous budget cycles, there have been incremental reductions in secondary teaching positions while maintaining class sizes within School Committee guidelines.

WPS Elementary and Secondary Enrollment

Historic and Projected



Conversely, during the same 10 year period, elementary enrollment gradually declined and reached a low point in 2020-2021. Since that time, elementary enrollment has begun to rise, with an increase of 72 students in Grades K-5 in the last two years. Enrollment projections show a slow and steady increase in the coming years, and one of our top priorities will continue to be keeping elementary class sizes within the School Committee guidelines. Those guidelines are 18-22 students in Grades K-3 and 18-24 students in Grades 4-5.

A challenge during the budget development process is to predict the number of incoming kindergarteners and where those students will be enrolled across the four elementary schools. As we develop the budget, we look at town census data to see how many children currently reside in Westwood who will be eligible for kindergarten the following fall. As illustrated below, the number of

incoming kindergarteners who are visible in the census data during budget development tends to be lower than the number of students who actually enroll by the start of school.

**Kindergarten Enrollment
Difference Between Actual and Census Data by Year**

| | Eligible Kindergarten Students in Town Census | Enrolled (as of Oct. 1 report) | Difference (Actual to Census) |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2019-2020 | 185 | 206 | 21 |
| 2020-2021 | 174 | 203 | 29 |
| 2021-2022 | 181 | 201 | 20 |
| 2022-2023 | 177 | 197 | 20 |
| 2023-2024 | 157 | 225 | 68 |

While there had been a previous trend over the previous few years that actual kindergarten enrollment exceeded census data by approximately 20 students annually, that trend was broken dramatically in the current 2023-2024 school year. The impact on the FY'24 budget is that an additional kindergarten section needed to be added in the summer of 2023, which necessitated adding both a classroom teacher and a general education instructional assistant (IA) after the FY'24 budget had been approved.

Given this information, the approach to projecting kindergarten enrollment for FY'25 needs to be different from previous cycles, and should be done conservatively to avoid the need for post-budget staffing additions. As a result, the 2024-2025 projections are based on an assumption that student enrollment in kindergarten for FY'25 will be level with FY'24.



Below, please find the current projected enrollment for each elementary school by grade level, along with the number of classroom sections (in parentheses):⁴

| | Downey | Martha Jones | Pine Hill | Sheehan |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Grade K | 48 (2.5) | 56 (3) | 69 (4) | 55 (3) |
| Grade 1 | 48 (2.5) | 56 (3) | 69 (4) | 55 (3) |
| Grade 2 | 50 (3) | 39 (2) | 72 (4) | 43 (2) |
| Grade 3 | 48 (3) | 43 (2) | 87 (4) | 47 (3) |
| Grade 4 | 47 (2) | 58 (3) | 77 (4) | 53 (3) |
| Grade 5 | 43 (2) | 35 (2) | 65 (3) | 45 (2) |
| TOTAL | 284 (15) | 287 (15) | 439 (23) | 298 (16) |

The assignment of 2.5 sections to both Grade K and Grade 1 at Downey is reflective of an FY'25 budget that continues the current practice of having a combined K/1 classroom. Should the kindergarten enrollment at Downey for FY'25 be lower than projected, the K/1 classroom will be discontinued for FY'25 and there will be two sections of kindergarten and three sections of Grade 1.

Given the small size of most of Westwood's elementary schools, in which a school may have only two class sections per grade level, small changes in enrollment can impact class sizes. The proposed FY'25 budget maintains the current number of elementary general education teachers at 69, and includes the shift of one classroom teacher position from Downey to Martha Jones for FY'25. Based on the data we can see now, and the patterns we have observed over the last couple of years, we believe that 69 elementary sections is sufficient to maintain favorable class sizes and provide the flexibility to strategically place a section if there is a significant change in enrollment at a particular grade level.



⁴ These projections are reflective of not only the merger of Hanlon and Deerfield into Pine Hill, but also the movement of the WABA program from Downey to Pine Hill in September 2024.

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED STAFFING CHANGES?

When developing the District's proposed budget, cost center leaders conduct a careful analysis of staffing levels with respect to enrollment distribution and student needs. When additional staff is needed, District leaders first look to identify ways to *reallocate* positions. Over the last several years' budgets, this strategy has effectively contained budget escalation and allowed the District to incorporate modest increases in staff to address student needs and strategic priorities. In the FY'25 budget, we also examined the implications of Pine Hill consolidation on both direct and indirect staffing needs. In making decisions around staff reductions, the District focused on student learning needs, listened to what educators have identified as priorities to support staff and students, and made every effort to mitigate the impact on student learning.

