



January 22, 2019

To: Board of Education

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

CC: Richard Rudl, Director of Finance & Operations,
Dr. Ken Craw, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Michael Rizzo, Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services
Lewis Brey, Director of Human Resources & Internal Legal Counsel
Dr. Craig Tunks, Director of Digital Learning & Technology
Laura Kaddis, Principal
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Subject: Potential FY 2020 Budget Reductions for Discussion

Background

As requested, the Superintendent is submitting a set of potential reductions for consideration as the Board of Education (BOE) reviews the growth rate of 4.32% in the Recommended FY 2020 Budget. The 17 items listed here total \$817,924 and would represent a 1.59% reduction, dropping the overall growth rate for the FY 20 Budget to 2.73%.

We identified these items over a couple week period of intensive conversations and review amongst Cabinet members and the Principals. Nearly all of the 17 items immediately demonstrate the sober assessment I provided in my various summaries of any moves to reduce the Recommended FY 2020 Budget. The list includes increases in elementary and middle school class sizes, it eliminates elementary and middle school programs, it cuts math and science student and teacher supports, and it removes two new assistant coach positions. Smaller programs and initiatives also are included on the list, which, while less impactful if cut, signal that we are a district now limited in our capacity for innovation. Fortunately, the list also includes some adjustments that are manageable (i.e., lower increases for legal representation, correction for a double budget entry for social study books, and lower than expected increases in the new cleaning services contract).

Collectively, the 7.5 FTE reduction would result in the elimination of six full-time staff positions (five certified and one non-certified) and reduce five current full-time teaching positions at the secondary level to part-time positions. In total, 11 staff members would have their positions, either in whole or in part, affected by these reductions.

The 17 items listed here would have a deleterious effect on staff morale. We must recognize that Weston is at risk of moving into unfavorable territory—potentially becoming a school district closer to the norm of public schools regionally and nationally, instead of being a school system serving as a beacon for what public education can and should be.

General Statement Regarding Increasing K-8 Class Sizes

Among the 17 items are a set related to increases in K-8 class sizes. Any increases in K-8 class sizes would have a significant negative impact on teaching and learning. The current level of personalization and attention afforded to each Weston student will be reduced with higher class sizes. Teachers will not be able to differentiate instruction to the same degree or provide the level of feedback to students, verbal or written, to guide their progress. Weston teachers closely monitor and track student progress so that students requiring early intervention can be identified immediately. Their ability to respond swiftly to individual student needs to provide extra support or enrichment will be greatly diminished.

From a programmatic standpoint, the effectiveness of our instructional approaches in our K-8 literacy and math programs are maximized by our current class size guidelines. Raising class sizes would make it more challenging to implement the readers and writers workshop model and the Math in Focus program with fidelity. These programs are characterized by teachers conducting mini-lessons, facilitating guided practice, conferring with students, and providing targeted assistance as students apply their learning. Clearly, the current Weston Board of Education class size guidelines are in place to support the implementation of the adopted curriculum and the endorsed pedagogical practices of the district (e.g., workshop, inquiry-based learning, and performance-based learning).

List Structure and Organization

The 17 items are listed by title and description, amount of the potential reduction, and the percentage of budget growth each item would reduce. An impact statement on each reduction also is provided. Items are not prioritized, but listed from highest to lowest dollar amounts.

	<u>Description</u>	<u>Reduction Amount</u>	<u>% Growth Reduced</u>
1.	Increase Elementary Class Size K-1 guidelines from 18-20 to 18-22	\$177,248	0.34%

Impact Narrative:

As noted above, increasing class size has the potential to negatively affect the quality of instruction. Our teachers take great care to provide differentiated and personalized instruction to our students. Adding four to six students per class will impact the time teachers have to give individual attention and instruction for all students. We also take great pride in providing ongoing communication with our families. Parents of very young children appreciate access to their child’s teacher, particularly

as they are beginning their journey into the Weston Public Schools. The Center for Public Education cites research that smaller classes in early grades (K-3) can boost student academic achievement; A class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits.

The DRG A class size comparisons previously shared with the BOE (*January 16, 2019 BOE Q&A Document*) underscore the comparative advantage Weston would lose by increasing elementary class sizes.

This reduction would represent a 2.0 FTE cut.

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| 2. | Eliminate Project Challenge grades 3-8 | \$114,174 | 0.22% |
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Impact Narrative:

While Weston is not required to provide gifted programming, the elimination of the Project Challenge class at both WIS and WMS would significantly impact 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.

This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

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| 3. | Eliminate K-2 World Language | \$103,998 | 0.20% |
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Impact Narrative:

The loss of this entire program would impact every K, 1st and 2nd grade child—a total of 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.

