

Weston Public Schools
K-5 Instructional Programs & Services
Draft - March 12, 2019

Background

This is the second of two reports prepared for the WPS Curriculum Committee as part of a comprehensive overview of our K-8 instructional programs and services.

Report #1: Weston Middle School

At the February 20, 2019 meeting, the administration presented proposed changes to the WMS teaming approach in order to improve teaming, enhance the delivery of intervention services and to expand enrichment opportunities. The key changes to the organizational structure include the reduction from nine (9) to eight (8) grade level sections and having teachers on each team deliver the intervention/enrichment services to their own students. The new approach would also provide an opportunity to service students in the WMS Project Challenge program with a different model, thus reducing overall staffing by .70 FTE, an amount equivalent to the staffing of the Project Challenge program.

Further, the report highlighted key enrollment data that would be a determining factor for when the District could implement the proposed model. The optimum class size would need to range from 160 to 192 students to maintain class sizes within the current guidelines. Unfortunately, the projected enrollment for the incoming eighth grade class is just over 200 students, and with eight sections, our preliminary analysis shows that many class sizes would be at 27 due to leveling in math and student choice in world language. This would be an untenable situation for our students and teachers.

Therefore, the administration is recommending that the proposed model for WMS be considered for implementation no earlier than the 2020-21 school year. This will also allow time to provide the necessary staff training, curriculum development and professional learning for a major shift in how we do business at WMS. It will also give us the time to effectively communicate changes with the community.

However, this projected implementation date does not preclude the District from restructuring the WMS Project Challenge program for 2019-2020 in anticipation of these future changes to the middle school model. The administration has been exploring alternatives to the current model in order to support the unique, and sometimes complex, needs of talented and gifted students. Report #2 includes the strategies we would employ to support talented and gifted students if the Project Challenge program, as currently structured, were to be eliminated due to the budget constraints.

Report #2: Hurlbutt Elementary and Weston Intermediate Schools

The following companion report is focused on our K-5 programs and services. It provides:

1. a summary of the instructional approaches in order to provide a holistic understanding of the core K-5 subjects and special area programs;
2. a summary of the K-5 staffing model;
3. the amount of time allocated to each subject area; and,

4. a listing of potential areas of reduction along with alternative strategies for addressing those elements of the K-5 program.

In our K-5 schools, we have a wonderfully comprehensive and engaging academic program focused on establishing a strong foundation in literacy, math, science, wellness and the arts. The program is personalized to the needs of each student and the instructional approaches are based on current research in education.

Current class sizes enable us to be attentive the needs of all of our students. They enable us to effectively differentiate instruction and provide all students with regular feedback, both verbal and written, to guide their progress. Further, our teachers are able to respond swiftly to individual student needs to provide extra support or enrichment.

However, due to the current budget situation it is important to review our educational delivery model to explore how the District might re-imagine its educational programs, while still achieving our educational outcomes. To this end, the last section of this report describes how the District could modify the following programs for the 2019-20 school year to achieve some savings to the operating budget:

1. WIS Project Challenge Program
2. WIS math enrichment
3. HES and WIS computer instruction
4. HES Spanish program
5. K-5 Class Size

Changes to each of these programs will have implications for several personnel and the administration is sensitive to this fact. Consequently, we have spoken with the teachers potentially impacted ahead of the March 12 Curriculum Committee meeting.

The administration is prepared to discuss any questions the Committee may have around K-5 class sizes. As the Board recalls, two items on the Potential FY20 Budget Reduction List presented to the Board on January 22, 2019 included increases to K-5 class size. Item number one identified increasing K-1 guidelines from 18-20 to 18-22 students. Similarly, item number four suggested increasing class size guidelines in grades 2-5 from 20-24 to 20-25.

While special education and pupil services are critical elements of a comprehensive elementary program, these areas were not included as part of this report.

Core Academic Programs

The following section highlights our instructional approaches for our core K-5 subject areas:

Reading: Grades K-2: Our students learn a multitude of reading strategies during reading workshop that ensure that they become proficient at reading increasingly difficult fiction and nonfiction text. Students receive explicit instruction that support their reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and oral language development. Ensuring that students develop and increase their reading stamina is a vital part of our instructional time together. Individual conferences and small group strategy work is an integral part of our daily instruction. Choice in independent reading material and time to

independently read each day help to foster a lifelong love of reading and solidifies the skills we teach on daily basis.

Grades 3-5: Across all grades at WIS, students build both their volume and stamina as readers during reading workshop. In each grade, students engage in three fiction units of study and three nonfiction units of study, where students receive direct and differentiated small group instruction on how to analyze increasingly longer and more complex texts. In addition, writing about reading becomes a stronger focus each year as a platform to grow deeper thinking about text.

