

2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

REPORT OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The School Committee unanimously recommends the fiscal year 2023 operating and capital budget as presented herewith. The Committee believes it is a fiscally responsible plan to meet the educational needs of the Town's students. The general fund portion of the proposed budget is \$44,911,436, which is an increase of \$1,093,519 or 2.50% over the FY22 approved budget.

Budget Process

We are a small community with excellent schools. We discuss some of the unique benefits of the Weston Public Schools under "Excellence in Education and Beyond" below. First, we will discuss our budget process. The School Committee and Administration are mindful of the generosity of Weston's taxpayers and the need to be extremely thoughtful when deciding how to spend their money. We are being strategic and forward-looking, budgeting in a way that allows the district to continue to provide a top quality education to Weston students while also limiting budget growth. This year the Administrative Team has worked hard to find savings in ways that make our district more efficient but have no impact on direct services to students.

The budget was developed collaboratively following the School Committee Budget Guidelines to:

- Preserve Excellence in Curriculum and Instruction;
- Maintain Safe and Secure Environment and Infrastructure; and
- Maintain the Rate of Budget Growth at a Responsible Level.

These guidelines reflect the Town's desire to maintain the overall strength of the school system by supporting the needs of all students while remaining fiscally responsible. The recommended budget encompasses collective bargaining requirements, Federal and State mandates such as the provision for Special Education, and elements of the District's Strategic Plan and the Superintendent's Goals.

The budget is developed over a period of 4-5 months, including dozens of internal Administrative Team meetings, numerous meetings between the budget sub-committees of the School Committee and Finance Committee, a meeting between the full School Committee and the full Finance Committee, multiple open School Committee meetings, and a Budget Hearing. The School Committee and the Administrative Team are focused on preserving and enhancing the curriculum and student experience while also making targeted reductions to slow the rate of growth and adjust for recent declines in enrollment. In recent years actual spending in recent years has come in below the approved budgets.

Drivers of the Fiscal 2023 Budget: General Fund

The table below highlights key drivers of growth in the fiscal 2023 general fund budget, which does not include town overhead or debt service. The analysis in this section reflects changes from the fiscal 2022 approved budget.

Salary and Other Compensation

Salary and Other Compensation represent approximately 84% of the general fund budget. In addition to the negotiated cost of living adjustments (COLA) with our six collective bargaining units, our faculty unit provides for employee salary increases through "steps" and "lanes" movement. Continued employment allows faculty members to move through the steps, one step each year. Professional development and continuing education allow faculty members to move lanes. Salary increases are determined by a combination of step and lane movements. Accordingly, salary increases in the budget will invariably increase in excess of the negotiated cost of living adjustments (COLA) increase and can only be offset by reductions in staff. In order to help manage this expense the district offered an **Early Retirement/Separation Incentive Plan** effective FY23 to qualified employees. This resulted in modest reductions in personnel costs and numbers in the proposed budget. The "step" and "lane" increase for faculty in Fiscal '23 is approximately \$337,000.

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Category	FY'22 Approved	FY'23 Updated	FY'23 Variance	% Change
Salary and Other Compensation	\$36,899,117	\$37,905,207	\$1,006,090	2.73%
Instructional and Supply Materials	\$1,519,568	\$1,588,364	\$68,796	4.53%
Contractual Services	\$1,131,847	\$1,200,159	\$68,312	6.03%
Contractual Student Services	\$3,945,647	\$4,133,500	\$187,853	4.76%
Utilities	\$1,579,922	\$1,467,717	(\$112,205)	-7.10%
Equipment and Vehicles	\$664,109	\$695,489	\$31,380	4.73%
State Aid and Offset Accounts	(\$1,922,293)	(\$2,079,000)	(\$156,707)	8.15%
Total General Fund:	\$43,817,917	\$44,911,436	\$1,093,519	2.50%

Salary and other compensation are increasing by \$1,006,090 or 2.73%. The fiscal 2023 growth is driven by known and unknown contractual obligations. As this is a negotiating year and without settled agreements, we have a set aside. This relatively low growth rate in compensation reflects the two most recent rounds of collective bargaining agreements negotiated by the School Committee. COLA increases in fiscal year 2022 are limited to 2% for our teachers, and to 1.25% - 2% for other bargaining groups.

