



# *Wachusett Regional School District*

*Holden, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Sterling*

**To:** Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

**From:** Paul K. Soojian  
Director of Operations

**Date:** **January 29, 2004**

**Re:** **Impact of FY 04 Appropriation Reduction on Instruction**

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Due to the fiscal problems of the State, the District along with Member Towns experienced a significant reduction in State Aid. As such, the Wachusett Regional School District appropriation was reduced by \$1,141,148.00. This reduction has manifested serious impacts on the operation and programs at each of the District's schools. The following outlines the impacts that have occurred due to the budget reductions.

## **Staff Reductions**

The reduction in the District appropriation this year resulted in a 60.4 reduction in positions, which has seriously impacted on instruction and support. It is important to note that this comes upon last years level staffing budget, which did not result in staff layoffs but did not increase staffing ratios to keep up with the increasing student population thus increasing class size. The reduction of teachers and increase in students (149 over last year base on the October 1 count) has increased pupil /teacher ratios at the high school by 3.2% and the middle and elementary schools by 2.6%. This increase in ratio manifested the largest impact at the high school, as 94 of the additional students were at this level. The chart on the following page identifies the position reductions that occurred this year.

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### **Jefferson School**

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### FY04 Position Reductions

| FTE  | Position                       |
|------|--------------------------------|
| 4.0  | Administrative Positions       |
|      | <b>Teacher</b>                 |
| 12.7 | Elementary Teacher Positions   |
| 3.6  | Middle School Teacher Position |
| 5.0  | High School Teacher Positions  |
| 2.2  | Speech Pathologist Positions   |
|      | <b>Instructional Support</b>   |
| 4.0  | Model Teacher Positions        |
| 19   | Aide Positions                 |
| 2.0  | Technology Assistant Positions |
| 1.0  | Health Service Coordinator     |
|      | <b>Clerical</b>                |
| 6.9  | Clerk Positions                |
| 60.4 | Total Positions                |

During the school year, positions were added either due to increased enrollment or in the area of special education due to IEP requirements. The following chart identifies the positions that were added:

### FY04 Established Positions

| FTE  | Position                  | Location                 | Reason               |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| .5   | Kindergarten Teacher      | Paxton                   | Increased enrollment |
| .5   | Kindergarten Aide         | Dawson                   | Increased enrollment |
| 2.0  | Special Education Teacher | WRHS, Naquag             | IEP Requirement      |
| 4.5  | Special Education Aides   | ECC, WRHS, Paxton Naquag | IEP Requirement      |
| 2.5  | ABA Program Assistant     | ECC                      | IEP Requirement      |
| .2   | Speech Pathologist        | Central Tree             | IEP Requirement      |
| 1.0  | Occupational Therapist    | District Wide            | IEP Requirement      |
| 1.0  | Multi Sensory Tutor       | WRHS                     | IEP Requirement      |
| 12.2 | Total Positions           |                          |                      |

At WRHS the reduction of 5 teachers has had a major impact on class size. Currently Wachusett has 38 classes at or above 28 students. While twenty-four of these classes are in either Physical Education or Music which traditionally tend to be larger, the remaining fourteen classes lie squarely in the English, Math, Social Studies and Foreign Language Departments. It should be noted that at an enrollment of twenty-eight, a course is considered "over-enrolled." WRHS is experiencing a much higher rate of

courses above twenty-five than experienced in recent years, leaving many teachers with total academic loads in excess of one hundred twenty five students.

In addition to the increased enrollment in the aforementioned courses, the high school also had to cancel a number of programs due to the position reductions. Among the casualties are the Computer Technician and Architectural Design programs, leaving the recently equipped space for these programs sitting idle. A number of programs in the Business Department were also canceled. The net result of these program reductions is that an additional 250 students had to be enrolled in directed study. The Adaptive Physical Education program was eliminated and reductions made in the Advanced Placement (AP) offerings. In science both AP biology and AP Chemistry were eliminated. In Foreign Language AP Spanish was eliminated. Also eliminated at the high school was the job coach counselor position.