Changes in Staff Related to Pine Hill Consolidation

Reduce Assistant Principal at Pine Hill from 12 months and 10 months

Reduce 0.2 FTE ES Special Education Department Head

Reduce 1.0 FTE Administrative Assistant at Pine Hill

Pine Hill consolidation allows for savings in administrative costs. This year, the assistant principal position was based on a full-year contract - an appropriate staffing level given the demands of planning for and implementing consolidation and supervision across a campus that started the year in two separate school buildings. After the two campuses merge, the position can be effectively reduced to a ten month role. In addition, movement of several district-wide programs to Pine Hill and the reduced need for travel make it possible to reduce special education administration costs. Finally, reconfiguring responsibilities and moving an existing district office administrative assistant role to the Pine Hill Campus allows for a 1.0 savings in administrative support FTE.

Reduce 1.0 FTE Building-Based Substitute at Elementary Schools

The FY'24 budget included six building based substitutes: one for each building and an additional position associated with sub-separate programs at Downey. This position was unfilled in FY'24, and with the Pine Hill consolidation and the move of the WABA program from Downey to Pine Hill, this position is not required for FY'25.

Reduce 1.0 FTE Speech Language Pathologist Assistant (SLPA)

With the consolidation of the Pine Hill School and the movement of the WABA program from Downey to Pine Hill, we can reduce the SLPA position that was originally created for one year due to enrollment needs at WABA.

Reduce 1.0 FTE Psychologist at Pine Hill

Add 1.0 FTE ES Adjustment Counselor at Pine Hill

With the Pine Hill consolidation comes an opportunity to expand the existing model for supporting mental health and SEL in Westwood's elementary schools. Downey, Sheehan and MJ currently have access to both a full time school psychologist and a part time adjustment counselor. While the psychologist's role includes testing and support for the IEP process as well as counseling, the adjustment counselor is able to work with more students on a proactive basis to support the development of social emotional competencies that promote positive academic outcomes as well as a sense of connectedness at school. The added adjustment counselor position will be based at Pine Hill, and will also be able to provide support to other elementary schools as needed.

Reduce 1.0 FTE ES Music Teacher

Reduce 0.8 FTE ES Art Teacher

Add 1.0 FTE ES Instructional Technology Coach (ITC)

Elementary school consolidation presented an opportunity to begin the process of reimagining the elementary specials offerings. While the district is committed to continuing to provide high quality instruction in Art, Music, Library and PE for every elementary school child, a change to the fifth weekly special will allow for the offering of an expanded Digital Literacy and Computer Science program in grades 2 - 5. In grades K & 1, students will have a double offering of PE weekly. The performing arts program in grades 4 & 5 will continue to provide experiences in chorus and drama, as well as providing a choice-based instrumental music program.

Other Staffing Changes

Reduce 0.5 FTE MS Instructional Technology Specialist (ITC)

Establish four (4) MS Technology Facilitator Stipends

Reduce 1.0 FTE Technology Support Specialist; increase hours /days

In FY'24, the middle school ITC was reduced from 1.0 to 0.5 and the high school ITC allocation from 1.2 to 0.7. Reductions at the secondary level acknowledge the decreased need for dedicated coaching, given the improvement in educators' comfort and skills with technology over the past several years. For FY'25, the district will replace the remaining 0.5 ITC at the middle school with four stipended Technology Facilitators, one at each grade level and one from the Art department. There are inherent advantages to switching to this model. Most notably, active teachers have direct knowledge of the curriculum and close relationships with their grade-level peers, both of which are essential in enhancing the effectiveness of technology in the classroom.

This year the district piloted a centralized tech support model with a single Technology Support Specialist serving as the primary point of contact for all elementary tech support needs. To date, the model--one utilized in several area school districts with multiple elementary buildings--has worked very well, and with a modest increase in the hours and days, it will be sustainable as the district moves into FY25.

Add 1.0 FTE Human Resources Director

Unlike other districts of similar size, Westwood does not have a dedicated Human Resources Director. Currently, responsibilities for recruiting, hiring, onboarding, developing and retaining highly qualified staff is dispersed throughout the district, with coordination falling to the assistant superintendent's office. In the post-pandemic work climate, we have seen a significant increase in staff turnover, particularly among support staff, as well as staff taking medical leaves of absence and staff requiring workplace accommodations. In addition, the district's strategic priorities include the recruitment, hire, and development of a more diverse staff so that our educator workforce more closely mirrors our student population and we all have the benefit from working with and learning from one another as members of a diverse team. Finally, the role will include a significant focus on district communications strategy.

Add 1.0 FTE MS Library/Media Specialist

In FY'21, the District reduced elementary library staffing, and eliminated both the middle school librarian and the K-12 Director of Libraries positions as part of an overall strategy to reallocate resources and create very small classes in grades K - 3: a difficult, but necessary, decision. The District places a high value on school libraries and the role that librarians play in helping our students develop the informational literacy needed to navigate today's media-saturated world. With the

consolidation of Pine Hill, all of our elementary schools will again have full-time librarians. Data collected during the recent review of our DLCS and Library programs indicates that the restoration of a middle school librarian is a critical priority for students, educators and parents.