Instructional and Supply Materials

The increase of \$68,796 in instructional materials is primarily due to textbook and reading materials needed.

Contractual Student Services

Contracted Student Services is increasing by approximately \$187,000, due almost entirely to an increase in Out-of-District tuition. Outplacement tuition expenses are approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Operations Services Division. We have, and will continue to, intentionally invest in new programs to in-source more of our special education programming with the ultimate goal to reduce expensive outplacements and keep our students within the district.

Utilities

The decrease in utilities is due primarily to not knowing the true impact of not having the solar credits on the school side anymore. We needed a complete fiscal year to determine some of the changes. We also had a green initiative grant in which we upgraded all the lighting in the schools.

Equipment and Vehicles

The increase in equipment and vehicles is driven by replacement equipment and price escalation for bus purchases totaling approximately \$11,000.

Drivers of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Town Charge-Backs

In addition to the general fund budget discussed above, the total impact of the school budget on the Town includes debt service and overhead costs. The School Department has taken excellent care of our buildings and facilities and does not anticipate major increases in debt service costs as a result of deferred maintenance or the need to fully replace any buildings. With the completion of the Case House renovation, the School Department is planning a number of feasibility studies to evaluate the potential for partial renovations of the Middle School and High School. A separate warrant article elaborates on these proposed studies.

Overhead costs allocated to the School Department include health insurance, retirement contributions, unemployment, workers compensation and Minuteman tuition and transportation. While the final overhead numbers were not confirmed

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as of the writing of this letter, the Town projects that OPEB contributions related to the schools will decrease approximately \$58,229 in fiscal 2023. The six-year GIC contract between the Town and the unions covering health care costs ended on June 30, 2021. The Town negotiated a new agreement with the unions that resulted in reduced contributions from the Town. It is important to note that the Middlesex retirement system is projecting that Weston’s contributions will need to increase by 6.5% per year through 2024 and 4% annually beyond that to be fully funded. Fortunately for the town, teacher pensions are an obligation of the Commonwealth, rather than the Town.

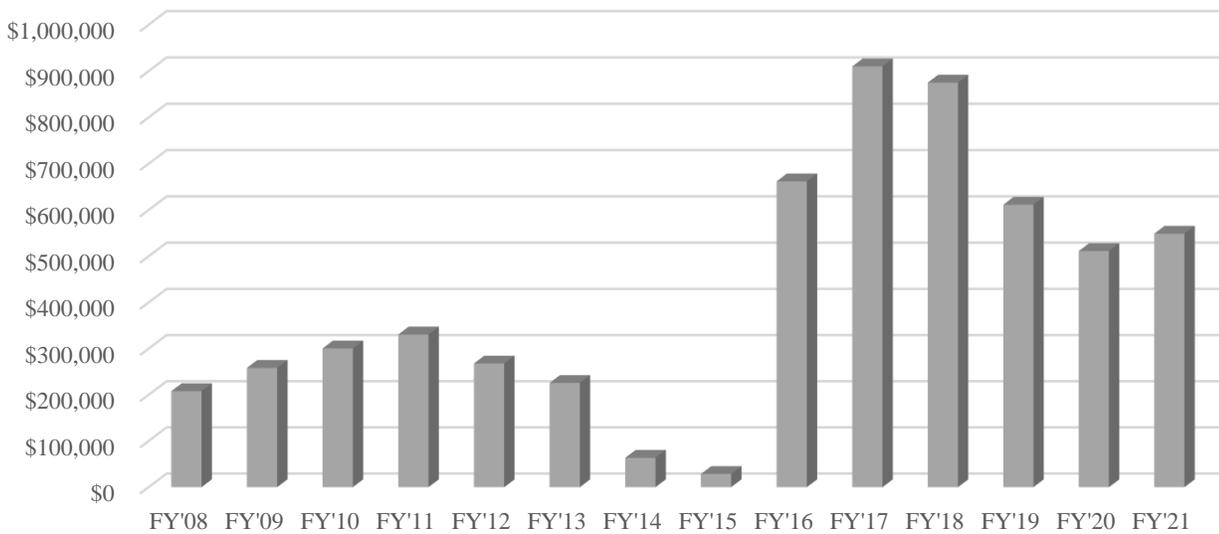
Drivers of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget: Grants and Revolving Funds

The last piece of the budget is grants and revolving funds. These funding sources play a large role in the overall budget. For FY23, the estimated budget for grants and revolving funds is \$4,488,034. This includes federal, state and private grants as well as revolving accounts, including but not limited to, athletics, circuit breaker, food services, pre-school tuition, etc.