At Mountview Middle, the reduction of two language arts teachers increased class sizes from 14 to 20 in both seventh and eighth grade language arts classes. The reduction in psychologist/counseling services has seriously diminished the schools ability to respond to socio/emotional issues, family crisis issues and achievement issues that are not ability based.

At Chocksett Middle the mandatory reductions were accomplished by eliminating a .4 School adjustment counselor, a .6 Special Education teacher and a .2 Speech/Language Pathologist. While maintaining the ability to provide mandated services in Individual Education Plans (IEP's) the reductions have resulted in the inability to provide other interventions and support services that have been successful in preventing students from requiring services under IEP's as well as eliminating counseling services that are so important in mitigating issues for middle school students.

The School Adjustment Counselor's allocation at Central Tree, Paxton Center and Thomas Prince was eliminated. This has impacted on the school's ability to provide services to students who could benefit from the Counselor's assistance. In addition, the assistant principal at each of these schools has picked up the scheduling responsibilities that were performed by counselor.

Dawson Elementary was reduced by 0.5 FTE less teacher positions due to the change in staffing ratios. At the same time, a larger than traditional registration of kindergarten students required the formation of an additional section. In order to meet this need, it required the reallocation of .5 FTE from another grade level to kindergarten. This resulted in the grade 3 students being grouped into 3 sections rather than the four sections the students experienced the previous year as second graders, with 23 students

per section. The change in staffing ratios also resulted in insufficient staffing allocation to establish a fourth section of grade 1 to accommodate for a large number of students who transferred into Dawson from other schools over the summer resulting in three classes with a student populations of 23-24, larger than the District would normally like to see, reducing the amount of attention that the teacher can provide to each individual student has at this young level.

### **Reduction of Elementary Art, Music and Physical Education**

Principals were faced with the prospect of increasing class size or reducing planning time. Due to language in the collectively bargained agreement with the WREA, the only area where this could be implemented with out violation of the agreement was at the elementary level, by reducing Art, Music and Physical Education. This mitigated to the extent possible, the overall increase in class size that would have occurred without the reduction, however it also had a negative impact on the scope of the affected programs and related cross grade activities at each District elementary school.

At Davis Hill the music program, reduced to 3 days a week resulted in the elimination of the 4th and 5<sup>th</sup> grade chorus programs. The 5th grade did not have sufficient time to organize and perform their traditional holiday concerts at Big Y, Talbot's and Checkerberry Village. The traditional holiday concert held for parents and the community also had to be canceled this year.

Due to the rotation of the teachers, (some teachers being in the building only once in a 6 day period) the use of the kiln (time for set up, firing, experience in use, etc.) has significantly hampered the art program.

Enrichment classes for students have also been severely reduced or eliminated at some grade levels. Common planning time for grade level teams cannot be scheduled, eliminating the time that teachers previously met to plan curriculum and discuss student progress.

At Houghton, the rotation has resulted in the reduction of art time. In addition, students now have different music and physical education teachers, which inhibits program continuity, hampers the integration of the arts into Social Studies and Science Units and has a negative effect on school-wide themes.

Mayo reports that the reductions have resulted in a reduced chorus program at grade four and five. Physical education and art classes have different teachers at different grade levels. Without the continuity that comes form the same personnel working with all students, the daily quality and continuity of these programs are lessened.

The rotation and a lack of time for the various special teachers to coordinate the organization of programs resulted in Naquag canceling the Music/Choral and Art programs that had taken place twice a year in the past.

At Dawson, as in the other elementary schools, there are never more than two special subject teachers in the school on any given day. As a result, the schedule no longer contains any time during the school day, except for the thirty-minute duty free lunchtime, for teachers to have common preparation time to plan curriculum implementation and cross grade learning experiences. Art teachers do not have time to display student work so that students can experience the self-esteem building that comes from having one's work on display.

