

FY 2022 Operating Budget

Opening Narrative

Introduction

The Weston Public Schools Leadership Team is pleased to submit to the Weston Board of Education the Requested FY 2022 Operating Budget. The requested budget totals \$56,222,651, which represents an increase of 3.81 percent or \$2,061,209 from the FY 2021 Operating Budget.

The Leadership Team has worked intensively over the past several months to develop a budget plan that balances the dual needs of organization advancement and fiscal frugality. We carefully reviewed all budget categories from a strategic standpoint to ensure only necessary resources are included to advance our overarching priority outcome of *Producing Global Citizens*, achieved by focused work on the goals of *Academic Excellence*, *Healthy Learning Environments*, *Digital Learning*, *Gauging Progress* and *Resources for Learning*. Even while limiting budget growth to only a few targeted areas, we believe the requested budget allows the district to extend its record of excellence.

Throughout the budget development process, we have considered the implications of COVID-19. While it has dominated every aspect of our educational work since March 2020, and continues to have a budgetary impact on FY 21, we anticipate it will have less of a direct impact in 2021-2022. Nevertheless, we have positioned staff and financial resources to allow us to continue to address the immediate and subsequent effects of the pandemic on the provision of educational services and the operations of the district. When we are able to return to normal schooling, we will have to address any residual effects of the pandemic on student growth and development. We believe that our students on average have progressed well this year academically and socially-emotionally, but it will continue to be a focus of all administrators and teachers.

FY 22 Major Budget Drivers & Necessary Reductions

The Leadership Team developed the FY 2022 budget with the aim of advancing Weston's exceptional educational program (curricular and co-curricular), educator-to-student ratios, administrative leadership and supervision, and operations and facilities. The resulting budget is based on a series of major cost areas, many of which are in core areas representing contractual obligations for personnel and essential services, health and dental insurance, supplies and materials, equipment and transportation. Table 1 lists the major budget drivers for FY 22.

Table 1: Major Budget Drivers for FY 22

Budget Category	FY 22 Year over Year Increase in Dollars	FY 22 Year over Year Increase as Percent
Salaries	503,073	0.93
Benefits	908,266	1.68
Professional Services	75,923	0.14
R&M/Property Services	86,434	0.16
Other Services	533,847	0.99
Supplies & Materials	(12,525)	(0.02)
Equipment	133,700	0.25
Dues & Fees	2,781	0.01
Revenue Offset	(170,288)	(0.31)
TOTAL	2,061,209	3.81

The recommended growth rate of 3.81 percent is the result of careful reductions by the administration. The full set of priority needs for FY 22 would have required a growth rate of 5.44 percent. Cognizant of the need for fiscal austerity, the administration has identified reductions totaling \$877,926. They are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Administration Identified Reductions in FY 22 Operating Budget

Budget Category	Reduction in Dollars	Reduction as Percent of Total Budget
<p>Salaries & Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Para Educator ● Speech Pathologist ● K-2 Computer Teacher (.50 FTE) ● K-2 World Language (.60 FTE) ● Grade 7 Section ● HS FTE reduction ● Groundskeeper 	436,772	-0.81
<p>Stipends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Club Advisors (Young Progressives, Acadeca, Tutoring on Wheels, Save the Children, St. Baldrick's) ● Athletic Coaches (Assistant Coach Boys & Girls Golf, Head Coach Esport, Assistant Coach Boys & Girls Cross Country) 	23,696	-0.04
Repairs & Maintenance	47,446	-0.09

Other Services	190,000	-0.35
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED Allowance • Proposed Change to ESS 		
Equipment	96,512	-0.18
Other Objects	2,500	-0.46
Shift Cost to Open Choice Grant	81,000	-0.15
TOTAL	877,926	-1.62

We anticipate that the Board of Education will want to discuss the reductions the administration has identified for reducing the growth rate. We look forward to reviewing these items with the BOE in a comprehensive fashion, factoring in the pros and cons of these reductions relative to alternative options, which the BOE may separately identify.