The expense discipline of the School Department is highlighted by the fact that actual spending has come in below the budgets approved by Town Meeting in recent years. In the five years from fiscal 2017 through fiscal 2021, the School Department has returned over \$3,457,133 to the general fund.

The table below shows the surplus returned to the general fund since fiscal 2008.

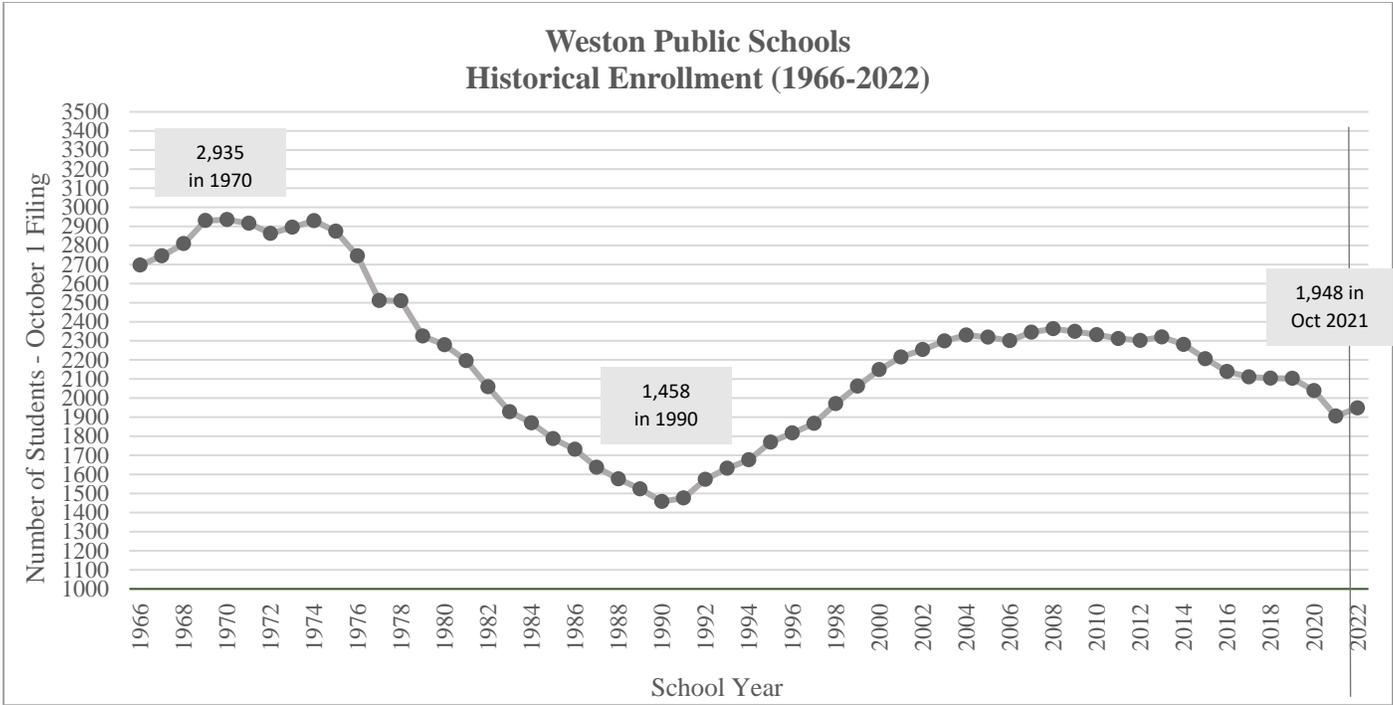
General Fund Surplus at Year's End



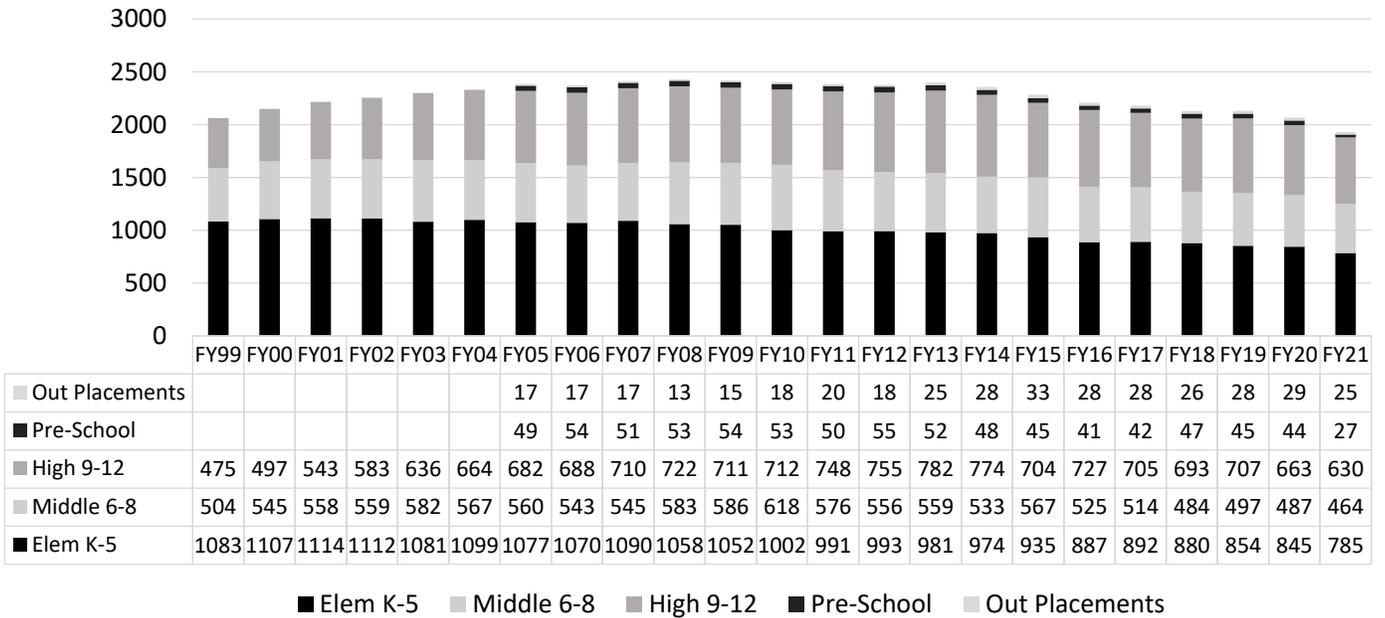
Enrollment Changes

For the past nine years there has been an active discussion in the district and on the Committee about school enrollment and budget trends. The chart below shows Weston Public Schools enrollment over a 50+ year period and illustrates a cycle of rising and falling enrollment from highs over 2,900 students in the mid-1970's to lows under 1,500 students in 1990. Our enrollment during the 2021-2022 school year reflected a slight increase over the 2020-2021 school year. To help with planning and budgeting the School Committee reviews demographic data and enrollment projections annually.

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The chart below illustrates the change in enrollment and the underlying mix shift we have seen in town over the last 22 years. Families are moving to Weston when their children are older, and many residents are keeping their homes long after their children have graduated. In general, high schools are more expensive to run per student, primarily due to the variety of courses offered.

