

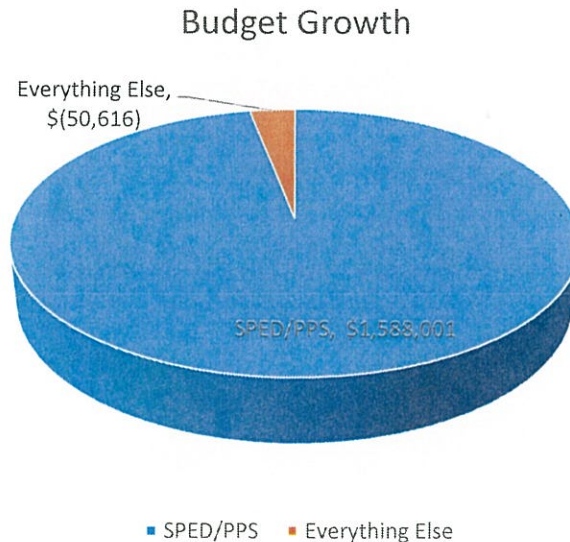
BUDGET RECOMMENDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Weston Public Schools Administration, I am pleased to submit the Recommended FY 2019 Operating Budget for review and adoption by the Weston Board of Education. The recommended budget is the product of intensive analysis and decisions by Central Office and School administrators to develop a financial plan for the 2018-19 Academic Year that ensures the Weston Public Schools continue to be one of the premier school systems in Connecticut and the nation.

The total recommended FY 2019 Operating Budget is \$51,444,906, which represents a \$1,537,385 (or 3.08 percent) increase over the FY 2018 Board of Education approved at Referendum in May 2017. The proposed budget features essential investments in SPED/PPS (\$1,588,001)¹, Digital Learning and Technology (\$217,769) and the new Science Research Program (\$54,901).

Understanding the critical need for modifications to our SPED/PPS program, and the extent of the associated costs, we built the proposed budget with a clear formula: larger than usual growth in the SPED/PPS budget would be offset by net-zero growth in all other areas of the operating budget. This led us to identify and recommend equivalent reductions for any budget increases in all areas other than SPED/PPS and the OPEB and Internal Services Fund contributions. We believe we have succeeded in instituting this bold formula. Please see the depiction in the Budget Growth chart below. We now bring to the Board of Education a budget that advances the District's top goals and critical needs, while simultaneously demonstrating fiscal responsibility.



¹ SPED Increase (pg. 222) \$1,541,979+PPS Increase (pg. 234) \$554+SPED Settlement/Rideshare Transportation (pg. 285) Increase \$45,468

Investment Areas:

Special Education and Pupil Services	3.18%
Everything Else	-0.10%
Total Budget Increase	3.08%

The Recommended FY 2019 Operating Budget ensures that the signature qualities of the district will continue. By nearly any measure, Weston is an uncommon school district—in terms of student success, teaching excellence, robust academic and co-curricular offerings, and dedication to the physical, social and emotional well-being of our students. We operate on a pristine, unified four-school campus, ensuring a cohesive learning environment from PreK through 12th grade. Weston students, from their earliest days through graduation, are challenged and cared for by our faculty and administrators. Current and prospective families can be assured that Weston believes “connections” are essential to student success—we insist that all students are known well by many adults. We are confident that the proposed budget will advance Weston to even greater heights in its stated mission of “empowering each student to achieve success and contribute to our global society...and to serve as part of a caring and supportive community.”

STRATEGIC & GOAL DRIVEN

Framed by Weston’s Strategic Goals, the FY 2019 Operating Budget will accelerate the district as a place known for intellectual rigor and compassion.

The District has set the development of **Global Citizens** as the ultimate outcome for our work with students. Global Citizens have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve their personal goals and contribute to society. Our aim is to empower students to be innovative thinkers, creative problem-solvers, effective communicators, and inspired learners prepared to thrive in an ever-changing world. These skills are commonly referred to as the four C’s: Critical and Creative Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration.

The District has identified high-leverage Goals and associated action steps to develop global citizens. The five goals are:

- Academic Excellence
- Digital Learning
- Healthy learning environment
- Gauging district progress
- Resources for learning

Each goal and associated action steps are spelled out on the *District’s Outcome & Goals Website*: <https://sites.google.com/a/westonps.org/district-goals-17-18/home>. The Outcome and Goals weave through the entire proposed budget.

