

The Woodbridge School District (WSD) Proposed FY23 Operating Budget

Question & Answer Factsheet, March 10, 2022

This factsheet has been developed to answer various common questions related to the Woodbridge Board of Education's proposed operating budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year. For further information, please contact the WSD Superintendent, Jonathan S. Budd, Ph.D., or the Interim Director of Business Services & Operations, Richard Huot, at jbudd@woodbridgeps.org, ruhot@woodbridgeps.org, or 203-387-6631.

Section 1: Overall Budget Factors

In considering the WSD proposed FY23 operating budget, what factors are important to know about WSD and BRS?

- Beecher Road School (BRS) is the largest elementary school in the State of Connecticut, and has built an excellent reputation over decades. The proposed operating budget seeks to maintain that excellence within a time of escalating student needs, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- School districts in the State of Connecticut are categorized into District Reference Groups (DRGs) based on socioeconomic factors. Woodbridge is in DRG B, and compares educationally to districts in DRG B and DRG A. Of the 31 districts that comprise DRG B & DRG A, plus Bethany (which is in DRG C), WSD is one of only 4 districts whose enrollment has increased over the past decade. Our enrollment growth of 13.7% is the highest of all those 31 districts. (See Appendix A.) Simply put, the district's educational funds must address many more students than a decade ago, in a time of rising student needs and inflationary costs.

How has the WSD budget grown over time?

- The State Department of Education calculates the per-pupil expenditure of each school district. Of the 31 districts that comprise DRG B & DRG A, plus Bethany (which is in DRG C), WSD's growth in per-pupil cost over the past decade is ranked 30 of 31. (See Appendix B.) While the district has been prudent in its approach to using the dollars allocated by the Town, the relatively low growth of dollars per student necessitates a proposed operating budget that seeks to better meet the needs of students.

What has been the impact of the WSD budget growth over time?

- While an excellent education has been provided to students at Beecher Road School over the past decade, the gap between rising student enrollment and low per-pupil-cost growth has reached a critical point. Over the past decade:
 - Budget dollars for supplies have decreased 33%.
 - Budget dollars for professional development have decreased 28%.
 - Budget dollars for repairs & maintenance have increased only 12%, lagging far behind inflation.Further cuts in non-instructional areas cannot be supported. All requested budget dollars will be used to fund all areas of the budget appropriately for the children of Woodbridge.

What is the budgetary effect of rising special education costs?

- Costs for special education are based on federal mandates. As in all districts, costs for special education in WSD have risen over the past decade. For example, to support the legally mandated needs of some students for 1-to-1 teachers' assistants (TAs), WSD was obligated to add 11.05 special education TAs; the district was also obligated to add 5.0 special services teachers. Some of these increases were due to the wise decision approximately four years ago to bring in-district several students who were outplaced prior. While this necessarily increased the WSD personnel dedicated to special education, it avoided what would have been even greater increases in special education outplacement cost. Indeed, the total cost of special education outplacement has increased only 15% over the past decade, an increase that is very modest, due largely to the reduction of outplacements.

Section 2: Personnel Costs

Is it true that personnel numbers have risen at Beecher?

- As mentioned in the prior answer, over the past decade, 16.05 new special education positions have been legally mandated. In order to offset that increase within the district's budget allocation, all other staff have actually *decreased* by 5.42, for a net total ten-year staff increase of 10.63.
- The decrease of all other staff has posed challenges that must be combated. For example, 8.05 general education teachers' assistant positions have been reduced over the past decade; these positions are instructional, and thus this reduction has had a negative impact on the typical students who receive support prior to being identified for intervention or special education services that are more costly.

Do new staff need to be added for next year?

- Four new 1-to-1 special education TAs are required for next year; they are reflected in the proposed operating budget. An additional special education teacher was required this year, but paid for from a grant that is ending; this position is included in the budget request, as it is also required next year. Based on growth priorities, the Board of Education's budget proposal includes funds for an additional STEAM specialist, an additional social worker, an additional classroom teacher based on enrollment increases, an additional half-time custodian, and 6 additional general education TAs to address the issue discussed above.

Can the teaching force be reduced through part-time options for staff?

- The reduction of existing staff from full-time to part-time is governed by contract and, in the case of teachers, by statute. As compared to a municipality, a school district has fewer options for part-time work. In most cases, a position is needed all day because our students need to be taught over the course of the full day. Additionally, an acute teacher shortage has reduced significantly the number of potential applicants interested in part-time positions.

What are the roles of teachers who do not have “typical classroom assignments”?