Phonics: Grades K-2: Our Foundations word work and spelling program provides explicit, daily instruction in encoding and decoding skills. This multimodality approach to learning ensures that all students have the instruction, practice, and skills necessary to support both ongoing reading, and writing development. Explicit instruction in phonics and spelling are important components of a comprehensive literacy program.

Writing: Grades K-2: Our students live writerly lives at Hurlbutt Elementary School. In writing workshop, students continually move through all stages of the writing process as they write narrative, informational text, and opinion pieces of writing. Students receive explicit instruction in writing that support the structure, elaboration, craft, and conventions of language. Ensuring that students develop both volume and stamina when writing is a critical part of our instructional time together. Young children have a lot to say. Our writing curriculum allows students to explore, discover their voice, and express themselves. Teachers support their development through individual conferences and strategy groups. These approaches provide individual and timely feedback to advance the learning.

Grades 3-5: Each year at WIS, writers engage in the writing process daily and throughout the year in three different genres: narrative, informational, and opinion/argument. Writers work to develop structure, elaboration, and craft in several pieces of writing while receiving feedback from both peers and teachers related to standards-based rubrics and checklists. Whenever possible, writers consider how a real-world audience might benefit from their voice.

Social Studies: Grades K-2: Through an inquiry approach to learning, our students explore age appropriate topics within civics, history, geography, and economics. The exploration and discovery that guide our instruction reveal to our students the importance of understanding our past and how it continues to impact our lives today. Our students discover the value of being both civically minded and engaged. Students develop an understanding of our world through a geographic lens and begin to explore how economics impact our lives.

Grades 3-5: Social Studies at WIS incorporates learning of current and historical topics related to Weston, Connecticut, and the United States. Students engage in inquiry to study government and citizenship in third grade before travelling back in time in grades 4 and 5 to understand events and topics of historical significance such as Native American life, European settlement, colonization, and the American Revolution.

Math: Our K-5 instructional approach in mathematics emphasizes the development of conceptual understanding prior to the teaching of procedures. This is based on the Singapore model. Teachers introduce new concepts using hands-on materials and guide students through problem solving

situations moving them toward abstract thinking. Consequently, students have a deep understanding of the mathematics involved rather than simply following a procedure. This progression is called the concrete - pictorial – abstract approach. Teachers use pre-assessment and formative assessment to build small groups for instruction, re-teaching, and extension. This allows them to meet the needs of individual students and know where they are on the learning progression.

Science: Our science classes, which have always been characterized by hands-on student inquiry, are becoming even more authentic with scientific practice. The Next Generation Science Standards are based around three-dimensional learning and are made up of three distinct but equally important components: Disciplinary Core Ideas (DCI), Cross Cutting Concepts, and Science & Engineering Practices (SEP). Teachers present students with an anchoring phenomena representative of the content (DCI) the students will begin to study. Throughout the units, students learn the content by engaging in the practices of a scientist or engineer. This means rather than just “learning about” science, students are actively engaged in “figuring out” how and why things happen. Throughout this process, teachers help them make connections to the Cross Cutting Concepts that can be seen from kindergarten through post-secondary science. These include such things as cause and effect, systems, and identifying patterns.

Specials

This section highlights our instructional approaches for our K-5 special area subjects.

Art: The visual arts program enables students to express and develop creativity, originality, and problem solving skills essential to their educational experience in a safe, supportive environment. Students learn how to utilize various art materials, mediums, genres, and techniques to challenge and encourage their expressive ideas.

Computers: Grades K-2: At HES, students have a weekly 30-minute computer class facilitated by the computer teacher. Students are taught basic computer skills in the HES computer lab.

Grades 3-5: WIS Students are using technology everyday to bolster their learning across all content areas. Currently, most of the computer instruction is delivered by the classroom teacher as part of their curriculum. In 2019-20, each grade level has a computer class once a week for 30 minutes for one trimester with the WIS computer teacher. The purpose of piloting this trimester class was to provide consistent direct instruction across each grade and accelerate skill development.

To support their learning in language arts, WIS students regularly use their Chromebooks to access online books, databases, and other reliable sources of information. Students communicate their ideas and learning with a variety of online tools including Google Docs, Google Slides, Flipgrid, and iMovie. Math and science curriculum is enhanced by Amplify.com, Dreambox.com and Xtramath, all accessible from student Chromebooks. Students also use online applications to develop, design and use critical thinking skills with programs such as Scratch and Tinkercad.