FY 22 Themes: Curriculum and Instruction as the Lynchpin

This year the budget book is organized by categories, rather than individual cost centers. We believe this allows the Board of Education and administration to analyze and manage district resources for the sake of optimizing organizational coherence and efficiency. Nevertheless, we still believe it is important to have statements from each department and school (i.e., the major cost centers) about the highlights and implications of the requested FY 22 budget. We have organized what typically have been the separate cost center introductions into a single opening narrative. We present here thematically the priorities that run coherently throughout each major part of the district and their individual statements. Significantly, the lynchpin to our priorities for FY 22 is Curriculum & Instruction, both in terms of academic growth and social emotional learning.

Weston Public Schools is committed to the continuous improvement of its programs and services while at the same time being fiscally responsible with the town resources. Continuous improvement efforts will focus on sustaining Weston’s long standing commitment to academic excellence and promoting a healthy learning environment. The FY 22 budget was built with this

focus and being mindful that next year will be a transitional year following the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the standpoint of **academic excellence**, Weston is unique in its ability to personalize learning, instill a love of learning and develop future leaders who are well prepared to contribute to a global society. It is clear that students who attend our schools are well prepared for post-secondary education. We know this based on the fact that on average 99% of our students graduate from a 4-year college/university within six years. This amazing statistic is a testament to the collective efforts of our faculty, staff and Weston Community to provide an education that values and supports the whole child.

Sustaining this academic excellence requires a continued emphasis on professional learning and supporting high quality teaching. Our teachers continually seek to innovate and enhance the learning experience for our students. The current school year is evidence to this fact since our teachers have adapted incredibly to the challenges and opportunities presented to them when teaching in Hybrid and Distance learning formats. The emphasis on professional development and curriculum development next year will be on how we modify and adjust teaching and learning following the COVID-19 pandemic. Key areas of focus that are supported by this budget include the following:

- Provide funding for new resources and corresponding training for the K-8 math program.
- Resume K-5 literacy initiative and our partnership with Teachers College, Columbia University to strengthen our comprehensive literacy program.
- Continue professional focus on enhancing the continuum of learning supports (SPED, 504 and intervention services).
- Provide teachers with the necessary technology resources to implement the curriculum; this budget includes funding to replace the aging fleet of teacher laptops that are essential to the Teacher Toolkit.
- Maintain the Curriculum Instructional Leader (CIL) model, which supports our teaching staff with ongoing coaching, professional learning and curriculum support.

Academic excellence must be supported with efforts to ensure a **healthy learning environment** for our students. This has never been so important as it has been during this pandemic year as students have been shifted between in person, hybrid and temporary distance learning scenarios. The Weston Schools have been a leader in sustaining a healthy learning environment due to its ongoing commitment to enhance school climate and school culture. The FY 22 budget framework supports social-emotional learning, with the following areas of emphasis:

- Improve the quality of services for students requiring social, emotional and behavioral support through a newly designed in-house WHS Alternative Pathways program, which will replace our five-year partnership with Educational Support Services (ESS).

- Continue to provide staff training and support for social emotional learning
- Continue to incorporate emotional intelligence (EI) strategies, approaches and skills into everyday school and classroom routines (RULER, anchor tools, and DBT STEPS-A skills).
- Continue to embed EI into the curriculum.

A major initiative woven into the budget is the district’s efforts to strengthen **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)** throughout the system. Our goal is to create and sustain a more inclusive school climate that values and supports all students and does not tolerate discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other perceived differences. This is a multi-year endeavor that will continue with an emphasis on increasing the capacity of Weston teachers and leaders to use an equity and excellence framework to expand our efforts to design a more inclusive curriculum. We also have joined the statewide CREC Teacher Residency Program (TRP) for 2021-22, which creates an alternate route to elementary certification for African American and Latino teachers by placing full-time residents in partner districts with mentor teachers as they work to obtain teacher certification.¹ The FY 20 budget request includes funding for DEI in the following areas:

- Includes funding for DEI for professional learning and consulting.
- Provides resources for PreK-12 curriculum integration and development.
- Includes two new high school courses (American Tapestry & Voices From the Edge).
- Continues our commitment to the Open Choice program, which provides Bridgeport students the opportunity to attend schools in neighboring towns.
- Expands the diversity of personnel – (Consideration being given for participation in a Teacher Residency Program to attract diverse candidates)

Weston High School

Weston High School (WHS) empowers students to become innovative thinkers, creative problem solvers, effective communicators and inspired learners prepared to thrive in an ever changing global society. Our teachers ensure that, upon graduation, our students are ready to tackle academic challenges and to become responsible, contributing members of the world.

