

It pains me to write this letter. I consider myself to be an advocate for education. But I am having a very hard time generating any enthusiasm for the school's FY25 budget as presented at the budget hearing.

As a Finance Committee member, I know the details of the requests submitted by each Department. I also spend hours poring over the details of the School Budget to assure myself that the budget has been carefully prepared. I have some serious concerns with the following requests for FY25:

1. **Transportation**. I continue to oppose funding non-mandated busing. Eliminating those costs would reduce Whitman's costs by \$181,780 and Hanson's by \$47,875, a total of **\$230,000**. While not part of the operating assessment, it is a savings that reduces the impact on the levy. Also, the assertion that non-mandated busing addresses the issue of school children crossing busy state highways flies in the face of reality. There are many Whitman Middle School children who cross rte. 18 and rte. 27 on a daily basis as they live within 0.5 miles of the school and are not entitled to a bus.

2. **Declining enrollment and Class sizes** – I took a look at the class size projections for FY25. What immediately leaps off the page **Class Size Projections 24/25** is the following:

Hanson Middle School

Grade 6 $101/6 = 16.8$ average class size

Grade 8 $110/6 = 18.3$ average class size

Reducing the number of sections to 5 results in:

Grade 6 $101/5 = 20.2$ average class size

Grade 8 $110/5 = 22$ average class size

Compared to the projected class sizes in the comparable grades in the Whitman Middle School:

Grade 6 $170/8 = 21.25$

Grade 8 $179/8 = 22.3$

The Hanson Middle School average class sizes are still smaller. Using the \$71,000 average teacher salary, that's another **\$142,000** in savings.

If these are added to the suggested budget cuts and use of E/D and CB discussed at the March 13, 2024, School Committee meeting of \$910,500 it totals **\$1,282,500** in combined savings to the towns of Hanson and Whitman.

Taking this approach will show a good faith effort to help bridge the FY25 budget deficits that both Whitman and Hanson are grappling with. I continue to oppose a "School override" that has been promoted by several Whitman officials and citizens. What concerns me is that failure to significantly reduce the FY25 school budget before voting to certify the assessments to the two Towns could result in the school department being excluded from future efforts by the Select Board/Board of Selectmen and Finance Committees to use Free Cash, Stabilization Accounts, and other revenue sources to balance the Towns' FY25 budgets.

Respectfully,

Kathleen A. Ottina ■