

Westford Academy English Department
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To the Members of the School Committee:

We reach out to you today regarding the Superintendent's proposed budget for the 2022-23 school year. In particular, we are expressing our concern over his proposal to cut staffing in the Westford Academy English department by 1.6 FTE.

School Leadership has presented to you what these cuts will save; we would like to ask you to consider what these cuts will cost.

The faculty in our department represents 288 collective years of teaching experience. Our department's most junior member has been teaching for 10 years. We have arrived at this point through different paths: some of us began our professional careers as teachers; some of us came to this work after time spent in publishing, marketing, broadcasting, editing, corporate, and the law. What unites us now is not only our passion for teaching English, but also our passion for teaching English at Westford Academy. We care deeply about our students and this community, and we serve as Class Advisors to the classes of 2022 and 2024, we coach basketball, volleyball, and lacrosse, we advise *The Ghostwriter*, the Human Rights Club, the Anti-Defamation League, the Book Club, the Film Club, and the Shakespeare Club, and we serve on the school-wide DEI Committee. We are here to support our students - your students - in their current endeavors and with our combined wisdom gained through professional life experience.

We teach our students to think critically, write clearly, and communicate effectively. Anecdotally, our alumni have repeatedly reported themselves to be among the strongest writers, if not *the* strongest writer, within their peer group at college. Statistically, we have guided our students to consistently high performances on standardized testing. In 2019, the state of Massachusetts identified 67 schools, encompassing elementary, middle, and high schools, as schools recognized for strong MCAS achievement. Westford Academy was one of those schools. Our 10th grade ELA MCAS scores that year reflected 84% of students either exceeding or meeting expectations,

as compared to the state average of 61%; within that, 31% exceeded expectations, as compared to the state average of 13%. That same year, 98.5% of our AP Literature test takers scored a 3 or higher, with 40% of those scoring a 5 on the exam, as compared to the state average of 62.6% scoring a 3 or higher, and only 10% scoring a 5 on the exam. Through differentiation and modification we support a growing number of students on IEPs and 504s. We prepare our students for success in many different academic arenas.

The Superintendent maintains that we can still provide our courses by absorbing increased class sizes reflecting a 25:1 student to teacher ratio. Yes, we can still provide all of the required English courses with increased class sizes, and we will never waver in our commitment to providing quality instruction and meaningful assignments to our students. However, at those increased ratios, in conjunction with the new Westford Academy schedule that decreases our amount of prep time, what we cannot provide is the consistent practice of writing and the detailed timely feedback at the same rates that we have maintained thus far. While a 25:1 student to teacher ratio might not sound like much per class, in aggregate, that is a student to teacher ratio of 125:1. The National Council of Teachers of English maintains an official position that secondary teachers of English should have a student to teacher ratio of 100:1 for improved academic performance and student engagement. Preserving the former matters, but the latter is not unimportant. English class is where students talk about their feelings. They reflect, they share, they journal, and we read, we listen, we encourage. English teachers are often frontline academic ambassadors when it comes to recognizing and supporting our students' social and emotional needs and concerns. More students means less time for personal attention. Less time for personal attention worries us, especially after the educational and emotional disruptions caused by the pandemic.

The Superintendent intends to uphold a ratio of 22:1 across our middle school classes, which, given that middle school teachers teach 4 sections instead of high school's 5, aligns with NCTE's recommendation. For a variety of reasons, not all Westford Academy academic departments maintain the 25:1 student to teacher ratio. We believe that asking the English department to hew to that number would be a mistake. The Superintendent acknowledges that numbers will increase for a while before they stabilize, and so while we recognize the likely unavoidability of a reduction in faculty within our department - a department that lost a .6 FTE just 2 years ago - we ask you to reconsider the prudence of such a drastic reduction at this time.

Respectfully,

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