WHS seniors continue to excel in the college process. Approximately 95 percent of the Class of 2020 matriculated to four-year colleges. In the Class of 2020, 33% of the students were accepted by the “most competitive” colleges and 53% received acceptances by colleges considered “highly competitive” according to Barron’s Rankings. Equally important, alumni data from the

¹ The total funding for each TRP Resident is \$65,750. The goal would be to have two residents, one in HES and one in WIS. As of the submission of this budget recommendation to the BOE (January 5, 2021), we have not determined if WPS can afford this cost, or we will have to turn to philanthropic or other public/private grants. We have not yet built the cost for TRP into the recommended FY 22 budget.

Class of 2014 indicates that 99% of our students earned a degree within 6 years of graduating high school.

WHS is proud of the level of personalization that students receive and the care and commitment that the staff demonstrates on a daily basis towards meeting this goal. This year, in response to the global pandemic, teachers put in place a daily extended learning hour for all students. Whether they be in-person or remote, any student can connect with their teachers on an individual basis.

For the upcoming budget year, the projected WHS enrollment is 796 students, which represents a decrease of six students. Specific projected enrollment differences by grade are as follows: a decrease of five students in ninth grade, an increase of 11 students in tenth grade, a decrease of 14 students in eleventh grade, and an increase of two students in twelfth grade.

The high school staffing proposal is the result of a careful analysis of our academic program and redistribution of sections among existing and new courses and programs. Our goal continues to be the best possible academic outcomes for all students. The certified staffing request is 61.2 Full Time Equivalencies (FTE) which is a decrease in certified staffing of .8 FTE from the 2020-21 actual staffing of 62 and a 1.4 FTE decrease from the 2020-21 budget of 62.6. This .8 FTE has been reallocated to the pupil services budget in order to staff our new *Alternative Pathways* program. In addition, staffing shifts include an increase of .3 FTE for our math lab, which increases access from approximately 50 blocks of student contact time per quarter to 84 blocks. Math lab provides specific individualized support and serves as a “push in” model in the standard level courses specifically in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.

There are two new semester course electives for the 2021-22 school year. *Voices from the Edge* (English) and *The American Tapestry* (Social Studies) were designed in response to student feedback that our curricula reflect diverse perspectives, connecting history with our current global society.

The overall increase of 0.3 non-certified staffing FTE is for the library paraprofessional in the afternoon. The 2020-21 actual non-certified staffing does not reflect this FTE as this position was not needed because of the pandemic.

In summary the total high school staffing budget request for 2021-22 is 65.4, which is a reduction from the actual 2020-21 staffing of 65.9. It is critical to maintain our exemplary academic program.

One of this year’s goals is to create and sustain a more inclusive school climate that values and supports all students and does not tolerate discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other perceived differences. There is a new social justice advocacy group, composed of students and teachers, that support this initiative. Teachers have integrated new

English texts and professional development has focused on this goal. As noted above, we are implementing two new courses, which require no additional staffing. *The American Tapestry*, a social studies offering, will focus on contemporary issues unique to African Americans, Black Americans, Latino American, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Students will analyze American identities through multiple perspectives drawn from history, geography, sociology, psychology, art, music and literature. *Voices from the Edge*, a new English elective, will encourage students to explore and study diverse voices while honing, discovering, and emboldening, their own. In addition, there is a request for additional funding to purchase new English texts written by diverse authors for existing grade level courses.

In summary, our budget proposal will ensure that our students will continue to develop the academic, social and emotional abilities and skills to succeed after graduation, especially as they pursue higher education and careers.