TARGETED INVESTMENTS

Before highlighting the featured investments, it is essential to note that the proposed budget ensures that:

- **Academic and co-curricular programs** continue with the same robust offerings;
- **Social, emotional and physical well-being** is bolstered by adequate staffing and support systems;
- **Competitive class-sizes and adult: student ratios** enable vital educational connections between professionals and students,
- The **campus and facilities** remain as attributes compared to other towns and districts.

Working with the formula of net-zero growth for all areas other than SPED/PPS, the Internal Services Fund Contribution and the OPEB Contribution, we are able to put forth three targeted investments.

SPED/PPS is the lead investment. As is well known to the Board of Education, we have been faced this year by a major problem with our Out-placement tuition budget. Running more than \$1.6 million over budget, the Out-placement tuition line has placed severe budgetary pressures on all district operations. We are working with administrators and the BOE to rectify the immediate budget shortfall, which will entail a February 2018 BOE decision to seek a special authorization from the Town of Weston. While the shortfall hit crisis levels this year, we have a several year trend of major overruns with Out-placement tuition. As Lois Pernice explains later in the budget proposal:

When looking closely at this current deficit, it is important to review that while this year has reached a significant level, we have been seeing this upward trend over the last several years. Besides what were unforeseen and unavoidable placements, we have had the trend of increased unilateral placements by parents to area schools with smaller student populations. Parents have then requested reimbursement for that placement, which leads to mediation. It is very difficult to go to a full due process hearing on these cases because of the concern for more significant costs. Connecticut is one of a few states in the country where the Burden of Proof is on the school district and not the parents when going to a due process hearing. Because of this, if the district does not succeed in the hearing in all areas then in addition to what the hearing officer determines about the placement, the district must also pay for the parents attorney fees, plus our own. Additionally over the last several years, we have seen that due process hearings have become more complicated and as a result are becoming quite lengthy which results in more preparation and more staff time being devoted to the hearing which also further drives the costs up. Our attorneys have recommended that it is in our best interest to go to mediation, where costs are then shared by the district and the parents. Currently, we are not the only district that is experiencing this increase in unilateral placements resulting in mediations; the trend is particularly on the rise in lower Fairfield County and several area districts have large cost overruns with Out-placement tuition.

We have taken the budget problem seriously and have comprehensively examined how to mitigate the issue going forward. In analyzing the roots of the problem, we determined that a series of modifications are necessary to management, service offerings and staff capacity. Preliminary management adjustments were flagged for SPED/PPS and Finance and Business Operations in a Memorandum to the BOE (October 12, 2017), which now has become a checklist for collaborative oversight by the Superintendent, Director of Finance & Operations, and Director of PPS. We also reviewed the report by CES (February 2017) on SPED for advice on necessary modifications. Lastly, we consulted with the

Cabinet and Principals on areas requiring attention.

The FY2019 budget proposes major changes for SPED/PPS. While we propose increased funding in the Out-placement tuition line, we are recommending changes in the management structure for SPED/PPS and the staffing and delivery of services on the school level. The management changes are designed to ensure the Director of PPS is focused district-wide on the range of complex oversight, accountability and management responsibilities inherent in serving over 20 percent of the entire WPS student population and 22 percent of the operating budget.¹ The changes in staffing and delivery of service are designed to reflect the marked shifts in the behavior, emotional and developmental needs of our students.

As Lois Pernice details in the SPED and PPS sections of this budget, we are recommending the following administration and staffing changes:

1. **Add a second Assistant Director** so that we have direct administration oversight, accountability and support in the two elementary schools (pre-K-5) as a unit and the middle and high schools (6-12) as another unit. The Assistant Directors would assume many of the school and student administration duties that have distracted the Director of PPS from district-wide management.
2. **Add one more BCBA** (Board Certified Behavior Analyst) to provide a dedicated BCBA in each of three schools and a BCBA specialist in the fourth school. We would reduce the number of school psychologists from five to four, providing one school psychologist for each school. This shift reflects the strong evidence of changing behavioral and emotional needs of our students, requiring greater work from professionals who are experts at managing dysregulated behaviors. While school psychologists have some background training in behavior modification, it is not their area of expertise.
3. **Hire an additional school social worker** to be fully dedicated to WMS. The current district social worker will move full time to the HS, rather than being split between the HS and MS. We are seeing more students with emotional difficulties at the younger grades, in particular grades 5-8, which has contributed to Out-placement pressures. The added school social worker can provide more direct clinical and family support in order to keep students in district.
4. **Continue with Effective School Solutions (ESS)** at WHS for a third year. While this is a costly program, ESS has proven in the last two years that it is able to keep students in district and would likely have helped keep current out-placed students in district if the program had existed. We gain important professional expertise from ESS in the form of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW), Clinical Psychologists, and management oversight that would be far more expensive for us to provide on our own. ESS also represents Weston's first effort to provide an alternative SPED program within district as a way to mitigate out-placed students.
5. **Add a certified counselor to direct WHS's College and Career Center.** Explained in detail in the PPS and WHS sections of the budget, the new position would address the increasing demands of the college timetable, the competitive process and the resulting growth in family requests for guidance, coupled with the demands of managing effectively our numerous support programs. These demands necessitate an adjustment to guidance staffing to best serve our

¹ This percentage includes both SPED students with IEPs and students with 504 plans under the American with Disabilities Act.

students. Our college graduation and success rates are superb, but we must modify our support for students and families if we are going to continue to achieve exceptional college and career outcomes.

Digital Learning & Technology is the second featured investment, moving us into the second year of the multi-year financial and implementation plan designed to systematize previous and future work to blend digital resources in teaching and learning. As Craig Tunks describes in the Digital Learning & Technology section of the budget proposal, our focus areas for the 2018-2019 budget year include:

- Extending Direct Access to Digital Devices at Hurlbutt Elementary School
- Providing exemplarily Information Technology (IT) support for infrastructure, devices, systems and software used by students and staff
- Ensuring all educators are prepared and supported in their efforts to connect student to technology resources
- Providing technology tools for formative and summative assessments
- Extending implementation of the Learning Management System (LMS)
- Enhancing the district's wireless infrastructure to support the growth of wireless devices for instruction
- Creating appropriate solutions to ensure redundancy and continuity of service and expand the district's ability to adequately backup the data on the network.

The new **Science Research Program** is the third featured investment. Ken Crow and Lisa Deorio both describe the Science Research Program in the Curriculum & Instruction and WHS sections of the proposed budget. Currently in planning stages, the Science Research Program has generated enthusiasm amongst teachers and students, with 80 students attending an introductory meeting this fall. When the HS was renovated over 12 years ago, space was created for science research. The program will enable students to pursue rigorous, original scientific research for full academic credit and the opportunity to compete in state and national scientific forums. Through funding from the Weston Education Foundation, WHS has been working with Andrew Bramante, an expert teaching consultant, to guide the development and launch of this long sought initiative. The Weston Education Foundation has further endorsed the Science Research Program by funding lab equipment.

COST CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

The proposed FY 2019 Operating Budget is organized into major cost centers, with each introduced by a narrative. Several expenditures for the schools and athletic department warrant highlighting.

Hurlbutt Elementary School — Weston students begin their journey of learning at Hurlbutt Elementary School, in the Early Learning Center, kindergarten, first and second grades. Through the combined efforts of administration, staff and parents, Hurlbutt is committed to creating a learning environment where every child can pursue and achieve personal excellence.

Hurlbutt's intervention support program will continue to include a 0.6 FTE math teacher and 2.0 full time reading teachers. Educational research emphasizes early intervention and its positive long term effect on reading ability and achievement. A small increase in lunchroom and playground monitor support is requested to ensure adequate safety and supervision for our young students. Our very young

children require a high level of supervision.

While addressed under Digital Learning & Technology, a major budget piece for Hurlbutt will be the addition of 160 iPads for the second grade (22 per classroom). This is a key element of the targeted investment in Digital Learning & Technology, and reflects the district-wide priority of expanding digital resources for on-demand use by students working individually and in small groups.

Enrollment is projected to drop by 12 students to a total of 417. The largest decrease is for Kindergarten, resulting in a recommend drop in sections from seven to six, with an accompanying reduction in FTE, in order to align with District Class Size Guidelines.² Additionally, first grade will be reduced from eight sections to seven with an accompanying reduction in FTE, in order to align with District Class Size Guidelines.