Add 1.0 FTE HS BRIDGE Program Teacher

This proposed increase allows for the creation of a “BRIDGE” program: a therapeutic and educational environment that allows at-risk and high-need students to re-engage with school by providing clinical support and trauma-informed instruction across academic content areas. This program would be accessible to all students but would most directly impact a small and fluctuating number of high need students: students who are chronically absent, or chronically struggling to attend classes throughout the school day; disengaged students struggling with a mental health challenge; students absent for unexpected and serious reasons (i.e., death of a loved one, housing instability), or students with serious medical conditions or injuries (i.e., concussion, eating disorder). The creation of a BRIDGE program is an investment that could potentially decrease special education referrals as well as out-of-district placements. Additionally, each year the BRIDGE Special Education Teacher would consistently collaborate with and support Grade 8 families with at-risk, anxious, and school-avoidant students as they transition to high school.

Add 0.5 FTE MS Speech Language Pathologist

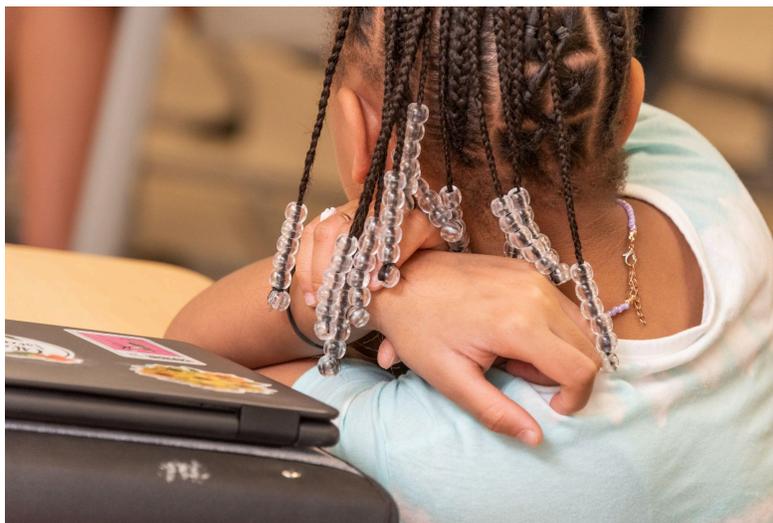
Add 0.3 FTE MS Occupational Therapist

Add 2.0 FTE Special Education Instruction Assistants (IAs)

These increases to staffing levels in special education are responsive to the requirements of students’ IEPs. The additional staffing of related service providers at Thurston address the needs of a large cohort of students moving from elementary school to middle school, and the IAs will be deployed to address the overall increase of student needs for in-district students.

Add Stipends for SEL Team Leaders

At the middle school level, there are stipend advisory leaders and a Dean of Students who collaborate with the Director of Social Emotional Learning to provide support and professional development to staff in order to enhance their ability to develop students’ SEL skills. The requested SEL stipends will provide this similar type of school based SEL support to teachers and staff at the elementary level and to allow for more opportunities for parent/caregiver communication and workshops.



WHAT ARE THE NON-SALARY BUDGET CHANGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

The Westwood Public Schools is committed to meeting the needs of all of our learners in an inclusive setting. As a public school, we are legally mandated to provide a certain level of service to students with special needs, as defined in a student's Individualized Education Plan or "IEP." When students' needs change, the budget also changes. This interdependent relationship between a) legally mandated services, b) student needs, and c) school budgets means that forecasting Special Education expenses presents a particular challenge for school administrators. As a result, Special Education is the most variable of all school department budget items. We analyze student needs both as part of the budget process, and also on an on-going basis throughout the school year.

Over the last decade, the District has created several district-wide programs for students with Special Education needs. These programs enable us to educate almost all of our students in-district. In FY'24, less than 1% of our student population attended school in out-of-district, tuition-based Special Education placements. This ability to educate almost all of our students in-district aligns with our desire to have students attend school in their community. It is also the most cost-effective strategy for educating students when their needs can be met in-district.

In addition to staffing requests articulated in the prior section, in the proposed FY'25 budget, we have budgeted for tuition and transportation for known/anticipated Special Education students, including contractual tuition and transportation increases. In typical years, the tuition increases for residential and day private special education schools have been 2-3%. For FY'25, the state's Operational Services Division instructed districts that they should budget for a 4.69% increase in tuition costs next year; this is after a 14% increase in FY'24.

This year, after reviewing our needs, we are budgeting for a net \$196K tuition decrease. However, the reduction is mitigated by a \$252K increase in transportation costs. When a school district observes a drop of one or two residential tuitions and a simultaneous increase in day tuition, the budget can reflect this shift between tuition and transportation categories.