This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

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| 4. | Increase Elementary Class Size Grade 2-5 guidelines from 20-24 to 20-25 | \$88,625 | 0.17% |
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Impact Narrative:

We are dedicated to academic excellence for each and every student. Adding students to each class will impact the amount of time teachers can provide personalized and differentiated instruction. The loss of one teacher in grade five will bring the number of sections to seven, an odd number of sections which will impact the current teaming model in grade five. Currently students move between two teachers on a daily basis with one teacher who focuses on reading/language arts and the other math/science. This helps students begin to learn the skills they will need when they transition to the middle school -- such as organization of material when moving between classes, and ability to adapt to

different teaching styles and expectations of different teachers. Additionally, the fifth grade teaming model was put in place to provide students with quality blocks of time with teachers focused on either language arts or math/science. Through the teaming model, teachers are able to specialize and become experts in their content area allowing them to further differentiate for the needs of all students. By moving to seven sections, we would be forced to reconsider how we deliver the teaming model if at all.

The DRG A class size comparisons shared with the *January 16, 2019 BOE Q&A Document* underscore the comparative advantage Weston would lose by increasing elementary class sizes.

This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

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| 5. | Increase Middle School Class Size | \$88,333 | 0.16% |
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Impact Narrative:

The impact of reducing the number of sections in 6th grade, pushing the average class size to the upper end of the BOE guidelines, would have ramifications beyond 6th grade. The reduction of fractional FTE (0.4 English, 0.2 mathematics, 0.2 social studies, and 0.2 science) across the core academic subjects would result in part-time positions. This decrease in FTE would impact overall staffing at the middle school since we rely on having teachers teach off grade level to preserve full-time positions. For example, we currently have a seventh grade English teacher who is assigned 0.4 FTE in 6th grade English; a seventh grade math teacher assigned 0.2FTE in 6th grade math, and an 8th grade English teacher assigned to 7th grade English. Having a number of part-time positions would make it difficult to retain, recruit high quality teachers and will likely result in current teachers seeking full time employment outside of Weston. In addition, this reduction would put at risk our fundamental teaming model, which is essential to how we deliver middle grades education in Weston. Part-time teachers would not available for team meetings and curriculum partner meetings, which are fundamental to the success of teaming in the middle school and would negatively affect student experiences.

This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

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| 6. | Eliminate Elementary Science Para Educator | \$60,350 | 0.12% |
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Impact Narrative:

Eliminating the elementary science para educator would substantially impact the ability of classroom teachers to prep hands on science lessons. Our elementary teachers teach and prep for at least six content areas on a daily basis. The quality of science instruction is notably boosted by dedicated help in preparing lessons.

This reduction represents 1.0 FTE cut in a non-certified staff member.

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| 7. | Reduction in Contracted Cleaning Services | \$48,891 | 0.10% |
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Impact Narrative:

Based on the top two finalists identified by the Cleaning Services Bid Review Committee, we feel confident reducing the projected increase in for the new contract by \$48,891

8.	Eliminate Math Enrichment Grades 3-5	\$47,287	0.09%
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Impact Narrative:

The elimination of math enrichment will reduce the number of opportunities for students to participate in additional math challenges and enrichment lessons. Math enrichment is provided through a push-in model and taught by the Project Challenge teacher, who works closely with the Math CIL to ensure activities are aligned with the curriculum and implemented consistently across grade level classes. Enrichment opportunities are designed to be fun, challenging experiences that help students deepen their skills and understanding of mathematical concepts and operations, fostering better mathematical thinkers and problem solvers.

This is a reduction of 0.5 FTE

9.	Reduction in non-personnel, non-contractual expenses	\$24,750	0.05%
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Impact Narrative:

This reduction would be made across the four schools, athletics, special education, and curriculum and instruction. It would result in less funding for assistive technology for special education students, less professional development money for curriculum and instruction and less funding for materials, books and supplies for classroom instruction all of which have been scaled back over the past two years as we have frozen accounts in order to help offset overages in special education out-of-district tuition. These reductions would continue the trend of not replacing crucial instructional materials when needed.

10.	Reduce Special Education Legal Representation Cost	\$15,000	0.03%
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Impact Narrative:

Special Education Legal Representation is based on the district's need to respond comprehensively in situations when families exercise the rights afforded in the procedural safeguards, in mediation and resolution meetings to represent the district, and in Planning and Placement Team meetings in which a family has an attorney present. We factored in all these items plus looked at our peers in DRG A when building the budget. While we feel \$150,000 is a sound estimate based on need and what this can do to benefit the district, a reduction of \$15,000 could be possible given the trend decline in the last month in legal bills. If we were to run short during the year we would have to identify potential savings in the budget if they were to materialize or transfer funds from other accounts, such as facilities and defer maintenance work.

11.	Increase High School Parking Fee to \$200 per student	\$15,000	0.03%
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Impact Narrative:

This would be an added cost charged to students. We would tie Ridgefield with the highest parking fee in DRG A.

