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DATE: January 22, 2021
TO: School Committee
FROM: Everett V. Olsen, Jr.
RE: Fiscal 2022 Budget Letter of Transmittal

I am presenting to you the first draft of the school system's FY 2022 general fund budget request. This budget was prepared with the input from many stakeholders and represents a starting point for the many conversations and decisions that will follow over the next several months. For the last ten months school systems across the nation have tried to cope with disruption to the normal education process due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From programmatic, instructional, and fiscal perspectives we have never faced such uncertainty in what we need to do and how we need to accomplish it.

In Westford, our 56-member Reopening Team planned and implemented both hybrid and fully remote models of teaching and learning. These well-planned models have worked for many students but not for all. Students and teachers have had to adapt to an entirely different educational environment including the delivery of instruction, planning and preparation, after school activities, athletics, and student transportation. This has had an academic and social/emotional impact on many students and our valued staff has been stressed to greater levels than ever before. In speaking with physicians on our COVID Advisory Committee, it has become clear that the separation and isolation of students from their peers has taken a toll on the emotional well-being of some students. Medical professionals are seeing higher numbers of students who are struggling with anxiety and/or depression. With this concerning disequilibrium in the lives of students and staff, our task of developing a budget that responds to the current and emerging needs becomes an extraordinarily formidable and difficult task.

Compounding the operational complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic is the unprecedented loss of federal, state and local revenues which are needed to fund essential services in all town departments. As of this budget submittal there is still great uncertainty over the sources and amounts of revenue available for town and school needs in Fiscal '22.

The drafting of our FY 2022 budget has involved the accumulation of information from the following sources:

1. Strategic Plan 2015-2020
WPS Mission

The Westford Public Schools will provide an excellent, free education to all students in the community. The School System will engage its students in a challenging learning environment

to prepare them for the political, economic, social, and technological challenges of a rapidly changing world. It will develop in its students the skills and attitudes that will enable them to be lifelong learners, to exercise sound judgment and to become responsible, contributing members of society.

WPS Vision

Westford Public Schools develops lifelong learners who are responsible, contributing members of the community, demonstrating innovation through traditional and nontraditional learning opportunities. We believe in preparing our students for global citizenship by developing and fostering creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking.

2. School Committee
3. Leadership Team
4. Staff
5. Families
6. School Improvement Plans
7. Town and School Student Safety Task Force
8. COVID Advisory Committee

School Committee FY 2022 Priorities

In developing priorities for Fiscal '22, the School Committee considered the following factors that will shape the budget request.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic
PreK-Grade 12 Enrollment Trends
Teaching and Learning Models
Student Transportation

The School Committee's FY 2022 Budget Strategies include:

- Strive for a Level Services Budget
- Fund all state and federal mandates
- Limit use of current Circuit Breaker funds when possible
- Reserve School Choice funds for unexpected costs
- Create a Capital Plan to reduce strain on the operating budget

Given the above frameworks, the School Committee FY 2022 Budget Priorities include:

Student Wellness

- Social and Emotional Health
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Student Services for Identified Students

- ELL (English Language Learners)
- Special Education

Staffing

- Address Collective Bargaining
- Maintain class size guidelines

Facilities Maintenance

- Focus more on Preventative vs. Corrective Maintenance

Technology

- Attempt to incorporate what we have learned from remote learning

After analyzing the inputs from the School Committee, Leadership Team, staff, families, School Improvement Plans, Town School Safety Task Force, and the COVID Advisory Committee, I have established the following priorities that are addressed in my Superintendent's budget submittal:

- Class Size
- Social and Emotional Wellness of Students
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Special Education Services
- Technology Support
- Facilities and Maintenance

In addition to addressing the aforementioned priorities in my budget, I have incorporated two significant operational changes. First, I have proposed a change from a 3-tier busing schedule to a 4-tier schedule which makes possible a revision of school start times. This has allowed us to reduce the transportation budget appropriation by \$444,174! Additionally, I am proposing a consolidation of our elementary Assistant Principal positions and our Special Education Student Support Leaders. This consolidation will allow each elementary school to have a full time Assistant Principal with both Leadership and Student Support job responsibilities. This consolidation will have a cost impact of \$7,000, which is also incorporated into my budget.

This budget which totals \$62,541,199 is 2.12% greater than our Fiscal '21 general fund appropriation from the town. At the present time it is \$441,912 more than the Town Manager's expected appropriation increase of 1.4%. We know that considerable work is ahead of us and our commitment is to work collaboratively with the Town Manager, Finance Committee and Select Board in the recognition that we are one town with growing needs and limited resources. In this collaborative process we will continue to focus on our objective of serving our students, staff and taxpayers well and maintaining the quality of one of the most highly respected school systems in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.