

Weston Public Schools



January 27, 2020

To: Weston Board of Education

From: William S. McKersie, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools

Re: Impact Statements for Consideration of FY 21 Zero Budget Growth (Addendum to “Weston Public School Adjustments to the FY 21 Requested Budget.”)

Background

This document is an addendum to the “Weston Public School Adjustments to the FY 21 Requested Budget.” The adjustments provide the Board of Education (BOE) potential reductions to cut the year-to-year (FY 20 to FY 21) growth figure in the FY 21 Requested Budget from 5.55 percent to 2.89 percent, as a first level of reductions, and then to 0.00 percent as a second level of reductions.

The “Weston Public School Adjustments to the FY 21 Requested Budget” lists each possible reduction by dollar total and individual and cumulative impact on the growth level. The first level of reductions (to the 2.89 percent level) include short notes for each item. For the second level of reductions (to the 0.00 percent level), the Cabinet and Principals have prepared specific impact statements.

To be clear, the Cabinet and Principals are not recommending any of the reductions listed in the “Weston Public School Adjustments to the FY 21 Requested Budget.” Each reduction would have an adverse effect on teaching and learning for Weston students, now and in the future.

We respect the BOE’s request for a listing of potential reductions, so that the Board and community may have a deeper understanding of the likely effects of major budget reductions. We understand that this in-depth information will be essential as the BOE moves into its final phase of decisions regarding the FY 21 Operating and Capital Budgets.

Potential Reductions

The potential reductions are listed from largest to smallest in terms of dollars cut from the FY 21 Requested Budget.

1. Reduce Library Media Specialists – All Schools (\$209,754)

Reduce Library Media Specialists district-wide, so that lower schools share a specialist and upper schools share a specialist.

The focus of the Library Media Specialist is to promote and support a lifelong love of reading and personal learning. The reduction of library media specialists will reduce the amount of time they have to act as a reader advisor and maintain an age-appropriate collection by reading reviews and maintaining the library collection. The position regularly supports students directly and teams with classroom teachers to support digital literacy, research skills, technology skills, and library skills integration into curriculum and instruction.

This FTE reduction will adversely affect literacy, language arts, and research programs in all schools. The LMS supports the physical space of the LLC and the maker space in each school including access to digital tools. The LMS is also the sole provider of digital citizenship and digital literacy skills instruction for all students. This includes how to find, evaluate, create and communicate information digitally (cognitive and technical skills), as well as lessons on media balance, digital privacy & security, digital footprint, cyberbullying & digital drama, digital news & media literacy. This FTE reduction will reduce the amount of time the LMS has to partner with other teachers and support to support the district's Digital Learning goal.

2. Reduce Cabinet Position – District-wide (\$200,252)

One Cabinet Position would be considered for elimination if any current occupant voluntarily leaves for new employment. Positions included within Cabinet are: Assistant Superintendent for C&I, Assistant Superintendent for PPS, Director of Human Resources & Internal Counsel, Director of Finance & Operations, and Director of Digital Learning & Technology. This item is included on the chance that one or more of the occupants in the above noted positions may find new employment prior to July 2020 and the start of the new fiscal year. If there were to be such a departure, the superintendent would review with the remaining Cabinet, and then the BOE, the effect on district effectiveness and viability of eliminating the particular Cabinet position.

The impact of this reduction would be that the work of the Cabinet position would be redistributed amongst the superintendent, other Cabinet members, assistant directors, principals and assistant principals. All of these roles already have full work requirements, so the extent and quality of work in the given area would be decreased, and there likely would be a negative effect on the extent and quality of work by the other administrators.

Current contract protections do not allow for elimination of the positions included within Cabinet (Assistant Superintendent for C&I, Assistant Superintendent for PPS, Director of Human Resources & Internal Counsel, Director of Finance & Operations, and Director of Digital Learning & Technology). Without voluntary departure, any of these positions could only be eliminated through non-extension of the current three year contracts (expiring on June 30, 2022), or through a negotiated buy-out of contracts. As a result, there is not a budget reduction for FY 21 unless there is a voluntary departure.