The following tables represent the combined Town and Circuit Breaker⁵ budget for Tuition and Transportation. The budgets have been combined because the Circuit Breaker funding is over \$1 million and discussing Town-funded Tuition and Transportation in the absence of this \$1 million would provide an incomplete picture.

⁵ Circuit Breaker is a state reimbursement for "excess" Special Education expenses and is a revenue source that schools can use in their budgets for anticipated Special Education expenses, such as tuition and transportation. Prior year Circuit Breaker receipts are reflected in the Proposed Operating Budget.

| Tuition | FY'24 | FY'25 | Difference |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Residential Tuition | \$539,402 | \$145,805 | (\$393,597) |
| Day Tuition | \$1,093,120 | \$1,538,058 | \$444,938 |
| Collaborative Tuition | \$649,168 | \$401,426 | (\$247,742) |
| Tuition Total | \$2,281,690 | \$2,085,289 | (\$196,401) |

| Transportation | FY'24 | FY'25 | Difference |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Out-of-District SPED Transportation | \$461,229 | \$596,470 | \$135,241 |
| In-District SPED Transportation | \$373,774 | \$491,116 | \$117,342 |
| Transportation Total | \$835,003 | \$1,087,586 | \$252,583 |

Finally, the District maintains a line for the purchase of “Contracted Services” in Special Education, which has been historically underfunded. The contracted vendors typically provide specialized services and consultation (required in students’ Individualized Education Plans) in areas that the WPS does not employ in-district staff (e.g., Braille instruction). The contracted services line also provides hiring flexibility to the District. This approach has been effective and efficient and is anticipated to continue. The District is not proposing an increase to this line in FY’25 because expenses in FY’23 were \$350K lower than the prior year, FY’22. An analysis of the Contracted Services line will continue to be conducted annually through the budget process.



WHAT ARE THE NON-SALARY BUDGET CHANGES?

Increase in Special Education Tuition and Transportation: \$85,648

The changes to Student Services expenses are shown in the table above to be a net \$56,182, when incorporating Circuit Breaker funds. However, if we look exclusively at the impact on the Town-funded budget, the total increase across Tuition and Transportation is \$85,648. This difference is explained by a cut of \$29,466 to the Circuit Breaker offset, which reflects a small drop in Circuit Breaker funding between FY'24 and FY'25. This shortfall in Circuit Breaker funds must be backfilled with Town funds, in order to avoid an unintended cut in Tuition and Transportation. Therefore, the net increase on Town funds is \$85,648.

Increase in Yellow Bus Transportation: \$42,247

The rising cost of labor and fuel has impacted transportation contracts statewide. In FY '25, the District is in the third year of its three-year transportation contract with Connolly Bus Company. The FY'25 increase reflects the contractual increase for operating seventeen Westwood bus routes and late buses at Thurston Middle School. The METCO grant pays for the full cost of the two Boston buses and associated late buses for Boston students. In the FY'25 budget the METCO grant will absorb the additional increase of \$44,370 that is related to the Boston routes.

Increase in Professional Development Providers: \$8,000

The cost of providing rich content through professional development providers for instructional staff continues to rise. In addition, through its collective bargaining agreements the District has agreed to enhance offerings for professional development for its staff, including training in topics related to technology and safety for non-instructional staff such as Administrative Assistants and Custodians. This increase covers the cost of subscriptions and contracts associated with implementing these commitments.

Decrease in Electricity due to Solar Revenue: (\$25,000)

Due to a \$25,000 increase in the solar offset, which is discussed below, the District will be able to reduce the Town-funded electricity budget by a corresponding amount. This is effectively a change of funding source and is not a reduction in the net dollars that are available to pay the District electric bills.



WHAT ARE THE CHANGES IN REVENUE ASSUMPTIONS IN FY'25?

The FY'25 budget increase of 3.69% is a return to a more typical growth rate, after an unusual year in FY'24. Last year, a combination of \$642K more in Chapter 70 funding for schools and \$637K of increases in revenue assumptions (such as increased user fees for buses, athletics, and Preschool tuition) were used to fund an operating budget increase of 5.8%

Circuit Breaker

The Circuit Breaker account was put into effect by the state in 2004 to help defray the expense to local school districts for providing legally mandated Special Education supports and services to children with disabilities. The program reimburses local school districts for a portion of their "excess" costs above a certain threshold for educating high-needs students. (The threshold for eligibility is tied to four times the state average foundation budget per pupil as calculated under the Chapter 70 education funding law). Each year, the WPS receives a Circuit Breaker reimbursement for prior year costs. In FY'25, the District is budgeting for a Circuit Breaker offset on the basis of prior year receipts. These receipts of \$1,075,111 are \$29,466 lower than the receipts that were available for the FY'24 budget.