- As in all districts, outside of legally mandated special education positions, such positions fall into two broad groups:
 - Group 1: Those Providing Direct Intervention Support to Students
 - 3.0 teachers provide direct intervention support to students in literacy.
 - 2.0 teachers provide direct intervention support to students in mathematics. (0.68 of the 2.0 is funded through the federal Title I grant.)
 - 1.0 teacher provides direct support to the teaching and learning of science and related areas (STEAM).
 - 0.5 teacher provides direct intervention support to students for whom English is not their first language.
 - Group 2: Those Providing “Special” Instruction to Students (which occurs while classroom teachers receive their contractually mandated preparation time)
 - 3.0 teachers teach physical education and health.
 - 2.5 teachers teach general and instrumental music.
 - 2.0 teachers teach library media, oversee the Library Media Center, and teach students identified as talented and gifted.
 - 2.0 teachers teach Spanish.
 - 2.0 teachers teach technology, oversee the Technology Center, and teach students identified as talented and gifted.
 - 2.0 teachers teach visual arts.
- Finally, over the past decade, three positions (Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, & IT Manager) were moved from contracted services to salaried positions for total budget savings.

Section 3: The Budget Development Process, & Potential Next Steps

What has the district already done to control its costs?

- The district has engaged in research and negotiations to change its insurance carrier for a substantial savings for FY23. As possible, the district has also managed downward all non-instructional budget lines.

The Board of Selectmen supported an operating budget increase of 8.92%. What would occur if that number were to be reduced?

- First, it is essential to note that all budget reconciliation decisions would, by statute, be made by the Board of Education. Below are broad statements about likely impact at various budget adjustment levels.
- A reduction from 8.92% to 6.74% (\$410,053) would likely result in the elimination of all new positions, with the exception of .5 of the additional social worker and 3 of the additional general education teachers’ assistants. This tier of reduction would include a reduction from 6 to 5 grade 3 class sections, resulting in a class size of 21 students, which exceeds longstanding BOE guidelines at this time of complex student needs. This tier of reduction would also include a reduction in the number of interns the district supports, which would have the effect of reducing interventionist service time in order to cover absent staff.
- A reduction from 6.74% to 5.90% (\$130,718) would likely result in the elimination of the .5 additional social worker and the 3 additional general education TAs referenced above.
- A reduction below 5.90% would likely result in the reduction of existing programs and personnel. The following items would be among those under consideration:
 - Reduction of the current number of administrative assistant positions.
 - Reduction of the current number of classroom teachers, likely moving class size to 24 students in intermediate grades.
 - Reduction of the current number of general education TAs to support the necessary 4 new 1-to-1 special education TAs.
 - Reduction of the current number of school nurse positions.

Reduction of existing staff is governed by various contractual and statutory provisions. Existing staff whose positions are eliminated are entitled to unemployment compensation, the cost of which would need to be factored in as a budget addition.

I hear that the district has received “ARP ESSER” grant funding. Can this be used to support the operating budget needs?

- First, one principle of the ARP ESSER grant is that it can be used “to supplement, but not supplant”: in other words, if an item has been paid for by prior operating budgets, it cannot be shifted to the grant funding. Including budget adjustments that have already occurred, certain items are already identified for ARP ESSER funding, such as items aligned with necessary building improvements and with professional development.
- At least 20% of the ARP ESSER funding must, by federal and State guidelines, be set aside for specific new support for students experiencing academic needs.

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Appendix A1: Ten-Year Enrollment Growth, All CT DRG A + B Districts (+ Bethany)

District	Enrollment Growth FY13 to FY22	DRG	Rank
Woodbridge	+13.7%	B	1 of 31
South Windsor	+10.6%	B	
Farmington	+1.1%	B	
Orange	+0.8%	B	
Trumbull	-0.6%	B	
New Canaan	-2.0%	A	
Darien	-2.6%	A	
Greenwich	-2.7%	B	
Monroe	-4.1%	B	
Brookfield	-6.9%	B	
Weston	-7.8%	A	
Westport	-8.3%	A	
Avon	-8.6%	B	
West Hartford	-8.7%	B	
Fairfield	-9.2%	B	
Region No. 5	-9.5%	B	
Simsbury	-10.2%	B	
Cheshire	-10.3%	B	
Easton	-12.2%	A	
Guilford	-12.8%	B	
Wilton	-12.8%	A	
Region No. 15	-13.5%	B	
Ridgefield	-13.6%	A	
Glastonbury	-13.7%	B	
Granby	-16.4%	B	
Bethany	-17.8%	C	
Region No. 9	-20.3%	A	
Newtown	-21.5%	B	
New Fairfield	-24.0%	B	
Redding	-26.6%	A	
Madison	-27.4%	B	

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Appendix A2: Ten-Year Enrollment Growth, All CT DRG A + B Districts (+ Bethany)

