

FAQ Article 16: School Network Switching Equipment, Phase II

What is the reason for and the amount of the request in Warrant Article 16?

We are asking for \$300,000 to replace old, unreliable and failing computer network switching equipment in the Weston Public Schools. The first phase of this upgrade was funded as a result of the December Town Meeting Warrant Article and focused on the High School and the Town Hall core network equipment. This next step, Phase II, will continue this work in the Middle School and begin work in the elementary schools.

Why do the schools need this new equipment?

The Weston Public Schools, like most organizations, is dependent on information systems. We rely on electronic communications, database record systems, central file sharing, attendance systems, grading systems, point of sale systems, accounting and payroll systems, and many other management systems to run the business of schooling. Perhaps even more importantly, our teachers and students are engaged in instructional activities that rely on computer systems, Internet access, wireless computer network access, interactive whiteboards, various software products, and many other information technology resources. Our current computer network infrastructure cannot handle these basic needs, seriously impedes progress in meeting the goals outlined in the district Long Range Plan, and fails—in portion or in whole—much too often. This project will upgrade and replace this equipment in a systematic manner.

What is the result for students in the Weston Public Schools?

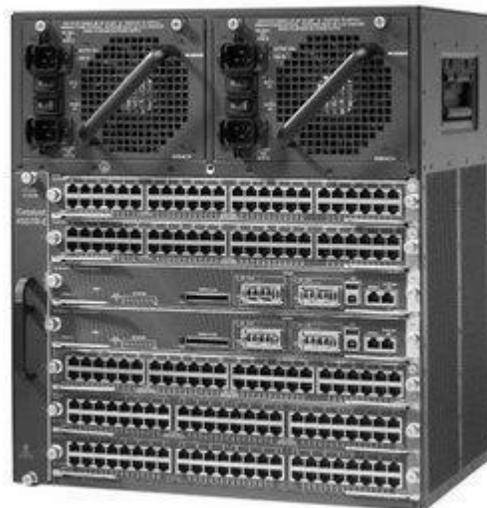
This project will create a stable network for students and staff. This will increase instructional time and opportunity by eliminating the all too common failure of devices to connect to the network. This will allow teachers to lesson plan with confidence and be able to

rely on electronic communication protocol. The technology staff will also be able to more effectively and efficiently manage the district system, e.g. by imaging and managing computers remotely.

Additionally, we will now have the capability to provide safe and secure Internet access to devices not owned and maintained by the school department. This will allow students and guests to bring in laptop or WiFi devices and connect for functionality and access to Internet resources.

How many phases and what is the total cost?

This is a three phase project with a total cost of \$950,000. Phase I was funded to 300k last fall, in phase II we are asking for 300k, and we are projecting phase III to be 350k, which will be a request made at the fall Town Meeting. Some variables will be adjusted as the project continues.



Does Phase II continue the collaboration with the Town, given that the request is for upgrading school technology?

Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology for both the Schools and Town of Weston, is looking to consolidate School and Town network services to leverage the most efficient and cost effective means to run the department. Overall, the Town's networking equipment is in much better shape and does not need dire and immediate replacement. Dr. McCanne will be working to ensure continuity of equipment, redundancy of critical services, and this project is an important step in that direction. One of our goals is a centralized wireless system; the Phase I work toward this end also benefits the municipal operations.

Will this enable my student to bring a laptop to school?

This project will enable us to create an "open" wireless network that students and guests can use to access the Internet and school resources from within the schools. Although one of our goals is to enable students to access the resources they need anywhere, anytime, it is currently an unacceptable risk to allow unknown devices to connect to our network because we cannot control their virus protection and security patch levels. The "open" access wireless network will still be content filtered, firewalled, and monitored for security threats, but will enable students to be productive during

down time at school. In fact, this wireless could be extended to athletic fields, the Town Pool, and the Town Green in the last phase of the project, if this is desirable by the residents.

How does this relate to other future technology needs and projects?

Another industry shift is underway that we are monitoring—and in fact counting on. Computing power is beginning to return to the core infrastructure and away from the user endpoint device. Cheaper and less capable laptop and desktop devices will be available as the network and backend server infrastructure assumes a bigger role in the system. This trend, often referred to as Cloud Computing, also enables better management and more flexibility for anywhere, anytime, access to resources. This shift may allow a longer lifecycle for certain types of equipment where the core infrastructure provides most of the computing power. These trends underscore the need for a more robust and stable core infrastructure.

We are currently in the process of piloting a cloud computing project utilizing an enterprise education account from Google. This type of project can have great impact and benefit to our school system, but is only possible if we have a reliable and manageable wireless system. This infrastructure project is a critical step to enable us to move forward with some powerful and exciting tools for our students and staff.