User Fees

The revenue assumptions include an approximate 3% increase to Bus Fees, Athletic Fees, and Preschool Tuition. In taking this approach, we intend to maintain a 3% annual increase in fees for future budgets to address offset inflationary costs. This stands in contrast to the significant increases in Bus Fees in Athletic Fees in FY'24, after neither fee had been adjusted for many years.

This increase will adjust the annual Bus Fee from \$270 to \$280 annually, with a family cap increased from \$750 to \$770. Athletic Fees will increase from \$300 per sport at the High School (\$450 for hockey; \$150 at the Middle School; \$300 for MS Football) to \$310 per sport at the High School (\$460 for hockey; \$155 at the Middle School; \$310 for MS Football). The family cap will also increase from \$1050 to \$1080.

Finally, this budget includes a 3% increase in Preschool tuition, as voted by the School Committee in December 2023. Together these increases in bus, athletic, and Preschool revenue will generate \$26,871 which will be applied to the operating budget and used for buses, athletic expenses, and Preschool teacher salaries.

Solar Revenue

The District is leveraging a power purchasing agreement with the owner of a Woburn solar array in order to incentivize state investment in solar power and in order to generate revenue for reducing electric costs. Revenue in the last twelve month period from the Woburn solar array exceeded expectations. Whereas in FY'22 the revenue that was generated permitted the District to assume a \$50,000 solar offset in FY'24, in FY'23 the revenue was nearly \$75,000 and permits the District to raise the solar offset for FY'25 to \$75,000, with a corresponding decrease in the Town-funded electricity budget.

Grants

Based on legislative guidance at the federal level, the District is making an assumption that the Special Education IDEA grant, the Early Education Grant, and the Teacher Quality Grant (Title II) will be level-funded, with no increases. The District is making an assumption that the state-funded METCO

Grant will be increased by a modest 2% to reflect inflationary growth. The state-funded Community Partnerships Grant has been level funded for multiple years and is assumed to be level funded again. Finally, this is the last year of ESSER III funding, and the FY'25 Operating Budget reflects the fact that these funds will be fully depleted when we close FY'24.

Miscellaneous Offsets

Prior operating budgets have shown two other offsets. The Recreation Utility Offset was established to show that the schools incur utility costs for the community use of fields after school hours, and by agreement with the Town these expenditures are transferred to the Town budget, since the Recreation Department oversees the use of these fields. This practice is expected to continue, but for accounting purposes this has always been treated as a reduction in our utility costs rather than an offset. In order to match the longstanding accounting practice, we are removing this offset from the budget.

The other change is to the E-Rate Reimbursement offset. In the past, the federal E-Rate program has reimbursed the District for expenses associated with internet connectivity. At one time, this was a predictable revenue source of about \$15,000 per year, and the District counted on this revenue to supplement the budget and pay telephone utility costs. Unfortunately, this E-Rate revenue stream has been inconsistent and therefore has not been used for operating budget expenses in recent years. The FY'23 budget fully covered the cost of the telephone bills. As an accounting correction, the District is eliminating the offset from the budget with no corresponding change to the Town budget. To the extent that E-Rate funding is available, it will be used to cover expenses for one-time costs in the area of telephone communications and technology (such as the purchase of replacement phone devices due to occasional unit failure or obsolescence).