WHS -- Athletics

The Weston High School Interscholastic Athletics Program is an integral part of the school's total educational program. Interscholastic competition provides students with the opportunity to grow physically, mentally and emotionally as individuals; but also as members of their school and community. Recent analysis in the education media speaks to the importance of school athletics:

“The study finds that the brains of fit, young athletes dial down extraneous noise and attend to important sounds better than those of other young people suggesting that playing sports may change brains in ways that alter how well people sense and respond to the world around them.” (*The Quiet Brain of the Athlete*, The New York Times, December 19, 2019)

The Weston High School athletic budget has been developed to support a diversified interscholastic program of 65 teams. Students have the option of participating on 32 varsity, 27 junior varsity and 4 freshmen teams along with three seasons of Unified Sports. The program has strong community support and has annually received statewide recognition for overall program excellence. Twice in seven years we earned the Overall State Award as the Weston High School Athletic Department was named the “Most Exemplary, Outstanding Athletic Department in the state of CT” by the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC). (The CIAC has now done away with this overall award.) The Weston High School athletic program offers a wide variety of team and individual sports to support student skills and interests. This philosophy has led to a high degree of student participation with approximately 70% of our students participating in at least one sport last school year. It is anticipated that 910 student-athletes will participate in the program next year.

In building the proposed budget, every effort has been made to deliver the same level of excellence to the student/athletes while also keeping the cost of our athletic program down. The athletic program budget is significantly enhanced by funding from sources outside the Board of Education budget, including the use of gate receipts (approximately \$14,500 annually), Weston Boosters Club (approximately \$30,000 annually), the Gridiron Club (approximately \$10,000 annually), and the Diamond Club (approximately \$5,000). In addition, Weston levies a user fee for athletes. The proposed budget has been developed using the assumption that the participation fee will remain \$100 per athlete per season with a \$400 family cap. Twenty percent of the participation fee does not directly assist the Athletic Budget (\$10 to Turf Replacement and \$10 to Athletic Facilities).

A total of 75 coaching positions are necessary to operate the 65 teams, we have been gradually adding assistant varsity coaching positions for the past eight years. We had intended to include new coaches in this year's proposed budget as we turn our attention to some of our non-contact varsity sports as these coaches are necessary to continue to provide a safe, educationally sound environment for all of our student-athletes. As noted in Table 2 above, we were considering an Assistant Coach Boys & Girls Golf, a Head Coach for Esport and an Assistant Coach Boys & Girls Cross Country. However, due to fiscal constraints, we put these additional position on hold until a future year,

Weston Middle School

Weston Middle School is committed to the goal of providing students with an exemplary middle level education. Our dedicated teachers are critical resources in helping our students develop the essential capacities and content knowledge to achieve at high levels. This budget supports our middle school teaming model, which groups the same students with an interdisciplinary team of teachers. The teaming model plays a key role in helping students make the transition from elementary school to high school, by allowing a group of teachers to know their students well and plan learning experiences to meet their needs. Our faculty and staff believe that these middle school years are key to the academic growth and social-emotional development of our students and they strive to nurture that growth throughout the school day and through a rich variety of co-curricular programs. We constantly evaluate our co-curricular programs to assure that we continue to meet the needs and interests of our students. Our Wingman program was placed in abeyance this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. We look forward to bringing the program back and have budgeted funds for required training that is part of the program.

The proposed budget supports our district initiatives and aligns with our mission and commitment to meet the unique needs of our adolescent learners. We have a projected enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year of 546 students, which is 12 less students than our current enrollment. The staffing proposal reflects a decrease in the number of sections in seventh grade from nine sections to eight, based on enrollment projections. In addition, we are proposing

an additional efficiency, replacing math lab with math intervention services provided by our math intervention specialist. We are continuing all other academic supports in the areas of reading, writing and study skills.