Weston Intermediate School — WIS takes pride in fostering a caring, responsive community of learners that encourages an appreciation of individual differences and each student’s developing abilities. We strive to build the essence of community each day in every classroom, and provide learning experiences that challenge each student to pursue personal excellence in all aspects of their lives. We focus on enhancing students’ ability to think critically and creatively, and to be innovative problem solvers and proficient communicators; helping our students speak and write effectively and clearly across all subject areas.

This budget proposal supports WIS’s highest priority needs, which include the continued implementation of a revised reading curriculum that directly aligns with our current writing curriculum, the ongoing implementation of the math curriculum, and the increased utilization of student data to provide individualized instruction. WIS transitions next year to the Next Generation Science Standards. Implementation of the new standards will begin in grade five during the 2018-2019 school year, with the transition occurring the following year for grades four and three. Advanced literacy training in reader’s and writer’s workshop for all grade-level and special education teachers will continue as well. WIS also will continue to support the implementation of a social-emotional curriculum through our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, as well as the continuation of the school and district initiatives on Emotional Intelligence (EI) Learning and the RULER Approach.

In 2018-2019, WIS’s overall projected enrollment is expected to be 494 students. In order to meet District Class Size Guidelines,³ the total number of sections will remain unchanged for third and fifth grade, and will be decreased by one section in fourth grade for the 2018-2019 school year.

Weston Middle School — WMS is committed to the goal of providing students with an exemplary middle level education. Our dedicated teachers are critical resources in helping our students develop the essential capacities and content knowledge to achieve at high levels. Our faculty and staff believe that these middle school years are key to the academic growth and social-emotional development of our students and they strive to nurture their growth throughout the school day and through a rich variety of co-curricular programs. We constantly evaluate our co-curricular programs to assure that we continue to

² Class Size Guidelines – K-1 – Up to 20 Students; 2-5—20-24 Students

meet the needs and interests of our students.

The proposed budget will allow WMS to maintain a strong core academic program as well as practical and fine arts programs, which include general music, band, chorus, orchestra, art, physical education, health and wellness, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and world language. WMS is fortunate to benefit from the generous philanthropy of its Middle School PTO which has been very supportive of teacher initiatives to enhance students' learning experiences.

WMS is proposing minor adjustments to staffing for next year. We are proposing that the Mock Trial program be funded through our co-curricular stipends rather than making it part of a teacher's regular assignment. By scheduling this program after school, more students will have access to the program and students participating in Mock Trial will still have access to the full middle school program. We have proposed a slight increase in the seventh and eighth grade practical and fine arts staffing to account for this change. WMS also is eliminating the middle school after school sports program. The District has been in communication with the Weston Parks and Recreation Department to take on athletic and recreational opportunities for our middle grade students.

WMS has a projected enrollment for the 2018-19 school year of 577 students, which represents a decrease of eight students from current enrollment.

Weston High School —WHS empowers students to become innovative thinkers, creative problem solvers, effective communicators and inspired learners prepared to thrive in an ever changing global society. A series of independent reviews and recognitions underscore our exceptional impact on student learning and growth. The WHS budget section notes the recognitions from *U.S. News and World Report* and most recently the AP Honor Roll distinction.

There are several themes reflected in the budget proposal. Most important, developing WHS's Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, maintaining the high school's current academic offerings, and enhancing social emotional wellness. In the area of STEM, the feature is the proposed Science Research Program. AP Environmental Science also will be added as WHS's 22nd AP course. Project Lead the Way has grown, so there will be two section of Principles of Engineering next year, bringing to nine the total sections for the entire program. Integrated Algebra & Geometry will be added.

The second theme—to continue the exemplary academic program in a fiscally prudent manner—is explained by Lisa Deorio in the WHS section of the budget.

The third theme of enhancing social emotional wellness is exemplified by the above noted recommendation (as part of the SPED/PPS investment) to add a certified counselor to direct WHS's College and Career Center (CCC).

The projected WHS enrollment for 2018-2019 is 804 students, which represents a decrease of five students.

Athletics — The Weston High School Interscholastic Athletics Program is an integral part of the school's total educational program. Interscholastic competition provides students with the opportunity to grow physically, mentally and emotionally as individuals; but also as members of their school and community.

