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Date: November 16, 2018
To: School Committee
From: Everett V. Olsen, Jr.
RE: Fiscal 2020 Budget Letter of Transmittal

I am presenting you with the first draft of our FY2020 school system budget that was developed with the input of our Leadership Team. When I submitted my FY2019 budget to you last year, I noted that it would be the most challenging budget process in the last 10 years. Fiscal 2020 presents far greater challenges than FY2019.

Our annual school system budget is not simply driven by the number of students who we must educate, but the complexity of academic and social/emotional needs. If all children had the same interests, abilities, and personalities, our budget development would be relatively easy. But as we know, that's not reality. We appropriately identify the needs of our students, but the challenge is to be able to appropriately fund the services to meet the ever-increasing needs.

Fiscal 2020 presents significant challenges. The Town Manager's difficult job is to work with available revenues and do the best job possible in understanding townwide departmental priorities. Jodi is recommending a 2.5% increase for the school system in FY2020. It is important for me to note that contained in with the 2.5% is the \$530,000 in override funds for teacher salaries. It is my interpretation that we are receiving approximately a 1.5% increase for the second consecutive year with the expectation that we will fund the \$530,000 in teacher salaries from other programs, services and staff currently in our school system. The challenge associated with this recommended appropriation is enormously magnified by the anticipated need for additional staff and services to meet the greatest amount of residential growth in Westford since the late 1980's and early 1990's. I have detailed this in my budget presentation.

In the development of the FY2020 school system budget, I have addressed my priorities as follows:

- Preserve direct instructional services in the classroom
- Preserve academic support services
- Account for new residential growth by adding staff to maintain a pupil/teacher ratio of 22:1 in grades K-5 and 25:1 in grades 6-12
- Attempt to fund the special education tuition account for anticipated placements
- Continue our ability to provide strong curriculum coordination
- Minimize fee increases
- Maintain safe, clean and healthy school facilities

- Adjust school start times to reflect the sleep research associated with adolescents
- Fully fund the school systems' proration for the Town/School Facilities Director and Administrative Assistant

This budget submittal does not contain an additional School Resource Officer which was an important priority of some voters at the last Annual Town Meeting. A Request for Proposal for a security audit of town and school facilities has been issued, and it is the consensus of the Town/School Safety Task Force to see what safety/security recommendations are specific in the report.

My \$60.7 million budget submittal for your review is \$1,287,088 more than the Town Mangers' recommended FY2020 appropriation of \$59,447,329. Clearly this is concerning in that it is the second consecutive fiscal year that we will have to reduce my request by nearly \$1.3 million. This magnitude of reduction may require the following:

- Staff reductions
- Program reductions/modifications/eliminations
- Increasing class sizes
- Increasing fees
- Reductions in essential operating accounts
- Using unprecedented amounts of Circuit Breaker reimbursement funds and School Choice funds to offset operating costs. This will place us in a very precarious position for Fiscal 2021 and beyond.

We have very difficult work ahead of us if we are to maintain a school system that meets the academic and social/emotional developmental needs of all students. To this end we must work collaboratively together and with our town administration, boards, and committees in an effort to maintain the quality programs and services for the students in our highly revered school system.