Our academic programs strive to empower students to become successful through dynamic, personalized, authentic learning experiences and the use of data to make informed decisions. This budget will allow us to maintain our strong core academic program as well as our practical and fine arts programs, which include general music, band, chorus, orchestra, art, physical education, health and wellness, technology and engineering, and world language. We are proposing an increase in classroom materials. Some of this increase is to cover the cost of additional supplies for the art curriculum made necessary by the increase in art instruction in seventh and eighth grade that was implemented this year. We are fortunate to benefit from the generous philanthropy of our Middle School PTO which has been very supportive of teacher initiatives to enhance our students' learning experiences. Each line item in the pages that follow has once again been carefully reviewed to produce a responsible budget that continues to move the school forward in its mission to provide an exemplary middle school experience for the Weston community.

Weston Intermediate School

Weston Intermediate School takes pride in fostering a caring, responsive community of learners that encourages an appreciation of individual differences and each student's developing abilities. We strive to build the essence of community each day in every classroom. Learning experiences are created that challenge each student to pursue personal excellence in all aspects of their lives. We focus on enhancing students' ability to think critically and creatively, and to be innovative problem solvers and proficient communicators; helping our students speak and write effectively and clearly across all subject areas.

The FY 22 Operating Budget proposal supports our highest priority needs. This year we will continue to implement the curriculum renewal process for math. Last year a curriculum upgrade of the *Math in Focus* program was begun in grade 5. This year we will continue this work in grades 3 and 4. The majority of these costs will come under the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum's budget and can be found in the Curriculum and Instructional Improvement section of the district budget. Reading and literacy will continue to remain a focus as we look to continue our partnership with Teacher's College and extend our teaching of phonics and spelling with additional resources and professional development.

We also will continue to support the implementation of a social-emotional curriculum through our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, as well as the continuation of the school and district initiatives on Emotional Learning and the RULER Approach, and DBT strategies. This budget also supports our continued implementation of a revised reading

curriculum that directly aligns with our current writing curriculum, the ongoing implementation of the newly revised curriculum for science, and the increased utilization of student data to provide individualized instruction. We also will continue to focus on embedding essential skills such as critical and creative thinking, innovative problem solving, and effective communication within and across the curriculum, to provide our students with the foundational thinking and skills to become global citizens.

The FY 22 Operating Budget proposal supports the staffing needed to provide intervention services to meet the varied needs of our learners in literacy and mathematics. As students continue to develop their conceptual understanding of mathematical concepts, it is imperative that they have a strong foundation and the confidence to be mathematically proficient. The proposed staffing will allow us to continue to provide differentiated support to students, and enable us to provide teachers with professional development within their classroom setting. Professional development is an essential investment to strengthen teachers' abilities to meet the needs of the individual students in their classrooms.

Advanced literacy training in readers and writers workshop for all grade-level and special education teachers will continue as well. This is especially important during the developmental phase when our students are growing as readers and moving from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". In addition, in order to prepare our students for the more advanced reading in all content areas that they will encounter, it is essential that we provide them with the foundational skills and strategies for them to become competent and confident readers and thinkers. Administrators, Curriculum Instructional Leaders, and certified reading teachers will provide classroom teachers and support staff with focused and ongoing training and feedback to support professional growth for improved student learning.

Through a continuous renewal process, we work to align our curriculum with the Connecticut Core Standards and national guidelines. Our teachers differentiate instruction in the classroom, thereby addressing the strengths and struggles of each individual student. Ultimately, our goal is to challenge our students with a curriculum experience that is rigorous, relevant, and personalized. We achieve this through the implementation of a workshop approach to instruction in all subjects, the creation of common assessments across subjects and grade levels, ongoing professional development for teachers that is both immersive and job embedded, and a comprehensive unified arts and technology program. Our mission is to build a foundation for success by providing a balanced learning environment, which supports problem solving, creativity, communication and independent thinking.

The overall projected enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year is expected to be 486 students. In third grade, enrollment is projected to be 150 students, a slight increase from this year's enrollment of 145 students. Organized into seven sections, this will result in an

average class size of 21.4 students. The fourth grade is projected to have an enrollment of 155 students, a decrease of 21 students. To adjust to the proposed decrease, the number of sections will be reduced to 7 sections from 8, which will result in an average class size of 22.1 students. Enrollment in the fifth grade is projected to be 181, an increase of 9 students, which organized into eight sections will result in an average class size of 22.6. The number of sections proposed for each grade will allow us to meet the district class size guidelines.