The FY 2019 Budget has been developed to support a diversified interscholastic program of 60 teams. Students have the option of participating on 29 varsity, 26 junior varsity and five freshmen teams. The Weston High School athletic program offers a wide variety of team and individual sports to support student skills and interests. This philosophy has led to a high degree of student participation with more than 70% of our students participating in at least one sport last school year. It is anticipated that 908 student/athletes will participate in the program next year.

The athletic program budget is significantly enhanced by funding from sources outside the Board of Education budget, including the use of gate receipts (approximately \$14,000 annually), Weston Boosters Club (approximately \$30,000 annually), the Gridiron Club (approximately \$10,000 annually), and the Diamond Club (approximately \$5,000). In addition, Weston levies a user fee for athletes.

While part of the Capital Budget, which is separate from the Operating Budget, the Athletics Program is in line to receive major attention through the installation of a new upper field and goal posts, as well as refinishing of the main WHS gym floor.

TOUGH DECISIONS: BUDGET REDUCTIONS

The proposed FY 2019 Operating Budget includes tough decisions about reductions. Our attention to efficiencies was driven in large part by our sensitivity to careful stewardship of the resources Weston tax payers provide the school system. Weston as a town is generous to its schools, helping with each tax dollar to establish a district that deserves its regional and national recognition. As in past years, we built the proposed budget with close attention to the typical annual increases approved by the Board of Education and Town leaders. On average, Weston has the next to lowest five-year average in DRG A for annual budget increases: 1.84% percent versus a DRG A average of 2.44% percent (3 year average of 1.96% for DRG A vs. Weston 1.76%). This year's recommended increase of 3.08 percent is the second highest growth rate put forth in the last eight years. We know that other DRG A and B districts also are recommending larger than usual growth rates for FY 2019 with Special Education being a main driver of those increases.

As noted earlier, the 3.08 percent growth is driven entirely by SPED/PPS investments (3.18 % of the 3.08 %). All other aspects of the proposed budget, including the targeted investments in Digital Learning & Technology and the Science Research Program, have net reduction. Obviously, we have made tough decision about reductions to achieve the net-reduction.

The recommended cuts are based on careful consideration of the implications for the District's Outcome & Goals and the daily academic and programmatic opportunities for students. Seven changes and approaches that will accrue financial savings, while maintaining high quality programs, should be highlighted.

First, a commitment to cost effectiveness guided the budget decision making by administrators. We would not have achieved net-reduction without a commitment by administrators to keep costs level or make cuts. Non personnel budget requests from each school and athletics net to a total budget reduction of \$7,494. We still are able to recommend new classroom furniture for two middle school classrooms.

Additionally, Facilities is requesting a budget decrease of \$48,742 while still ensuring proper attention to all facilities, including priority projects such as, refurbishing a snow plow, and rebuilding our electric motors.

Second, the new two-year contract with the Weston Teachers Association (effective July 1, 2018) evidences shared concern for fiscal prudence given the financial challenges facing the state and district. Through negotiations and good coordination with the Weston Teachers Association (WTA), the BOE and WTA agreed to a two-year contract settlement with an average salary increase inclusive of step of 2.35%. This settlement is the lowest in Fairfield County to date and under the current average DRG A teacher settlement of 3.00%. This also represents one of the lowest settlements for Weston in recent years.

Third, the proposed budget accrues major savings from the shift from Aetna to the State Partnership Plan 2.0 for employee health insurance. (This shift is a central element of the new contract with the WTA.) Discussed in detail by Richard Rudl in the District-Wide Services section, the District anticipates saving more than \$5 million over the next three years by migrating its employees to the State Partnership Plan. Projected annual savings are \$1.5 million in FY 19, \$1.6 million in FY 20 and \$1.9 million in FY 21. These savings are inclusive of cost avoidance, which would have occurred had the districted remained with its HDHP through Aetna. By shifting to the State Partnership Plan the district will see a budget reduction in FY 19 of \$701,981.

Fourth, we are recommending a **reduction in the number of Security Specialists** from eight to six. Joe Olenik discusses this recommendation in detail in the Security section of the proposed budget. We would have 2.0 FTE security specialists at both WHS and WMS, and 1.0 FTE security specialist at WIS and HES. This difficult decision is possible because of improvements in our physical buildings and training. The new interior cameras allow for greater coverage of our buildings without the necessity of the additional staff. The security specialist team manages the safety of the buildings efficiently and in coordination with other security resources during emergencies. We have a seamless relationship with the Weston Police Department and other first-responders, which has only improved with the arrival of a new WPD Police Chief Ed Henion and the appointment of Captain Matt Brodacki. The second year of the School Resource Officer position has been a boost to coordination with the WPD on student and staff safety.