3. Eliminate Information Technology Coordinator - District-Wide (\$131,034)

The reduction of the Information Technology Coordinator will reduce the efficiency of the IT Department. This position currently supports the four technicians (school-based), is directly assigned to each school 0.5 of a day each week and supports the town hall and police department as needed. In

addition to providing end-user support, this role acts as the purchasing agent for the IT department (the role was consolidated from last year's staff reduction). The absence of the IT Coordinator will cause a slowdown in our ability to purchase software, repair parts, help assess the overall technical needs of the district, and reduce quick access to a higher level of support than the technicians can provide.

4. Reduction to CIL Model – District-Wide (\$122,547)

Reductions to Curriculum Instructional Leader (CIL) positions (5.5 FTE to 4.0 FTE) will have an adverse effect on teacher growth and student achievement. It will result in a significant restructuring to the model and a narrowing of the role. Any restructuring will limit the amount of time CILs have to work with teachers to raise student performance and to address trends in student achievement on standardized assessments.

As outlined in a 2017 external review, Weston's current CIL model is highly effective in supporting teachers through their instructional coaching and professional development roles. With fewer CILs, the district may need to increase its reliance on external consultants for supporting professional learning, particularly for specialized content areas.

CILs facilitate ongoing curriculum and new course development to ensure that learning experiences and assessments are aligned with state and national standards. The current 5-year renewal cycle for each subject area will need to be extended out further given the reduction in FTE allocated to CILs. In addition, they have several departmental responsibilities including, but not limited to, standardized test data analysis, honors placement, and maintaining book and equipment inventories. While some work performed by CILs may be shifted to administration, the loss of their specialized content expertise and pedagogical knowledge will have an impact on teaching and learning.

5. Reduce K Section by One – HES (\$120,317)

Reducing one section of kindergarten will give us six sections of kindergarten instead of seven, as currently proposed for FY 21. With projected enrollment at 120, that would give us class sizes of 20 each. We would be starting the school year at capacity in those classes and every student who enrolled past the 120 number would push us over guidelines.

This reduction could affect our ability to take Open Choice students, since they potentially would tip a section if we went past guidelines. We would need to consider delaying as late as possible the enrollment of Open Choice students.

6. Reduce Central Office Support Position – District-wide (\$100,573)

One Central Office Support Position would be reduced. The position to be reduced would be one of the four support staff for the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for C&I, Assistant Superintendent for PPS, and Director of Human Resources.

The impact of this reduction would be a redistribution of the lost position's responsibilities among the remaining three Central Office support staff and assistants and other staff in the schools. All of these roles already have full work requirements, so the extent and quality of work in the given area would be

decreased, and there likely would be a negative effect on the extent and quality of work by the remaining support staff.

7. Eliminate Double Block of English Language Arts in 6th grade – MS (\$92,037)

Currently students have one 43-minute period of reading and one 43-minute period of writing each day. This cut would convert the double block of English Language Arts to a single period and require a new sixth grade schedule to be created for core academic classes. Core academic classes (ELA, math, science, social studies) in 6th grade would be made longer, perhaps 54-55 minutes each, or an adjusted schedule might allow for other possibilities.

8. Eliminate K-2 World Language Program – HES (\$83,058)

The loss of this entire program would affect every K, 1st and 2nd grade child—almost 400 students. Research supports early language instruction benefits to students' cognitive abilities and their appreciation of cultural diversity. Clearly addressing our priority outcome of developing global citizens, the program also supports the acquisition of grade level concepts, which are integrated into the lessons.

9. Eliminate Team Leaders – HES, WIS, MS, HS (\$61,101)

At the Elementary School level, team leaders provide leadership for each of the grade-level teams, as well as our special education department, and serve on the school's leadership team. In their role, Team Leaders work with their grade level teams/departments of approx. 8-10 teachers to design twice-weekly grade-level/department meetings (CPT and Team meeting time). Time in these meetings is used to collaboratively interpret and use student performance data to inform curriculum and instruction, and design lessons and classroom activities that ensure consistency and alignment across and within the grade-levels. The sharing of instructional practices is a key element of the meetings. In addition, the twice-weekly meetings provide time for developing activities and lessons that promote a positive school climate and ensure students are progressing emotionally and socially, as well as academically. During these meetings, time is also frequently used to provide on-going professional development, which is needed to further curriculum initiatives and help teachers deepen their content knowledge so students' academic needs and interests can be met. Teams also plan for grade level activities, field trips and events that enhance our instructional program and social/emotional learning initiatives.