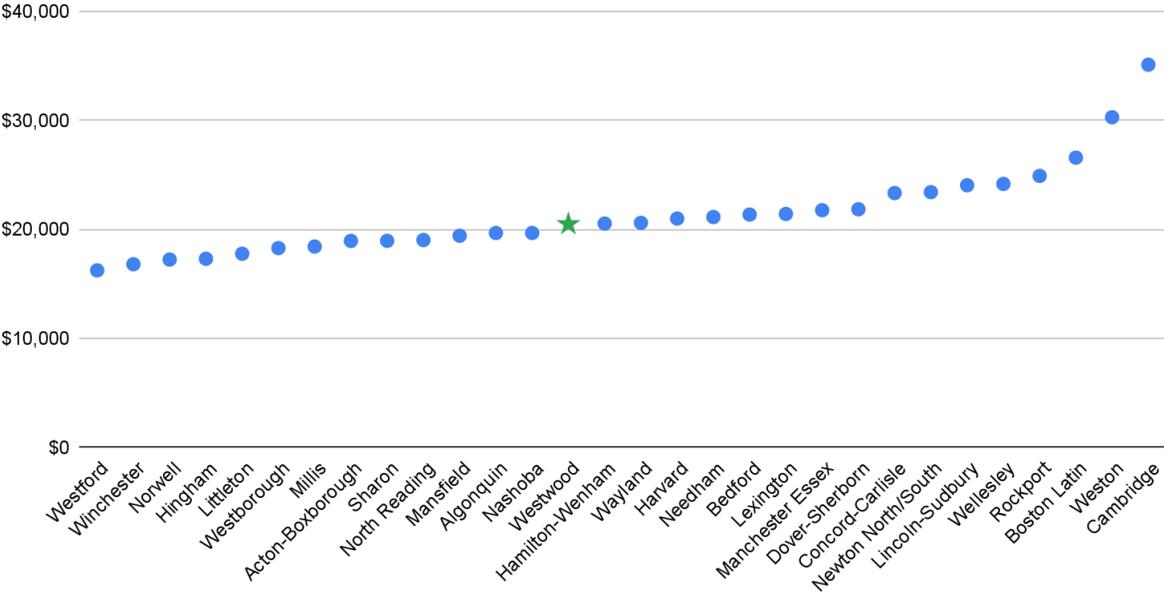


HOW DOES WESTWOOD'S PER PUPIL SPENDING COMPARE TO OTHER DISTRICTS?

The chart below compares the per pupil spending in Westwood to spending in the districts that appear in the top 30 of *Boston Magazine's* high schools list for 2023. The financial data presented is from the MA Department of Education website and reflects FY'21 spending, the most recent data that is available.

Boston Magazine's Top Public High Schools (2023)

FY'21 Per Pupil Spending (most recent data available)



As illustrated above:

- The state average per pupil expenditure is \$19,062.
- The mean per pupil expenditure for districts on this list is \$21,336.
- The median per pupil expenditure for the districts on this list is \$20,580.

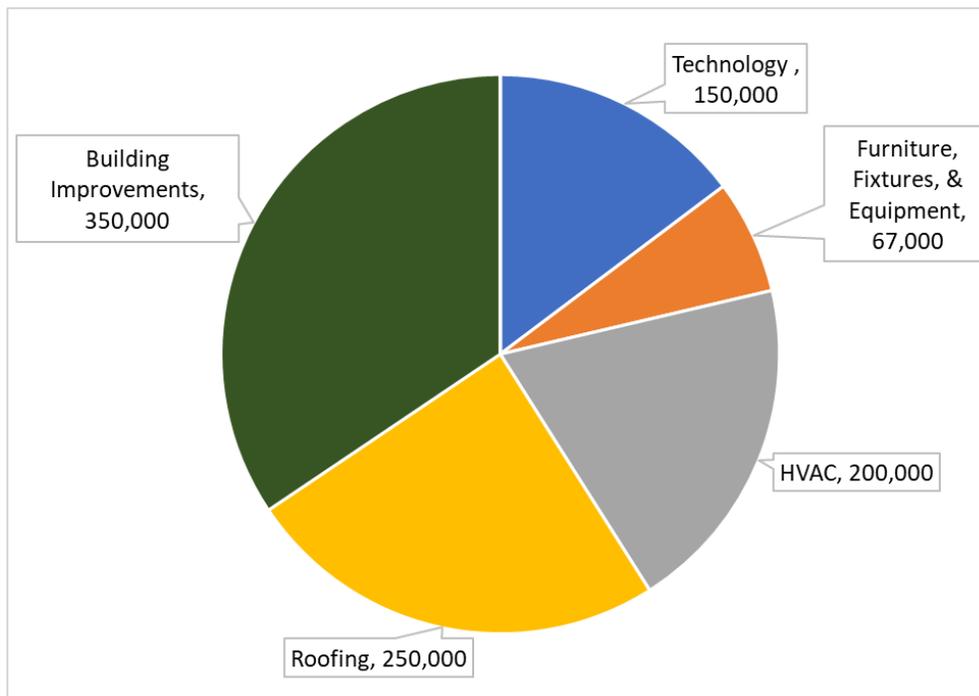
Westwood's per pupil expenditure of \$20,500 is generally on par with or below other high-performing districts and suggests that the Westwood Public Schools continue to provide a good value for the community's investment.



WHAT ARE THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DRIVE THE ANNUAL CAPITAL BUDGET FOR FY'25?

The FY '25 Capital Budget covers technology upgrades, large purchases such as vehicles and furniture, as well as facilities improvements in HVAC, roofing, and other areas. The annual budget does not fluctuate significantly from year-to-year, but there are annual changes in how the funds are applied. The annual budget is \$1.017M for FY '25.

The allocation of the \$1.017M capital budget:



FY'25 funds set aside for technology will allow replacement of Chromebooks for Grade 6 and Grade 9 and new Macbooks for teachers at the High School. For context, technology capital funds are typically used to sustain our 1-1 Chromebook program, student iPads, teacher devices, infrastructure improvements, and to fund other special projects. We are fully 1-1 in grades PK - 12. Chromebooks are on a 3.5-year refresh cycle. Teacher laptops are on a 5-year refresh cycle.