Even with a reduction of 2.0 FTE security specialists, Weston would remain one of the strongest staffed school systems in Fairfield County with respect to Security. Weston's per student investment in security would still be the highest in Fairfield County, but our level of staffing with security specialists would mirror Westport, Darien, Ridgefield and Newtown, while surpassing Wilton and Greenwich. Unlike nearly any area district, we would provide full-time security coverage at all schools, including our elementary schools.

Fifth, **changes in how we deliver two programs at WMS** would increase budget efficiency. First, we are eliminating the **middle school after school sports program**. The district has been conferring with Weston Parks and Recreation Department about taking on athletic and recreational opportunities for our middle grade students. We believe that their programs can meet our student needs for after school sports activities. The Director of Parks and Recreation, Dave Ungar, is excited for the opportunity to expand

after school offerings for Weston children. Several of our sister districts have a similar approach to providing after school sports for middle grade students.

A second adjustment at WMS is **shifting the Mock Trial Program to after school**. We now have evidence, including the *Project Challenge Report* (Fall 2017), that many WMS students do not have adequate space and flexibility in their schedules to take a full complement of courses. Mock Trial is an important program, but as an offering during the academic day creates a scheduling challenge for students. We believe a larger number of students will be able to access Mock Trial after school, and the move to it after school will allow Mock Trial students to have more scheduling flexibility during the academic day.

Sixth, we are **not recommending the addition of two more varsity assistant coaches** in FY 2019. Mark Berkowitz discusses this step in the Athletics section of the proposed budget. We have been gradually adding assistant varsity coaching positions for the past 11 years. Due to budget constraints, we decided not to add two more in FY 2019. We are hopeful that they will be included in FY 2020. We are pleased to maintain the current set of assistant varsity coaches, since these paid positions are necessary for us to continue to provide a safe, educationally sound environment for our student-athletes.

Seventh, we are recommending a **change to the accounting practices for how we handle theater receipts and expenditures**. Currently, all theater revenue (ticket sales, concessions, advertisements) are deposited into our student activity accounts and expenditures are placed against those revenue. To improve internal controls and to ensure the prosperity of our theater program, we are recommending moving solely ticket sales revenue and providing a budget for materials to support the stage construction and theater operations into the operating budget as separate theatre cost center. The Theater Program will now follow the standard requisition process.

CONCLUSION

The Recommended FY 2019 Operating Budget has been carefully crafted in a collaborative process to advance the District's priority Outcome & Goals and ensure we continue to be known regionally and nationally for intellectual rigor and compassion. We built the proposed budget with a bold formula: providing for investment to support essential changes in our SPED/PPS programs, as well as investments in Digital Learning & Technology and the Science Research Program, while simultaneously arriving at net-zero growth for all other cost centers and programs. The formula also allowed for minimal growth in two contributions pointed at long-term fiscal stability (the OPEB and ISF contributions).

The proposed budget ensures that Weston's academic and co-curricular programs remain robust; social, emotional and physical well-being is bolstered; competitive class-sizes and adult: student ratios continue; and the campus and facilities are maintained as attributes.

Ultimately, we believe the proposed Operating Budget for FY 2019 will make a difference for every student in the Weston Public Schools.

Capital Budget Note

This Executive Summary by design has focused on the Proposed FY 2019 Operating Budget. At the close of the Budget Book is a presentation of the Proposed FY 2019 Capital Budget, which is dealt with by the Board of Education separately from the Operating Budget. The FY 2019 Capital Budget recommendations give first priority to accounting for the likely renovation of the WIS Knee Wall. A specific dollar figure is not listed, since the Building Committee is finalizing the construction budget. We have assumed a cost close to a past estimate of \$600,000. As a result, we list additional Capital Projects for FY 2019 totaling \$246,341, which along with the WIS Knee Wall would bring the FY2019 total to roughly the budget proposed in FY 2017 and FY 2018. The additional recommended projects for FY 2019 include, a new Hybrid PBX Phone System, Refinishing the New Gym Floor in Weston High School, and Replacing the Turf and Goal Posts on the Football Field.