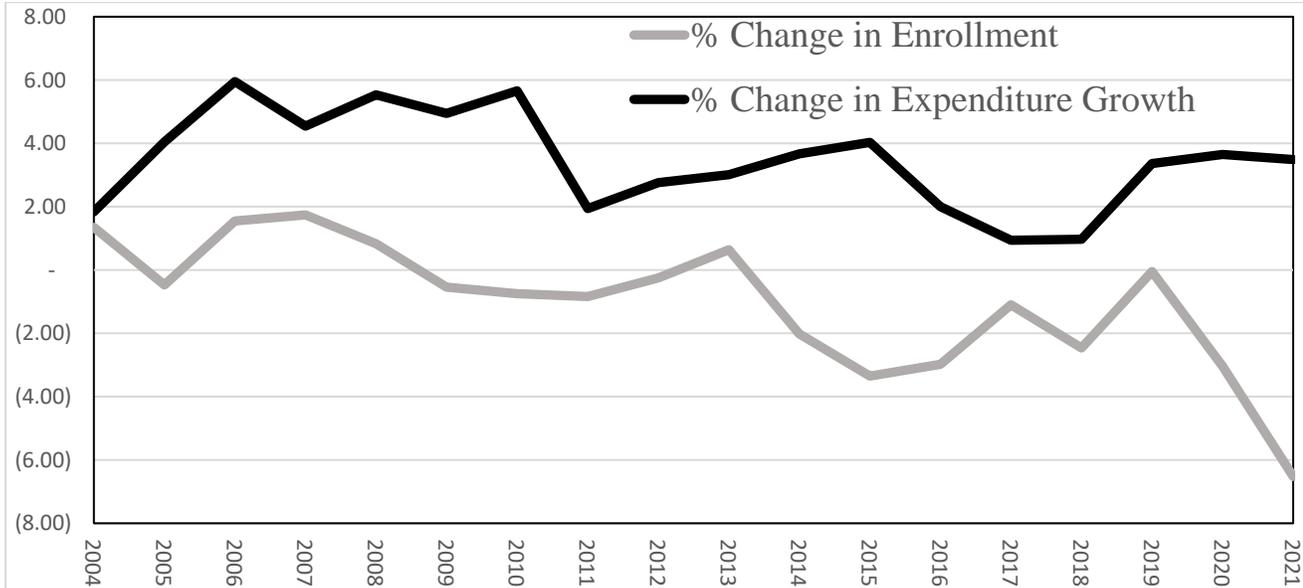


The Committee recognizes the need to be disciplined about expenses, and we have made several reductions and cuts over the years to contain the rate of growth. The fiscal 2023 budget reflects approximately 9 fewer FTEs than the approved fiscal 2021 budget. However, expenses will not decline in line with enrollment because of the structure of the teacher contract, which includes annual cost-of-living increases, “steps” for longevity, “lanes” for professional development and seniority rules. As noted above, the district offered an early retirement incentive to teachers; if more senior teachers step away the district either can choose not to fill the vacant position or hire a more junior, and therefore less costly, replacement.

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While the annual budget process described above is very transparent to the public through posted documents, presentations, and open meetings, much of longer-term budget planning simply cannot be transparent to the general public. The district is in the midst of planning for structural changes to address possible continued declines in enrollment and further optimize its spending. However, these structural changes impact employees, and in any given scenario for change in a small district like Weston, it would be easy to identify the impacted individuals. These types of changes cannot be discussed publicly until they are closer to implementation, but they are a key part of the strategic, forward looking budgeting process of the district.

The chart below illustrates that the historical change in spending has generally declined over time as enrollment growth has slowed and then recently declined.



Per-Pupil Expenditure

The School Committee has been asked to analyze our cost structure relative to other districts, generating significant discussion and analysis regarding publicly reported per-pupil expenditures. While benchmarking can be a valuable exercise, finding consistent and reliable data from comparable districts can be more challenging than it might appear, and state records of per-pupil expenditure may not be the best comparison tool.

Each town makes accounting and reporting decisions that significantly impact what is and is not included in per-pupil expenditures (PPE). For instance, federal, state, and private grant funds are not offset in PPE calculations. As a result, our success in providing additional programming through WEEFC funding, health and nursing grants, and other state and federal programs increases our PPE relative to other towns, even though there is no impact on resident taxes. In addition, each town handles cost-sharing among municipal departments differently, which can cause material differences in PPE. For example, a nearby town showed \$0 for certain utility costs in recent years, driving down their PPE despite the fact that we are certain they did, in fact, heat their buildings that year. Finally, we typically include technology purchases, such as student iPads or Chromebooks, in our operating budget while many towns record these as capital items funded separately from the school budget.

For FY20, 74.19% of the total per pupil expenditure number was from the general fund of the Weston Public Schools, 18.18% was from chargebacks from the Town, and 7.63% was from grants and revolving funds. In other words, in FY20 \$20,058.42 of the PPE was from the schools' general fund appropriation, \$4,916.83 was from the Town's allocated chargebacks to the school district and \$2,064 was from grants and revolving funds. When viewed in this light our PPE for FY20 was similar to peer districts.

On comparisons, it is important to note that the state data does not include debt service in PPE calculations, which is a material factor that differs significantly between districts. Many towns (like Concord) regularly use debt to pay for routine capital expenditures, which makes it more challenging to compare per pupil expenditures on an apples-to-apples basis.