We closely manage a device refresh schedule and reserve technology funds for years in which the device replacements are larger and/or more expensive than the annual capital budget would support. The anticipated costs for device replacement over the next five years are FY'25 (\$212k), FY'26 (\$530k), FY'27 (\$468k), FY'28 (\$296k), FY'29 (\$195k). As this list suggests, there are significant outlays coming in the next three years. Fortunately, the District has been setting aside funds for these investments. Furthermore, in FY'24 the District received 169k in a federal grant through the Emergency Connectivity Fund. These funds reimbursed the District for an investment in Chromebooks early during the FY'23 fiscal year and this funding will be put toward future device refresh cycles.

In FY'25, the District is setting aside \$67k for Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment. With the opening of the Pine Hill School, this budget will permit the District to invest in the other buildings and to ensure that

non-fixed assets such as furniture and equipment are replaced when they are no longer meeting the needs of the schools.

Finally, the FY'25 budget preserves funding for building improvements, including replacements of HVAC components and roofs. The District has recently conducted a comprehensive facilities condition study for mechanical, fire, and electrical systems (ex. fire panels, electrical panels, rooftop HVAC units, and chillers). This report has yielded recommendations for equipment replacement and upgrades that will be incorporated into the capital projects over the next few years. The funds that are being set aside in HVAC and Building Improvements will be used for these projects.

The District conducted an infrared roof moisture study for all buildings last year, and as a result is prioritizing replacement of the Sheehan non-sloped roof with available funds that have been built up in a roofing capital reserve. The infrared roof moisture study also led to a determination that the High School roof needs to be restored in order to extend the life of this roof by an additional thirty years. Since this roof restoration project at the High School is estimated to cost \$2.5 million and the Sheehan project will deplete the roofing reserve, the District has requested that this project be funded through a borrowing article. Finally, during the course of its comprehensive facilities condition study for mechanical, fire, and electrical systems and the infrared roof moisture studies, the District has observed that there are substantial capital improvement needs for both Thurston and Sheehan Buildings. This has reinforced the need for a long-term financial plan and a master plan study to inform the sequencing of these projects.

Comprehensive Facilities Planning

Given the significant level of needs across school building facilities - particularly at Sheehan and Thurston - the District will be engaging in the development of a new comprehensive facilities plan this spring. Funding for the development of this plan was secured through the Select Board, and there will be shared procurement of a vendor in cooperation with Town administration, who will be developing a parallel plan for municipal buildings.

This plan, which will include both an itemized capital improvement list for our existing facilities needs, as well as present options for future building project sequences, is scheduled to be completed in Fall 2024. This will position us to use the results of this planning process to inform our capital requests for Fiscal Year 2026 and beyond.



WHAT PRIORITIES DO WE ANTICIPATE IN THE FUTURE?

Each year in developing the budget, cost center leaders submit both short-term and long-term budget requests. The District leadership team then meets to review and discuss requests and identifies the priorities that will move forward as part of the upcoming fiscal year's budget proposal. Given the need to ensure a budget proposal that is fiscally responsible, there are always requests that are not able to be addressed in the current budget cycle and have to be deferred for future consideration. In reviewing those items identified as future needs in the FY'24 budget executive summary, many of them are addressed in this budget proposal:

- *Increase English Language Learner (ELL) staffing*
 - *ELL Staffing was increased by 0.1 FTE as a post-budget addition in FY'24 in response to increased student needs, and carries forward into FY'25. As outlined below, this will need to continue to be addressed in future budget considerations.*
- *Restoration of library staffing*
 - *The FY'25 budget proposal includes the restoration of the Thurston library/media specialist position*
- *Additional teaching staff to expand elementary specials offerings*
 - *The FY'25 budget expands elementary specials to include digital literacy/computer science for all students in Grades 2-5 once per week, with a net savings as a result of reorganization and Pine Hill consolidation*
- *Human Resources Director*
 - *The FY'25 budget proposal includes the addition of a Human Resources Director*

High priority requests not funded in FY'25 are identified below:

- **Creation of an additional Preschool classroom**

This need, which has been consistently identified in previous budget cycles, continues to be a priority but is unable to be presently addressed due to space limitations. The three current Preschool classrooms meet the needs of 45 students each year. There are required ratios for each classroom from the state that limit the number of students with and without disabilities who can be accommodated in each room. The Westwood Integrated Preschool is a sought after option for parents of children ages 3 and 4 and, this year, the program is fully enrolled. An additional classroom would require both appropriate space and staffing (one full time preschool/special education teacher and two Instructional Assistants - approximately \$145K). While the District supports enlarging the Preschool, it is likely that the costs would not be covered by the tuition generated and a second location in another building would need to be identified.
- **High School Wellness Teacher**

Wellness class (a hybrid of Physical Education and Health Education) is only offered for a half-year each in the ninth and tenth grades, with grades eleven and twelve completing an "independent study" that is compliance-driven rather than authentically engaging. The K-12 Wellness Curriculum Review recommends that WHS offer P.E. at all grade levels, which would

require a 1.0 increase in high school Wellness staff to work with grades 11 and 12. This staffing increase will support seamless 9-12 Wellness instruction, provide additional infrastructure for K-12 SEL, and expand Wellness electives offerings.