Health: The K-5 health curriculum is designed for students to be able to explore core concepts that are the foundation of healthy, balanced living and apply that knowledge to their own lives. Students engage in conversations to analyze internal and external influences, improve communication, advocacy, and goal setting.

Physical Education: The physical education curriculum is designed for students to be able to explore core concepts (space, balance, movement, fitness, perceptual motor, and community building) that are the foundation of a physically active lifestyle. Such exploration and application requires a learning environment where students feel comfortable to physically engage in activities that promote skill development, physical fitness, self-advocacy, and the ability to appropriately interact with others.

Music: The music curriculum is directly aligned with the National Core Arts Standards for music education. Weston provides a comprehensive, standards-based music education designed to enhance each child's musical aptitude and achievement in music. The artistic processes of creating, performing, responding, and connecting are emphasized.

In grades four, students may additionally enroll in our orchestra program. They receive periodic lessons in small groups and mid-year they come together to practice as an ensemble. In fifth grade students may select band or orchestra, which runs in addition to their general music class.

World Language: Currently, we are in year five of a six-year plan to revamp the K-5 Spanish program. With each successive year, our elementary Spanish teachers have built and implemented a new grade level curriculum. The 2019-20 school year marks the final year of development with the implementation of a new fifth grade curriculum. We are currently in the process of assessing the effectiveness of the new curriculum in relation to the ACTFL language standards to determine if our early immersion program advanced our students to higher levels of competency. We will have some preliminary data in June 2019 that will serve as a baseline for comparison for future years.

Our early immersion program builds a strong foundation in the Spanish language through a highly interactive content-based curriculum. Children develop communicative and cultural competence while learning how to compare their own community with those in the Hispanic world. By fifth grade, the goal of our Spanish program is to effectively communicate ideas through the target language both orally and in writing.

Project Challenge: Talented and gifted learners have unique academic and social-emotional needs that require a flexible program of specialized instruction and services that respond to the distinct profiles of gifted learners. Currently, this program includes:

- an advanced curriculum that equips students with the skills to think critically, problem solve innovatively, collaborate effectively, and communicate with a purpose, while supporting interpersonal and intrapersonal needs;
- formal and informal opportunities to build relationships with intellectual peers;
- a continuum of services; and,
- a transparent process of programming that involves parents and the community as partners.

The primary delivery model for achieving the goals of the Project Challenge program is through the self-contained class. At WIS, this class meets for approximately three hours once a week in lieu of their general education class, while at WMS, it meets every other day for a 40-minute class periods during the grade level extended learning block.

Intervention/ Enrichment Services

The following is a short summary of our intervention and enrichment services.

K-5 Reading and Math Intervention: Our building-based math and reading data teams meet regularly to examine multiple sources of data and use that information to determine appropriate students supports. These supports include providing teachers with classroom-based strategies, push-in supports, and/or more intensive supports such small-group pull-out instruction.

3-5 Math Enrichment: At WIS, the math enrichment teacher pushes into each class every other week to facilitate math enrichment lessons connected to the current unit of study. The classroom teacher is in the classroom with the math enrichment teacher and they work together to deliver and differentiate the lesson.

Subject Time Allotment Per Day

The following table provides an approximate amount of time devoted each week to each subject area.

| Subject | Grade K | Grades 1-2 | Grades 3-5 |
|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|---|
| Reading | 45 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day |
| Writing | 45 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day |
| Phonics | 30 minutes/day | 30 minutes/day | NA |
| Mathematics | 45 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day | 60 minutes/day |
| Science | 60 minutes/week* | 120 minutes/week* | 3-4: 120 minutes/week* 5th: 60 minutes/day |
| Social Studies | 60 minutes/week* | 60 minutes/week* | 90 minutes/week* |
| Music | 60 minutes/week | 60 minutes/week | 70 minutes/week |
| Art | 45 minutes/week | 45 minutes/week | 50 minutes/week |
| World Language | 40 minutes/week | 40 minutes/week | 60 minutes/week |
| Health | 30 minutes/week | 30 minutes/week | 30 minutes/week (2 trimesters a year) |
| Physical Education | 60 minutes/week | 60 minutes/week | 80 minutes/week |
| Computer | 30 minutes/week | 30 minutes/week | 30 minutes/week (1 trimester a year) |
| Project Challenge | NA | NA | 3-hour block weekly |
| Math Enrichment | NA | NA | 60 minutes/biweekly |

*science and social studies blocks alternate in grades K-4: K-2 science 75%, social studies 25%; grade 3 science 60%, social studies 40%; grade 5 science 50%, social studies 50%

HES & WIS School Staffing

The following table provides a comprehensive listing of K-5 staff with the exception of PPS and SPED personnel.

