# FY2028 School Committee Budget Guidelines

The FY2028 budget should provide the resources necessary to maintain strong educational programs and services, respond thoughtfully to changes in student needs and enrollment, and advance the District's strategic priorities in a fiscally responsible manner.

## 1. Establish a Clear Level-Service Budget

The administration should begin by developing a transparent level-service budget that identifies the cost of maintaining programs, services, staffing, and operations previously approved by the School Committee.

The level-service budget should be based on documented assumptions, including:

- enrollment and student needs;
- staffing levels and contractual obligations;
- special education requirements;
- transportation needs;
- facilities and operating costs;
- technology requirements;
- statutory and regulatory obligations; and
- other known or reasonably anticipated cost drivers.

The budget presentation should explain any material changes in assumptions from the prior year and the resulting effect on the level-service budget.

## 2. Distinguish the Base Budget from Proposed Changes

The budget should clearly distinguish the level-service base from proposals to add, expand, reduce, eliminate, or redesign programs, services, staffing, or operations.

Where a proposal is characterized as level service but reflects a material change in staffing, programming, service delivery, or cost, the administration should explain why the change is necessary to maintain the existing level or quality of service.

New or expanded initiatives should not be embedded within the level-service base in a manner that makes their cost or purpose difficult to identify.

### 3. Address Enrollment and Student-Need Changes

The budget should identify anticipated enrollment changes at the District, school, grade, and program levels and explain their implications for staffing and class size; instructional programs and student support; special education and related services; facilities and classroom use; transportation; and other operational needs.

Enrollment projections should be accompanied by a clear explanation of the methodology, assumptions, and uncertainties involved.

### 4. Align Proposed Investments with District Priorities

Requests beyond level service should identify:

- the strategic-plan objective or District priority advanced by the request;
- the demonstrated educational or operational need;
- the students, staff, schools, or programs expected to benefit;
- the anticipated outcomes;
- the District's capacity to implement the proposal successfully;
- one-time and recurring costs;
- staffing, facilities, technology, or other implementation requirements; and
- the measures that will be used to evaluate effectiveness.

The budget should focus resources on initiatives that address an identified need and can reasonably be implemented and sustained.

### 5. Present Alternatives and Tradeoffs

When material choices are available, the administration should present reasonable alternatives and explain the consequences of each.

The School Committee should be able to understand not only what is recommended, but also what alternatives were considered and why the recommended approach was selected.

### 6. Identify Cost Drivers, Risks, and Uncertainties Early

The administration should identify major cost drivers and areas of budget uncertainty as early as practical in the process. The administration should also update the Committee promptly when a material assumption, estimate, risk, or Town fiscal parameter changes.

Where appropriate, the budget should identify contingency planning or possible responses if an uncertain cost differs materially from the amount budgeted.

### 7. Review Existing Resources and Opportunities for Efficiency

The administration should review existing staffing, programs, services, contracts, and operating practices to determine whether resources remain aligned with current student needs and District priorities.

The budget process should consider reasonable opportunities to redirect resources from lower-priority or underutilized activities; improve operational efficiency; consolidate or redesign services; use technology appropriately; collaborate with other Town departments; obtain grants, reimbursements, fees, or other revenue; and reduce costs without materially diminishing educational quality or necessary student support.

### 8. Maintain Educational Quality and Fiscal Responsibility

Throughout the budget process, the administration should seek to maintain the quality of Weston's educational programs and the supports necessary to meet the needs of all students.

At the same time, recommendations should reflect careful stewardship of public resources and consideration of the Town's broader financial obligations and the tax impact of budget decisions.

Fiscal responsibility should not be understood solely as limiting year-to-year growth. It also requires the District to:

- identify needs accurately;
- plan for foreseeable costs;
- use resources effectively;
- evaluate whether programs and investments are producing the intended results;
- avoid unsustainable commitments; and
- explain clearly the consequences of both funding and not funding significant needs.

The final recommended budget should allow the School Committee and the community to understand what is required to maintain current services, what changes are proposed, why they are recommended, and what educational and financial choices are involved.

### 9. Coordinate with the Town's Fiscal Process

The School Committee, Superintendent and administration should coordinate with the Town Manager, Finance Committee, and other appropriate Town officials regarding fiscal assumptions, revenue projections, capital planning, and the overall financial context in which the school budget will be considered.

Coordination with the Town should inform the School Committee's deliberations without replacing the Committee's independent responsibility to determine the educational resources needed by the District.