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Weston has sought to reduce our use of debt for regular, recurring capital purchases like vehicles and computer equipment, which is a fiscally prudent thing to do, but does make our PPE appear higher.

There are also several drivers that boost our costs and cost per student relative to comparable communities. In no particular order, these include:

- Many of our comparable communities are much larger – Lexington, Wellesley, and Wayland have enrollment of 6,790, 4,290, and 2,711 respectively, compared to our 1,948. Many of our comparable communities share a regional high school with higher enrollment (Dover-Sherborn, Lincoln-Sudbury, Concord-Carlisle, Acton-Boxborough.) High Schools are generally the most expensive building in a district to operate.
- We do not charge student activities fees for most athletic and extracurricular programs, unlike most peer districts.
- We provide busing for all our kids (including late buses) with our own buses and drivers who are town employees. We do not charge fees for riding the bus, unlike most peer districts.
- We provide our own food service rather than contracting out the service, unlike most peer districts..
- Weston supports a higher percentage of METCO students than other districts and the METCO grant only covers a fraction of our expenses for this program.
- Our costs including employee benefits are “fully loaded” because we are contributing the full amount required to the Middlesex Retirement system and the Town has elected to contribute to the OPEB trust fund to offset these future obligations. These benefits costs also include current expenses for retirees that were not fully reserved for during their employment.
- We receive more grant money than some comparable districts resulting in higher PPE even though the money does not come from taxpayer dollars.

Despite the shortcomings with comparing PPE with other districts, the Committee does believe PPE provides valuable information to aid in responsible planning and budgeting. Many of the cost differentials listed above are policy decisions that can be revisited. The district is convening a broad committee tasked with a review of the high school schedule. Moving the high school to a schedule similar to other area schools could provide significant cost savings, but could also involve tradeoffs, such as limiting choice and breadth of course offerings, that must be considered carefully. The town may decide that it would support charging fees for sports, activities, and/or busing, or look to outsource certain functions. Charging for even a few of these would dramatically lower Weston’s PPE. Each of these decisions has benefits and costs and must be weighed carefully. The Committee is focused on responsible budget stewardship while providing excellence in education and understands its responsibility to make difficult decisions when necessary.

Excellence in Education and Beyond

For the past few years, some residents have expressed concerns that Weston is not getting enough “value” from our school budget. The Committee believes that making value judgments about schools is a nuanced exercise and standardized test scores and magazine ratings are only parts of a much larger scorecard. While standardized tests provide important information, there are diminishing returns from “teaching to the test” and many students benefit from a focus on improving in other areas. While college placement is another important measure, we believe that it is equally important that our students are well prepared academically and emotionally to succeed in those college environments.

Further, we disagree with an overly simplistic approach that points only to test scores and can point to many tangible and intangible performance metrics where Weston schools excel relative to our peers. Some examples in no particular order include:

- Weston Middle School won the 2021 Blue Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education. It was the only secondary school in Massachusetts to win this award.
- Middle School Principal, John Gibbons, was one of eight school principals in the country chosen by the U.S. Department of Education to receive the 2021 Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership.
- Exceptional fine arts and extra-curricular programs. Our representation in state, national, and even international competitions and festivals is extraordinary given the relatively small size of the district.
 - The school music program is offered during the school day to allow students to participate in other extracurricular and athletic activities. This is unlike many districts where students must choose whether to participate in athletics or music because both take place after school. Weston has been named a “Best Communities for Music Education” every year for over a decade. Participation in Band, Chorus and Orchestra is high – roughly 90% of our 3rd to 5th grade students, 80% of our Middle School students and

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50% of our High School Students. Our High School Symphony Orchestra has roughly 95 students which is over 15% of the school. Weston consistently has many students selected for Eastern Districts, All-States and regularly has students selected for All-Eastern and All-Nationals, which is extraordinary given the small size of our school.