- **Elementary Health Teachers**

The recent Wellness curriculum review also recommended the addition of Health at the elementary level in order to address topics not currently covered, expand opportunities for SEL, create a strong foundation of basic understandings related to human growth and development, and provide a consistent structure in which to address expanded “Same and Different disability awareness programming.

- **District Data Analyst**

A data analyst will help the district to develop a data governance strategy and make better use of existing data as we plan for improvement and track progress toward strategic priorities. Currently, the technical work of overseeing the district's SIS falls to a single data manager, whose position was very recently moved from the town's information systems office into the school department. While the current data manager maintains the SIS to ensure data integrity, a data analyst would mine the SIS, other state databases (EDWIN, EWIS) and the district's hiring and onboarding application (TalentEd) for information about student learning, student-postgraduate experience, and staff experience. The data specialist would be responsible for producing reports to district administrators, and for providing appropriate visualization of data when needed to support both internal analysis and public sharing of data.

- **ELL Teacher**

Expanded enrollment in the district has stretched the capacity of current staff (2.0 FTE) to meet needs of a diverse group of English language learners. WPS does not currently cluster students at the elementary level, opting instead to keep students in their “home” school districts so they can develop and maintain strong connections within their neighborhoods. This means that our ELL population is distributed among all four elementary school sites as well as the middle and high school. In addition, the needs of our ELLs vary widely. Some need support with foundational speaking and listening skills in order to navigate the school day, whereas others need help managing the literacy demands of an ambitious curriculum. Additional FTE may be necessary in the coming years in order to support student learning.

- **WHS Science Teacher**

In FY'24, the high school English and Math departments reallocated staff to provide co-teaching and develop new seminar-style course offerings that increase the instructional time students spend with highly qualified teachers. The Science department is also now the only high school MCAS subject-area department without this support, but there is not adequate existing Science staff to reallocate a classroom teacher to the role. This position would mirror grades 6-8 intervention support at Thurston and 9-12 ELA and Math support at the high school, where it has proven to be extremely successful in increasing support for our most struggling learners, revising the structure and curriculum of our intervention and enrichment programs, and creating environments wherein students are able to get individualized and personal content-specific attention. The teacher would also help the school prioritize providing coherent Science classroom coverage for younger and higher need students when their teachers are absent.

- **WHS School to Career Counselor**

Since FY'22, one of the strategic priorities at WHS has been to explore experiences, programs, and systems that promote diverse post-secondary opportunities to students and families. The high school has revised the guidance seminar curriculum to emphasize a wider variety of post-graduate opportunities, partnered with local community organizations - such as Westwood Living and Building Bridges - to provide career-oriented programming for students, introduced school-funded college tours, and re-launched the TEC College Fair. However, more staffing is needed to fully realize a vision for students “centered on the development of transferable skills” that is “more inclusive” and “community-based” (WPS Entry Plan Findings, 2023). In addition, while 95%-98% of our senior class continues to matriculate to 4-year colleges or universities, there is also an increased need for career-focused guidance in Westwood. Providing more hands-on college and career coaching will also help strengthen alumni ties, improve collaboration with municipal government, and further develop the educator applicant pool in the district. Many comparable districts have either a School to Career counselor, or a dedicated school counselor that helps students secure internships and work study jobs.



IS THIS THE FINAL FY'25 BUDGET? WHAT COULD CHANGE?

At its next meeting, the School Committee will review the budget, hold a public budget hearing, and deliberate. Through that process, the School Committee could make changes, modifications, or additions.

Thank you for your continued support of the Westwood Public Schools!



APPENDIX

The table below represents the changes in five major budget categories from FY'24 to FY'25, ***inclusive of revolving funds and grants***. The differences between this table and the table on Page 6 of this Executive Summary are explained by the changes to our offsets. A full report on offsets and how they are being adjusted is available in our Exhibits and has been discussed earlier in this document.

| Major Budget Category | Voted FY'24 Budget | Proposed FY'25 Budget | Incremental Change (\$) | Incremental Change as % |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Total Salaries | 48,564,995 | 50,499,222 | 1,934,227 | 3.98% |
| Non-Salary | | | | |
| Special Education | 3,730,097 | 3,786,279 | 56,182 | 1.51% |
| Utilities | 1,391,182 | 1,344,682 | (46,500) | (3.34%) |
| Facilities | 864,335 | 904,335 | 40,000 | 4.63% |
| All other non-salary | 4,265,621 | 4,214,550 | (51,071) | (1.20%) |
| TOTAL | 58,816,230 | 60,749,068 | 1,932,838 | 3.29% |