| Line | Grade Level/Subject | FTE FY20 | Possible Reduction Area / Impact |
|---|---|--------------|--|
| 1 | Kindergarten | 7.0 | |
| 2 | Grade 1 | 6.0 | |
| 3 | Grade 2 | 6.0 | |
| 4 | K-2 Art | 0.63 | |
| 5 | K-2 Health & Physical Education | 1.26 | |
| 6 | K-2 Music | 0.85 | |
| 7 | K-2 Computer Instruction | 0.50 | (.50) Librarian would take over these classes |
| 8 | K-2 World Language | 0.58 | (.58) WL instruction would begin in grade 3 |
| 9 | K-2 Math Specialist | 0.60 | |
| 10 | K-2 Reading Specialist | 2.0 | |
| 11 | K-2 Library Media Specialist | 1.0 | |
| 12 | HES Library Paraprofessional | 1.0 | |
| 13 | Kindergarten Paraprofessional | 2.63 | |
| 14 | Paras: Reading 1.0; Math 1.0; Science 0.5 | 2.5 | |
| 15 | HES Principal & Asst. Principal | 2.0 | |
| 16 | Grade 3 | 7.0 | |
| 17 | Grade 4 | 8.0 | |
| 18 | Grade 5 | 8.0 | |
| 19 | 3-5 Art | 0.77 | |
| 20 | 3-5 Health & Physical Education | 1.65 | |
| 21 | 3-5 Music | 2.33 | |
| 22 | 3-5 Computer Instruction | 0.50 | (.50) Trimester class returned to health |
| 23 | 3-5 World Language | 0.96 | |
| 24 | Project Challenge 3-5 | 0.50 | (.50) Alternative strategies to support students |
| 25 | Math Enrichment 3-5 | 0.50 | (.50) Delivered solely by classroom teachers |
| 26 | 3-5 Math Specialist | 0.70 | |
| 27 | 3-5 Reading Specialist* | 2.0 | |
| 28 | WIS Library Media Specialist | 1.0 | |
| 29 | WIS Library Paraprofessional | 1.0 | |
| 30 | Paras: Read 1.0; Math 1.0; Sci 0.5 | 2.5 | |
| 31 | WIS Principal & Asst. Principal | 2.0 | |
| Total K-5 Certified Staff and Academic Support** | | 73.96 | |

*0.3 funded through grant money

**Excludes PPS and SPED

Potential K-5 Reduction Areas

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the total K-5 instructional program, the following areas have been identified as areas that could potentially be delivered through a different model or eliminated

from the total programming offerings. Most of the impact narratives listed below comes directly from Dr. McKersie's January 22, 2019 memo to the Board of Education regarding FY20 potential reductions. Please note that some of the reduction amounts, (K-2 Spanish and K-5 Class Size), have been updated. The following potential reduction items are listed in order of greatest dollar to least dollar amount.

1. Eliminate Project Challenge Grades 3-8

\$114,174

Impact Narrative:

While Weston is not required to provide gifted programming, the elimination of the Project Challenge class at both WIS and WMS would significantly impact our gifted population of learners from an academic and social-emotional standpoint. The district identifies and provides programming in grades 3-8 for gifted students.

Gifted students are our most advanced learners, who have unique academic and social-emotional needs, requiring a flexible program of specialized instruction and a continuum of services that respond to the district profiles of gifted learners. Project Challenge is designed to meet the cognitive and social-emotional needs of the gifted learner.

An essential component of Project Challenge is the scheduling of a self-contained class designed for gifted students to learn from and with their intellectual peers. Several districts in DRG A provide programming for gifted students knowing that these students are often at risk of underachievement without specialized instruction. This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

Possible Alternative Approaches in both WIS and WMS if PC class is eliminated:

| Continuum of Services | Current Program | Alternative Strategy |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Self-contained class | Class is facilitated by the Project Challenge teacher. | PC students meet periodically with LLC teacher. |
| Master Project | Facilitated by PC teacher during PC class. | Facilitated by LLC teacher during pull out (WIS) and through extended learning period (WMS). |
| Social Emotional Learning | Lessons delivered by PC teacher | Lessons delivered by grade level counselor. |
| Enrichment | Provided through PC teacher in PC class. After school enrichment available at both WIS and WMS. | Provided by classroom teacher. After school enrichment available at both WIS and WMS. Possible expansion of WMS in-school enrichment offerings in the future. |
| Cluster Grouping | Currently, assign PC students to same class with a peer at WIS. | Enhance cluster grouping by placing PC students with teacher on that grade level trained to work with PC students at WIS. At WIS PC student's social studies teacher takes lead role in supporting PC student. |

2. Increase Elementary Class Size K-1 guidelines from 18-20 to 18-22 \$101,220

Impact Narrative:

Increasing class size has the potential to negatively affect the quality of instruction. Our teachers take great care to provide differentiated and personalized instruction to our students. Adding two to four students per class will impact the time teachers have to give individual attention and instruction for all students. We also take great pride in providing ongoing communication with our families. Parents of very young children appreciate access to their child's teacher, particularly as they are beginning their journey into the Weston Public Schools. The Center for Public Education cites research that smaller classes in early grades (K-3) can boost student academic achievement; A class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits.