Reducing or eliminating these elementary positions would affect the teachers' ability to share best practices, maximize resources and collaborate with colleagues. Without Team Leaders, the responsibility for organizing, planning and facilitating these meetings would be shifted to the school administration and CILs (although a parallel reduction may be cutting the availability of CILs).

At the middle school, eliminating Team Leaders dramatically changes leadership structure of middle school. Team Leaders meet regularly with administrators to discuss both grade level and building wide issues and topics. Team Leaders also serve a critical role facilitating weekly team meetings, hands-up meetings to discuss student concerns, facilitating parent conferences, and planning community meetings, grade level field trips, and socials. Administrators, Counselors and Student Government Advisors would most likely have to pick up some of the responsibilities.

At the high school, the elimination of the special education team leader would significantly impact the scheduling process and articulation process from middle school to high school. This role coordinates with administrators the schedules of paraprofessionals, schedules a weekly review of students, addresses initial referrals of special education students, works collaboratively with building administrators and the Assistant Director to plan department meetings and work with complex students and service delivery models. The elimination of this position would cause this work to shift to the building administrators and the Assistant Director.

10. Eliminate WHS Course Offerings if Enrollment Below 15 (\$60,000)

- Eliminate AP Physics C Mechanics (0.25 FTE Reduction), which has a projected enrollment of 12 students. Impact is that students will have one AP Physics course (Algebra Based) to take. Physics is the only science with two AP Levels as well as an honors level. Students who wish to continue in science will have to choose from AP Environmental Science, AP Chemistry or AP Biology for another AP level science course.
- Eliminate Science Research (0.25 Reduction). Currently this course has 11 students for the 2019-20 school year. Two students plan to continue for a second year. As of today, no new students have turned in an application for the 2020-21 school year. The deadline for new applications, which was January 6, 2020, has been extended to March 2, 2020. There is also a stipend attached to this position \$6060.
- Eliminate Multivariable Calculus (0.10 Reduction), which has a projected enrollment of five students. Impact is that students will have to take AP Statistics if they wish to continue in honors math.
- Eliminate Introduction to Psychology and/or Introduction to Economics (0.10 Reduction), which are social studies electives. Impact is that 20-25 students will have to make other choices regarding their elective programs. These courses will not impact students taking AP Psychology or AP Economics. However, a foundational knowledge of economics must be demonstrated by the student to enroll in AP Microeconomics. This is accomplished through an assessment of key concepts/content.

11. Eliminate Project Challenge Grades 3-8 – WIS & WMS (\$59,301)

While Weston is not required to provide gifted programming, the elimination of the Project Challenge class at both WIS and WMS would significantly affect our gifted population of learners from an academic and social-emotional standpoint. The district identifies and provides programming in grades 3-8 for gifted students. Gifted students are our most advanced learners, who have unique academic and social-emotional needs, requiring a flexible program of specialized instruction and a continuum of services that respond to the district profiles of gifted learners. Project Challenge is designed to meet the cognitive and social-emotional needs of the gifted learner. An essential component of Project Challenge is the scheduling of a self-contained class designed for gifted students to learn from and with their intellectual peers. Several districts in DRG A provide programming for gifted students knowing that these students are often at risk of underachievement without specialized instruction.

12. Eliminate Elementary Science Para – HES/WIS (\$43,076)

Eliminating the elementary science para educator would substantially affect the ability of classroom teachers to prep hands on science lessons. Our elementary teachers teach and prep for multiple content areas on a daily basis. Dedicated help in preparing lessons notably boosts the quality of science instruction.

13. Reduce WHS Athletics Offerings (\$41,500)

Eliminate Boys & Girls Freshmen Basketball and Boys & Girls Ski Teams – Due to Title 9 requirements, we must treat boys and girls' athletic offerings equally, both when adding and eliminating teams and opportunities. Two sets of teams are listed as possible reductions. The total reduction accounts for the loss in student participation fees.