In conclusion, Weston Intermediate School is committed to the pursuit of character, knowledge, creativity and a dynamic learning environment that challenges each student to continually pursue personal excellence. By placing students at the center of our work, we can meet this commitment in the coming year.

Hurlbutt Elementary School

Weston students begin their journey of learning at Hurlbutt Elementary School. Hurlbutt's teachers and support staff are committed to working together to create a safe and caring environment that supports student achievement and success. Hurlbutt this year is home to 419 students in the Early Learning Center, kindergarten, first and second grades (October 1, 2020 enrollment data). For the 2020-21 school year, Hurlbutt's prek-2 enrollment is projected at 448 students.

Staffing: With a projected enrollment of 127 students, kindergarten will have seven sections with an average class size of 18.1. The projected first grade of 145 students will be organized in eight sections with an average class size of 18.1. Second grade, with a projected 152 students, will have seven sections with an average class size of 21.7. Overall, the total number of teaching sections school wide (21) from last year will increase by one, creating twenty-two grade level classes in kindergarten, first and second grade.

Teaching and Learning: Our intervention support program will continue to include a 0.6 FTE math teacher and 2.0 reading teachers. Educational research continues to emphasize early intervention and its positive long term effect on reading and math achievement.

With the continued need for seven sections of kindergarten, our paraeducator support for the kindergarten classes will remain the same. Kindergarten para educators support the classrooms for approximately 90 minutes per day in the classroom. This support is necessary to ensure adequate safety and supervision for our young students. Kindergarten begins the formal school experience for our learners and the adult support during this important transition is needed. The four kindergarten paraeducator will provide academic support to our kindergarten classes during reading, writing or math as well as lunch and recess supervision. It should be noted that while the

paraeducators are listed as four people, the kindergarten paraeducators are part time and are 0.75 FTE.

Our book and material budget is driven by replacement needs for our classroom libraries as well as guided reading materials and books to support our science and social studies curriculum. In the primary grades as children are learning how to read, they typically read 10-20 books per week through independent reading, guided reading with the teacher, practice at home and partner reading. Books are rotated through the classroom routines constantly all year long, and as a result our books are well used and over time require replacement and refurbishment. We require rich libraries of both fiction as well as non-fiction materials to support our curriculum and to develop lifelong readers. Over the past few years, our book budget and materials have been reduced. We continue to build our non-fiction book choices in the classroom which supports our science and social studies curriculum. We are also committed to providing books and resources that reflect a variety of cultures and races. The library budget and book budgets support our goal to continue to enhance our collections with a variety of texts. There are now more books available with characters from diverse backgrounds and cultures. In order to ensure inclusivity and better reflect the world we live in, we need to continue to grow and expand our collections. Our materials lines also fund the math materials and workbooks for all kindergarten, first and second grade students.

Learning Resource Center (LRC): Technology is embedded in learning activities in purposeful, supportive ways, providing students with multiple learning opportunities and pathways to success. The LRC budget supports classroom instruction by continuing to provide a high quality circulating collection and a wide range of resources to our students. The requested amount reflects one shelf-ready book per student for our preschool through grade two students and supports growing our collection of resources supporting diversity, equity and inclusion.

As part of the Weston Public School community – and through the combined efforts of administration, staff and parents - Hurlbutt is committed to creating a learning environment where every child can pursue and achieve personal excellence.

Pupil Personnel Services and Special Education

The FY 22 special education budget is designed specifically to promote consistency. The goal is to deepen and solidify practices established through investments made in prior school years and continue to strengthen our ability to meet the individual needs of students. This budget maintains key staffing and personnel who are needed to ensure that the procedural aspects of our special education programming are adhered to and students receive the services outlined and agreed to in their individual plans.

It is important to note that the FY 22 budget is being developed within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This public health crisis has posed a series of unique challenges for implementing individual student plans within the various schooling scenarios. We have worked in collaboration with families to ensure that we are providing students with the support and services they need in order to access their education. Even with these efforts, we are beginning to see the impact of these challenges manifest themselves in a number of ways that might have both legal and fiscal implications for the district. While a reduction to the contingency is being proposed, it is being proposed very cautiously given our current circumstances and the evolution that is occurring from a legal standpoint in districts around the country.