The DRG A class size comparisons shared in the *January 16, 2019 BOE Q&A Document* underscore the comparative advantage Weston would lose by increasing elementary class sizes. This reduction would represent a 1.0 FTE cut of a kindergarten teacher plus the part-time para position associated with it.

3. Increase Elementary Class Size in Grade 2-5 Guidelines from 20-24 to 20-25 \$88,625

Impact Narrative:

We are dedicated to academic excellence for each and every student. Adding students to each class will impact the amount of time teachers can provide personalized and differentiated instruction.

The loss of one teacher in grade five will bring the number of sections to seven, an odd number of sections which will impact the current teaming model in grade five. Currently students move between two teachers on a daily basis with one teacher who focuses on reading/language arts and the other math/science. This helps students begin to learn the skills they will need when they transition to the middle school--such as organization of material when moving between classes, and ability to adapt to different teaching styles and expectations of different teachers. Additionally, the fifth grade teaming model was put in place to provide students with quality blocks of time with teachers focused on either language arts or math/science. Through the teaming model, teachers are able to specialize and become experts in their content area allowing them to further differentiate for the needs of all students. By moving to seven sections, we would be forced to reconsider how we deliver the teaming model if at all.

The DRG A class size comparisons shared with the *January 16, 2019 BOE Q&A Document* underscore the comparative advantage Weston would lose by increasing elementary class sizes. This reduction represents a 1.0 FTE cut.

4. Eliminate K-5 Computer Teacher Position \$88,625

Impact Narrative:

The loss of the K-5 computer teacher position would have an impact on the acquisition of computer skills at both HES and WIS. At WIS, the computer teacher provides teachers with support for the Chromebook initiative by assisting them with the implementation of class projects that require the use of technology. At both buildings, this reduction would impact

the ability of the LLC teacher to provide the full complement of makerspace activities and limit her ability to push-into the classroom to support teachers.

Possible Alternative Approach:

At HES, the librarian would meet with each K-2 class once a week for the 30 minute block that has been allocated to computer instruction. The content of this Library Learning Commons (LLC) period would need to be re-developed. It is envisioned that this class would be a combination of library skills and computer instruction.

At WIS, the trimester computer class, currently under pilot, would revert back to an additional trimester of health. Students would have a full year of health, meeting once a week with their teacher.

5. Eliminate K-2 Spanish

\$60,319

Impact Narrative:

The loss of this entire program would impact every kindergarten, first and second grade child-- a total of almost 400 students. Research supports early language instruction benefits to students' cognitive abilities and their appreciation of cultural diversity. Clearly addressing our priority outcomes of developing global citizens, the program also supports the acquisition of grade level concepts which are integrated into the lessons.

This reduction represents a .58 FTE reduction. (Please note that the January 22, 2019 budget reduction memo incorrectly listed the reduction at 1.0 FTE). Both figures did not include benefits.

Possible Alternative Approach:

The District would ask Weston Youth Services to offer a Spanish after-school enrichment activity as part of the WOW program at HES. This would be a pay for program offered to any interested students.

6. Eliminate Math Enrichment Grades 3-5

\$47,287

Impact Narrative:

The elimination of math enrichment will reduce the number of opportunities for students to participate in additional math challenges and enrichment lessons. Math enrichment is provided through a push-in model and taught by the Project Challenge teacher, who works closely with the Math CIL to ensure activities are aligned with the curriculum and implemented consistently across grade level classes. Enrichment opportunities are designed to be fun, challenging experiences that help students deepen their skills and understanding of mathematical concepts and operations, fostering better mathematical thinkers and problem solvers. This is a reduction of 0.5 FTE.

Possible Alternative Approach:

K-5 teachers have been trained in the Math in Focus program and are very familiar with the enrichment activities included with the program. Classroom teachers would continue to differentiate math instruction and address the individualized learning needs of their students. The curriculum instructional leader for math would continue to provide professional development on high-yield differentiation strategies.