District	Enrollment FY13	Enrollment FY22	Enrollment Growth FY13 to FY22	DRG	Rank
Woodbridge	745	847	+13.7%	B	1 of 31
South Windsor	4,321	4,778	+10.6%	B	
Farmington	4,071	4,116	+1.1%	B	
Orange	1,248	1,258	+0.8%	B	
Trumbull	6,937	6,896	-0.6%	B	
New Canaan	4,223	4,137	-2.0%	A	
Darien	4,880	4,754	-2.6%	A	
Greenwich	8,871	8,630	-2.7%	B	
Monroe	3,488	3,345	-4.1%	B	
Brookfield	2,793	2,601	-6.9%	B	
Weston	2,428	2,239	-7.8%	A	
Westport	5,818	5,336	-8.3%	A	
Avon	3,421	3,127	-8.6%	B	
West Hartford	10,078	9,200	-8.7%	B	
Fairfield	10,327	9,378	-9.2%	B	
Region No. 5	2,369	2,145	-9.5%	B	
Simsbury	4,553	4,089	-10.2%	B	
Cheshire	4,674	4,193	-10.3%	B	
Easton	1,019	895	-12.2%	A	
Guilford	3,597	3,136	-12.8%	B	
Wilton	4,312	3,758	-12.8%	A	
Region No. 15	4,093	3,539	-13.5%	B	
Ridgefield	5,296	4,578	-13.6%	A	
Glastonbury	6,606	5,700	-13.7%	B	
Granby	2,112	1,765	-16.4%	B	
Bethany	473	389	-17.8%	C	
Region No. 9	1,032	822	-20.3%	A	
Newtown	5,159	4,051	-21.5%	B	
New Fairfield	2,805	2,132	-24.0%	B	
Redding	1,133	832	-26.6%	A	
Madison	3,390	2,461	-27.4%	B	

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Appendix B1: Ten-Year Per-Pupil-Cost Growth, All CT DRG A + B Districts (+ Bethany)

District	Per-Pupil-Cost Growth FY13 to FY22	DRG	Rank
Avon	+60.5%	B	30 of 31
Madison	+60.0%	B	
New Fairfield	+54.2%	B	
Newtown	+45.5%	B	
Granby	+43.3%	B	
Bethany	+42.4%	C	
Ridgefield	+41.5%	A	
Easton	+39.5%	B	
Fairfield	+38.7%	B	
Darien	+38.3%	A	
Redding	+38.2%	A	
Region No. 15	+38.2%	A	
Guilford	+38.1%	B	
West Hartford	+38.0%	B	
Cheshire	+36.8%	B	
Glastonbury	+36.1%	B	
Greenwich	+35.2%	B	
Region No. 5	+34.8%	B	
Region No. 9	+34.8%	A	
Simsbury	+33.6%	B	
Wilton	+32.2%	A	
Orange	+29.3%	B	
Trumbull	+29.3%	B	
Westport	+28.5%	A	
Farmington	+28.2%	B	
Brookfield	+25.6%	B	
Weston	+24.2%	A	
New Canaan	+20.5%	A	
Monroe	+18.1%	B	
Woodbridge	+12.8%	B	
South Windsor	+10.6%	B	

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Appendix B2: Ten-Year Per-Pupil-Cost Growth, All CT DRG A + B Districts (+ Bethany)

District	Per-Pupil-Cost FY13	Per-Pupil-Cost FY22	Per-Pupil-Cost Growth FY13 to FY22	DRG	Rank
Avon	\$13,989	\$22,445	+60.5%	B	
Madison	\$14,393	\$22,964	+60.0%	B	
New Fairfield	\$13,106	\$20,212	+54.2%	B	
Newtown	\$13,694	\$19,920	+45.5%	B	
Granby	\$13,173	\$18,871	+43.3%	B	
Bethany	\$14,194	\$20,210	+42.4%	C	
Ridgefield	\$15,333	\$21,688	+41.5%	A	
Easton	\$15,727	\$21,932	+39.5%	B	
Fairfield	\$14,980	\$20,782	+38.7%	B	
Darien	\$16,509	\$22,838	+38.3%	A	
Redding	\$19,529	\$26,979	+38.2%	A	
Region No. 15	\$14,565	\$20,124	+38.2%	A	
Guilford	\$14,417	\$19,902	+38.1%	B	
West Hartford	\$13,884	\$19,155	+38.0%	B	
Cheshire	\$13,258	\$18,133	+36.8%	B	
Glastonbury	\$13,784	\$18,755	+36.1%	B	
Greenwich	\$17,997	\$24,326	+35.2%	B	
Region No. 5	\$15,344	\$20,677	+34.8%	B	
Region No. 9	\$18,641	\$25,126	+34.8%	A	
Simsbury	\$14,231	\$19,016	+33.6%	B	
Wilton	\$17,152	\$22,675	+32.2%	A	
Orange	\$14,969	\$19,348	+29.3%	B	
Trumbull	\$13,596	\$17,579	+29.3%	B	
Westport	\$18,165	\$23,348	+28.5%	A	
Farmington	\$14,449	\$18,521	+28.2%	B	
Brookfield	\$14,035	\$17,625	+25.6%	B	
Weston	\$19,004	\$23,601	+24.2%	A	
New Canaan	\$18,179	\$21,898	+20.5%	A	
Monroe	\$15,028	\$17,752	+18.1%	B	
Woodbridge	\$17,083	\$19,270	+12.8%	B	30 of 31
South Windsor	\$15,069	\$16,668	+10.6%	B	