12. **Cut Duplicate Middle School Social Studies Books** \$11,429 0.02%

Impact Narrative:

This was an accidental duplicate request between the Middle School and Curriculum. This can be safely removed from the budget.

13. **Eliminate Seven High School After School Clubs** \$10,349 0.02%

Math League Advisor \$(3,270), Literary Magazine \$(2,183), Independent Instruction \$(1,725), TSA Team Advisor \$(807), Art with a Heart \$(788), UNICEF \$(788), and Young Progressives \$(788).

Impact Narrative:

The clubs targeted in this reduction are those with lower student enrollment. Any reduction to after school clubs would have a negative impact on student opportunities as well as the overall school climate. In addition, elimination of Math League would prevent students from participating in competitions.

14. **Eliminate Odyssey of the Mind and Science Olympiad at Weston Middle School** \$6,476 0.01%

Impact Narrative:

A reduction to our WMS activities/clubs would prevent us from offering some unique opportunities for our students. In particular, we have had students and parents express an interest in a middle school team for Science Olympiad (the high school currently has a team) as well as a middle school Odyssey of the Mind (we currently have a number of WMS students who continue to participate under the auspices of the team at WIS). This reduction would eliminate the potential to meet these academic interests.

15. **Eliminate request for Assistant Cheerleading Coach** \$4,294 0.01%

Impact Narrative:

The fall season for the Cheerleading program runs from mid-August through the beginning of December. This is an extended schedule and places extra demands on a program with just one coach. Due to skill specialization and safety concerns, it is imperative that we have this second coach for this group. The assistant coach also ensures that we effectively oversee and guide athlete interactions and relations.

16. **Eliminate Colonial Day** \$3,500 0.01%

Impact Narrative:

This event has become a highlight of the 8th grade social studies unit, which focuses on early American history. Students prepare in advance to participate in a "tavern debate" with costumed reenactors, wrestling with the pros and cons of breaking with the English monarchy, and the risks involved in such a decision. Students also participate in a number of break-out sessions to learn about different aspects

of civilian and military life during the colonial era. Our colonial day activities bring history to life in ways that simply cannot be replicated without the direct interactions with the reenactors. As a result of the success of the program and the direct connection with our social studies curriculum, we feel strongly that this experience is of significant value to our students. Removing funding for this event from the budget could mean that future students would miss out on this engaging and unique experience. Funding for the initial Colonial Day was made possible through a generous grant from the Weston Middle School PTO. We would be eliminating a good example of how PTO funds can seed a successful academic opportunity.

17. **Eliminate request for Assistant Field Hockey Coach** \$3,220 0.01%

Impact Narrative:

Field Hockey is the only “contact” sport at this time that does not have an assistant varsity coach. This sport has become skill specific, with specialized needs for different positions, requiring the support of an assistant coach. Safety requirements also require the attention of a second coach. The new assistant coach would be hired with the capacity to work with goalkeepers. Lastly, adding this assistant coach would resolve any Title IX issues that could arise from the fact that the only tier 1 (contact) sports left without an assistant varsity coach are both female sports.

Summary Chart

The 17 items listed here are not prioritized. Rather, they are listed from highest dollar amount to lowest dollar amount.

	Item	Expense	% of Growth if Reduced
1	Increase Elementary Class Size K-1 guidelines from 18-20 to 18-22	\$177,248	0.34%
2	Eliminate Project Challenge Grades 3-8	\$114,174	0.22%
3	Eliminate K-2 World Language	\$103,998	0.20%
4	Increase Elementary Class Size Grade 2-5 guidelines from 20-24 to 20-25	\$88,625	0.17%
5	Increase Middle School Class Size	\$83,333	0.16%
6	Eliminate Elementary Science Para Educator	\$60,350	0.12%
7	Reduction in Contracted Cleaning	\$48,891	0.10%
8	Eliminate Math Enrichment Grades 3-5	\$47,287	0.09%
9	Reduction in Non Personnel, Non Contractual Items	\$24,750	0.05%
10	Reduction in Special Education legal representation Cost	\$15,000	0.03%
11	Increase Parking Fee to \$200 for High School Students	\$15,000	0.03%
12	Cut Duplicate Middle School Social Studies Books	\$11,429	0.02%
13	Eliminate Seven High School After School Clubs	\$10,349	0.02%
14	Eliminate Odyssey of the Mind and Science Olympiad at MS	\$6,476	0.01%
15	Eliminate request for Assistant Cheerleading Coach	\$4,294	0.01%
16	Eliminate Colonial Day	\$3,500	0.01%
17	Eliminate request for Assistant Field Hockey Coach	\$3,220	0.01%
	TOTAL	\$817,924	1.59%