



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS' (WPS) adopted budget for FY26, *From Here, Anywhere...Together!* (including general and special revenue) of **\$586,302,044 is a 6.1% increase from the adopted budget of FY25**. *Paying for a Public Education: An Examination of the FY26 Worcester Public Schools's Budget* is the latest in an ongoing series from the Bureau, explaining how Massachusetts' Ch. 70 education funding works, and translating and analyzing the budget-making process of the Worcester Public Schools.

The FY26 budget is a 6.1% increase from FY25. This year, the District did not face the same aid deficit it did in FY25 due to the state's inflation cap. The District itself saw **an enrollment increase of 1.75%, or 428 students**, between FY24 and FY25, increasing the overall baseline foundation enrollment numbers used to calculate state and local aid.

Page 6 in the report explains the City of Worcester's role in funding its public schools; **24.8% of the foundation budget for FY26 consists of a required local contribution**.

Page 6 also explains special revenues, like the Child Nutrition Program, that play a crucial role in funding WPS. **This year, they saw a 5.45% increase from FY25**, but uncertainty at the federal level could play a future role in this revenue line.

Worcester Public Schools largest expenditures are in the salaries and benefits of its employees (page 7-9). **86% of its budget consists of salaries and benefits** (page 8). **WPS budgeted for 5,109 employees in FY26, of which about 66% directly teach students** (page 7). While the number of teachers grew by 2.1% (56 positions) and paraeducators by 2.5% (17 positions) since FY25, **there are still more than 100 teachers fewer than there were in FY24 and 33 fewer than in FY23. Overall, there are 286 fewer employees than in FY24, and 40 fewer than in FY23 — a direct result of the state aid deficit that WPS faced in FY25 thanks to the state's inflation cap**.

FY26 marks the second full school year of WPS strategic plan, "Our Promise to the Future" (page 7-8). Spending in FY26 is aligned with the priorities, aims, and promises outlined in the plan.

Worcester has also continued to budget for facilities and capital improvements. \$15.7 million is budgeted from City, state, and federal sources for renovations, maintenance, and other repairs across the District (pages 8-9). Additionally, **the City and WPS continue to move through the Burncoat High reconstruction process**, as it

moves into the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA) feasibility study period, and Burncoat Middle School continues to be studied for inclusion in the process by the City, WPS, and the MSBA.

Finally, the last two sections of the report compare Worcester to selected Gateway Cities and its own neighbors, as well as what to watch in future budgets (pages 9-12). Though in FY24 Worcester was under required net school spending by \$4.9 million, **it made up that deficit and exceeded the required amount 0.4%, or \$2.29 million in FY25 according to data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** (page 10).

Among the top ten Gateway Cities by foundation enrollment, Worcester has the highest required local contribution, and the second highest foundation budget requirement (page 10). By percentage of its foundation budget, its local contribution, however, ranks third. Among Worcester's neighboring school districts, it ranks last in that same category. This is explained further on page 10.

Finally, the report concludes with several developments to watch:

- ▶ **There have been several instances this year already of federal grants being put on hold nationwide that would have affected Worcester.** With the Department of Education in flux, this will continue to potentially be an issue for WPS going forward.
- ▶ **Next year is the final phase-in year of new Student Opportunity Act funds.** How will the District handle them going forward?
- ▶ **FY25 was a difficult year for WPS, as it faced an unanticipated deficit in state aid thanks to a higher rate of experienced inflation that the state's 4.5% inflation cap could not match.** There has been some movement in the Commonwealth's General Court to rectify this problem, and it is a development to watch.
- ▶ Finally, the Governor initially enacted an FY26 state budget line item reduction of \$20 million in charter school reimbursements statewide. **The General Court overrode this reduction in October, restoring funding**, but interested parties should watch this line item in the future to ensure that proper funding continues.