

April 21, 2020

Dear Members of the Woodbridge Board of Education,

The Woodbridge Education Association (WEA) is grateful for the continued support of the Board of Education, especially during this time of uncertainty. We hope that the long term fiscal commitment to meeting the needs of the students and families of Woodbridge will continue to be the focus in your decision making process. We would like to reiterate what was stated last night during the Board of Finance meeting and believe now is the time to speak up on behalf of our students, our teachers, and our community.

During the February 20th Board of Finance meeting, Superintendent Gilbert's proposed budget was praised by members of the Board of Finance for the financial restraint shown. This proposed increase of .76 percent still required our district to make many difficult concessions. From the perspective of the WEA, the needs of our students were not met with this budget. Specifically, the elimination of the .5 social worker position leaves a void in bridging family-school challenges and supporting all of our students, regular and students with special needs, with social emotional support.

The WEA was even more disappointed in the recent shift to our 2020-2021 operating budget. Now the Board of Finance is asking for additional cuts, which will result in a zero budget increase. This budget includes in addition to the elimination of the Social worker position, a reduction of a full time Art teacher to a .7 position, as well as a full time Library Media Specialist to a .7 position. We have more and more students with growing emotional needs. All three of these positions being eliminated or reduced support social-emotional learning at our school, directly and indirectly. This reduction in staff will also greatly impact our ability to provide all students with many learning and enriching opportunities that Beecher is well known for.

In a recent survey sent out our membership in regard to the recent shift in budget cuts, teachers raised many concerns, including but not limited to:

- Eliminating the Social worker position and reduction of two positions to .7 directly impacts the academic, social, emotional and behavioral

needs of students and will result in limiting high quality programming that has already received budget cuts in previous years, stretching supplies and staffing even further.

- Our library/media department is past the point where they can compensate. They are no longer providing the services or student contact that they once did. The library has had to shut down or reduce services. This will have a drastic impact on students' accessibility to literature, research, and instruction.
- Now, more than ever, students and families will rely on trained mental health specialists for emotional/behavioral supports. They are having to learn social/emotional skills that no academic curriculum can account for. As we move forward and eventually return to a "another new normal", social workers will be needed more than ever in schools!
- Specialized programming that enhances a child's need to express or challenge themselves and a child's culture of creativity will be reduced. These are methods beyond an academic curriculum (TAG, Open Studio etc.).
- Our Social worker, Fine Arts, Library and Media programs are all factors that contribute to our strong test scores. These cuts will have a tremendous, long term impact on all students and test scores.

As we meet the challenges of this crisis, we hope you consider the needs of our students and growing population. Please take the actions necessary to make a positive impact on our ability to educate our children. In these times, we cannot afford to go backwards and freeze or cut the support for students and our school.

Sincerely,

The WEA Executive Board