14. Reduce WHS CASE (\$40,073)

The reduction of 0.4 FTE would cut Structured Study to three sections, which would result in approximately 25 students not being part of the program.

15. Reduce WHS Writing Center (\$34,682)

The reduction of 0.5 FTE would cut Writing Center staffing to 1.0. The impact would be the elimination of 300 periods of Writing Center support for the 2020-21 school year. This equates to 250 periods of individual conferencing @ 2 students per period (equaling 500 students); and, 50 periods of classroom "push in program" @ 20 students per class (equaling 1000 students). "Push in" includes at minimum Social Studies grade 9 sections (9), English grade 9 sections (10) and English grade 9 sections (10).

16. Eliminate Grades 3-5 World Language Program – WIS (\$29,191)

The loss of this entire program would affect every third, fourth, and fifth grade child - almost 500 students. There is strong evidence that time spent on world language study reinforces the core subject areas of reading, writing, social studies and math. Research studies have shown that the best time to begin the study of a world language is in elementary school because children at this age show better mental flexibility, more divergent thinking skills, and strong listening and memory skills. Additionally, the world language classes promote a greater appreciation of cultural diversity, and help foster a key district outcome of developing global citizens.

Additionally, a significant impact of this reduction would be the loss of "common planning time" for each grade level. This planning time is skillfully built each year into each teacher's schedule, so that there is time to meet weekly in grade-level teams to plan, share instructional practices, design grade-level lessons and activities, meet with curriculum instructional leaders (CILs) and administrators, engage in new curriculum initiatives, and align grade-level benchmarks and outcomes. As a school, we take pride in being a collaborative community and working together to grow and share best practices. The loss of this time will greatly affect the cohesiveness and consistency of the grade level teams, as well as our ability to provide on-going professional development without the additional costs of pulling teachers out of their classrooms and hiring substitute teachers to take over their classes.

17. Eliminate Grade 4 String and Orchestra Program – WIS (\$28,774)

The loss of this program will affect the ability for fourth grade students to begin participating in the Intermediate School strings program, which may affect the students' proficiency level when they enter middle school. This is a well-attended and valued program, and not only helps students gain proficiency at playing a stringed instrument and reading musical notation, but helps them learn to interact musically in an orchestra and work together as an ensemble. Since the program was first brought to the fourth grade, almost 100 students have participated each year, with many continuing in the strings program in grade 5 and above. Knowing that a string program is typically begun by grade three or four in most school districts, this is a program that we worked hard to bring to our students over five years ago.

18. Reduction in C&I Consulting – District-Wide (\$20,000)

The curriculum and instruction consulting line was cut by \$8,150 in the initial round of proposed cuts. An additional \$20,000 cut to this account would end our ongoing partnership with Teachers College Reading Writing Project. These funds provide job-embedded professional learning days with TCRWP trainers to enhance instructional practices at the K-8 level. This support enhances teachers' abilities to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

19. Reduce WHS Stipends (\$5,713)

- \$2,517 Jazz Band -- There are two Jazz bands. Jazz Ensemble has been included in the music FTE as a 0.1. We removed the 0.1 Jazz band from the staffing request and made it a stipend position. This was a cost efficiency that had already been included in the 2020-21 budget. The elimination of the stipend will result in only one Jazz performance group.
- \$2,400 Aspiring Scholars -- This is the stipend for the academic teachers that run the Aspiring Scholars program in August. The program supports identified rising freshmen who need pre-instruction prior to the start of high school. This will affect approximately 50 students.
- \$796 Debate Team -- This team is comprised of 17 students and has been very active this school year. Recently the team hosted the CT Debate Association's tournament in January 2020.

20. Reduce One Co-Curricular Jazz Band – MS (\$5,228)

We currently have two jazz groups: jazz ensemble and jazz lab. This cut would reduce the opportunities for students to participate in jazz performance groups. More students would not be selected to participate.

21. Additional Reductions To Be Determined – District Wide (\$59,880)

To achieve 0.00 percent growth, an additional set of reductions will need to be identified.

22. Increase in Unemployment Allowance – District-Wide -- \$12,000 Increase

The reduction-in-force entailed in cutting the budget to 0.00 percent growth would result in an increase in the district's unemployment allowance.