One significant change in this year's budget proposal is the shift from ESS, a program that supports students with complex social, emotional and behavioral needs, to an in-district program. A high school team composed of building leaders, department chairs and PPS staff have come together to generate a plan that further embeds the program within the fabric of the high school and incorporates the talents of Weston High School staff to meet the needs of the students. The program maintains the level of social, emotional and behavioral support that is needed for these students and strengthens and expands the academic learning opportunities at a budget savings to the district.

We are mindful that now is not the time to be adding additional staff and services to the proposed budget. In the future, however, it will be important for us to shift attention to transition programming at the middle and high school levels. There are opportunities to enhance the work that is being accomplished in this area to benefit students as they prepare to transition from high school to post-secondary education, employment or long-term support.

Digital Learning & Technology

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have become keenly aware of the increased use and dependence on digital learning and technology to deliver quality instruction and provide immersive learning experiences for students. This has caused a massive paradigm shift in the thought process of where technology fits in the world of education. In order to properly capitalize on this paradigm shift, we as a district have to focus on providing the proper tools and resources for educators and students.

The goal of the 2021-2022 technology budget is to plan for long term sustainability and reliability. Included in this budget request is a six-year technology hardware replacement plan; this is our roadmap to ensure that district hardware, whether front-end or back-end hardware, is replaced at end of life instead of well beyond its end of life. This will maximize uptime and will ensure the district will be able to keep up with the ever-changing world of technology.

Over the course of the last several months, it has become apparent that aging technology was the single most frustrating experience concerning instruction. Staff laptops are 7-10 years old, and

have become increasingly unreliable in their usability. Unfortunately, due to their age, these laptops cannot be replaced in batches; all staff laptops are at the point of needing replacement. Due to the virtual nature of this school year, a non-functioning teacher laptop meant a loss of instructional time for an entire class or multiple classes of students. Teachers were provided a “teacher toolkit” for this year - consisting of an iPad, a document camera, and a Zoom license. However, the teacher toolkit is rendered useless if their laptop is not functioning. As such, the district will be requesting to purchase a total of 275 Windows-based laptops for the 2021-2022 school year.

In addition to the laptop request, the district will begin replacement of the oldest Smartboards in the district by replacing 10 during the 2021-2022 school year. Smartboards can be replaced in batches - the oldest ones in the district are becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to repair. We will continue to replace all Smartboards in the district over the next five years.

The district also saw a major increase in the utilization of software and subscriptions. Nine subscriptions were purchased in direct response to the pandemic; some of these products we will be discontinuing for the 2021-2022 school year, such as Zoom. Other software has had such a profoundly positive impact on instruction that there has been an overwhelming request to continue use. We have scrutinized all of the software listed to ensure that it is being used effectively. We were able to reduce infrastructure and management licensing costs to keep the software budget relatively flat, while at the same time minimizing the negative impact on curriculum and instruction.

Capital Budget Recommendations

The Opening Narrative has focused on the FY 22 Operating Budget. The Board of Education also will be reviewing and voting on the Recommended FY 22 Capital Budget, which totals \$897,560. The FY 22 recommendations are listed at the end of the Budget Book, accompanied by projected capital needs for FY 2023 and FY 2024. The Recommended FY 22 Capital Budget is organized by location. Nine projects are prioritized for FY 22, with an additional 10 projects listed for FY 23 and FY 24. In past years, an estimated “three-year look” has helped the Board of Education, Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance make decisions about the immediate capital request.

Pending analysis and recommendations from the Town of Weston Facility Feasibility Committee on optimization of Weston Public Schools campus and facilities will be essential to Capital Budgets for FY 23 and FY 24. The work of the Facility Feasibility Committee will not be completed until later in FY 22. Nevertheless, anticipating that the Facility Feasibility Committee will have major recommendations relative to Weston Middle School, we have not included any projects for the Middle School in the Capital Budget. The priority projects that would be included are listed in the notes section of the budget spreadsheet.