- All-National Musicians: This year two Weston High School students were selected for All-National music ensembles, which is exceedingly rare in any school, but even more remarkable given the size of our school.
- Our drama program performs numerous productions annually, and places highly in state and national competitions.
- Our visual arts programs offer a robust program of studies, and both our students and faculty are regularly recognized for excellence at the state, local, and national level.
- Our math, business, robotics, and other teams place highly in state and national competitions.
- Robotics State Champions: In March 2022, the 10th grade robotics team won the Massachusetts state FIRST Tech Challenge robotics competition and will represent the state at the world championships.
- Our high school supports almost 50 active clubs, with the list regularly changing with student interests.
- Athletic programs that focus on teamwork and sportsmanship and offer greater opportunity for participation than many of our comparable towns. Despite our small size, we field several playoff and championship teams each year.
- 2022 Winter sports championships: The Girls Indoor Track Team won the MIAA Division 5 State Championship and the DCL Foley Division Championship and nine athletes competed in the Nike Indoor Nationals. In addition, the Boys Swim Team won the MIAA Division Two State Championship.
- The Case Campus, which provides a robust outdoor classroom experience for our elementary students.
- Outstanding educators with low turnover and high continuity.
- The integration of project-based learning and design thinking into our teaching and learning. These skills are increasingly seen to be as important as literacy and numeracy, but they are not easily captured in the current standardized test scores. The week-long June Academy at the high school and J Term at the middle school are models of this practice and unique to Weston.
- Our robust and successful METCO program, which represents a much higher percentage of our student population than most other METCO programs.
- To share a comment from Dr. Kimo Carter, our Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Weston is set apart from other communities by the amount of “relational trust” between students, administrators, teachers, and parents. This is an intangible that is very hard to measure in standardized rankings.
- Our students continue to be accepted at an impressive list of schools. Our graduates are well-prepared for college – another intangible that our families are better equipped to measure than Boston Magazine. We have attached a list of colleges attended by the Class of 2021 to the end of this letter.

We appreciate that all of these programs and outcomes are boosted by support from our families and individual effort by our students, but these are all things that current and former parents talk about when discussing the value and performance of our schools.

It is also important to remember that School Committee members have statutory and ethical obligations to our current and future students - we are not simply accountable to voters and taxpayers. Our school employees are subject to a growing number of state and federal laws, regulations, and mandates.

The School Committee would like to acknowledge the efforts of Dr. Midge Connolly, Dr. Kimo Carter, Sheri Matthews, our building principals, and other staff members for their help in developing this budget. We appreciate that Weston voters have consistently supported the school budget in order to maintain the quality of our educational programs. We do not take that support lightly. We will continue to request only as much as we need to deliver the high-quality educational services that our students require and deserve.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Anita Raman, Chair
Ken Newberg, Vice Chair
Danielle Black
Attia Linnard
Alyson Muzila

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Colleges Attended by the Weston High School Class of 2021

Bates College	Lehigh University	University of California-Davis
Bentley University (2)	Macalester College	University of Colorado Boulder
Boston College (2)	Manhattan College	University of Connecticut
Boston University (4)	Massachusetts Bay Community College	University of Florida
Bowdoin College (2)	Massachusetts Institute of Technol. (3)	University of Massachusetts Boston
Brandeis University (2)	McGill University	University of Massachusetts-Amherst (10)
Bucknell University (2)	Merrimack College (2)	University of Maryland-College Park
Case Western Reserve Uni. (6)	Michigan State University	University of Miami (3)
Chapman University	Middlebury College	University of Mississippi
Coastal Carolina University	New York University (2)	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (4)
Colby College (4)	Northeastern University (10)	University of Rhode Island
Colgate University (2)	Pennsylvania State University	University of Richmond
Colorado School of Mines	Pitzer College (2)	University of Southern California
Columbia University	Princeton University (2)	University of Sydney
Cornell University (4)	Providence College	University of Tampa (2)
Curry College	Purdue University (2)	University of Virginia- Main Campus (2)
Dartmouth College (2)	Quinnipiac University (2)	University of Wisconsin-Madison (3)
Drew University	Regis College	Vanderbilt University
Eckerd College	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	Virginia Polytechnic Institute
Emerson College	Rollins College	Wake Forest University
Fairfield University	Sacred Heart University	Washington and Lee University
Florida State University	San Diego State University	Washington University in St Louis
Fordham University (2)	St. Lawrence University	Wheaton College
George Washington University	Stanford University	College of William and Mary (2)
Georgetown University (2)	Stevens Institute of Technology	Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2)
Hamilton College	Syracuse University (5)	Xavier University
Hampshire College	Temple University	
Harvard College (2)	The New School (2)	
Haverford College	Tufts University (3)	
College of the Holy Cross (2)	United States Naval Academy	
Indiana University- Bloomington (2)	University of Alabama	
Johns Hopkins University		