There are two different special subject teachers who are never in the building on the same day in each area servicing each grade. As a result there are no grade wide concerts or plays being produced, which used to bring in most parents and extended families to the school. These productions, which built many positive perspectives of the school, were often the one direct experience of the school on the part of many adults in the community. The traditional grade 5 play, an evening event carried out each year, as final culminating event bringing grade 5 families together will no longer be produced.

It should be noted that art, music and physical education were eliminated from the Kindergarten programs at all but one District School, which operated Kindergarten at 2 full and one ½ day per week requiring limited art, music and physical education in order to meet contractual preparation time for the teacher in this situation.

### **Athletic Fees**

At the middle schools, athletic user fees, which were instituted for the first time in FY 03, were increased in FY 04 from \$50.00 per student with a cap of \$100.00 per family for all sports for the entire year, to \$50.00 per student per sport with no family cap. This increase in athletic fees has also been coupled with a limitation in the scope of the programs whereby the teams now play only other District schools in order to reduce transportation costs. While still able to fully field teams, middle school principals report that the number of students trying out for sports teams has diminished.

Intramural programs at the schools have become dependent upon volunteers, with no money to pay for student officials; this means that the replication of a game setting experience is lost for our young athletes.

At the high school, there appears to have been a very limited reduction in the number of students who try out for sports.

### **Elimination of Late Buses**

At the high school, the elimination of late busses has been problematic. Teachers report that students are less likely to stay for extra help and Principal Pandisico reports that when walking around the building at the close of the day, it is apparent that there are fewer students in classrooms. Aside from the anecdotal reports from teachers, the only quantitative documentation available to verify the impact of the reduction in student participation comes from the Media Center where the high school has kept statistics regarding visits to that site for a number of years. During first semester of 2002-03, 1,746 students visited the Media Center after school to do homework or research; this semester only 700 have visited. Last year 317 students used the Media Center for after school tutoring; this year the total is only 80. These statistics provide tangible evidence that education is being diminished due to the lack of late buses servicing the students at the high school.

Mountview was the only middle school that indicated that the loss of late bus service significantly reduced student accessibility to tutoring, remediation services as well as reducing the participation in fall sports program. Principal Sullivan felt strongly about this loss of service and applied to the PTA for a grant, which allowed for the late bus service to be reinstated for the remainder of this year however, there was nearly nine weeks without service availability for the students.

### **Reduction of Aide Support**

At the Kindergarten level, aide support was reduced by 50% this year resulting in one aide being shared by two Kindergarten classes. Elementary principals report that the loss of Kindergarten aide time has had considerable effect on the program by limiting or eliminating a number of activities. One example of such a reduction occurred at Dawson School. One of the most significant, effective activities in the school has been the series of Authors' Teas conducted in the Kindergarten. The families of students were invited into the school three times per year to watch the students recite and show their writings, act out nursery rhymes, and sing in concert. Families developed very strong, positive, supportive feelings about the school. Without the Kindergarten aide support to write the stories (which take time to sit and compose with each and every student of different abilities) the teacher is left to write stories while still trying to answer questions of other children in the class. Thus far this year, no Authors' Teas have been scheduled and it appears that this may hold true for the remainder of the school year.

When a special education instructional aide is absent and a substitute aide cannot be obtained, the kindergarten aide is pulled to service other children in the building due to the legal requirement to cover IEP's. This further exacerbates the affects of the reduction in Kindergarten aide support.

Special Education aides were also reduced to minimum levels, allowing for only those specific services required in IEP's to be performed. This reduction has resulted in the placement of special education students in one or two inclusion classrooms in larger proportions to ensure that aide support can be coordinated and provided in line with the IEP requirements. The increased number of students in groups/classes being instructed by aides and/or special education resource room teachers has resulted in students receiving less individual attention and support. This also created problems as students during the year are identified as needing aide support, however, since special needs students were not spread evenly though out most classes, these students must be reassigned to new teachers to allow the required services to be provided.

Principals have reported that early intervention strategies have been reduced or eliminated. Children need to demonstrate deficiency before a student can receive aide support. There are more referrals of students for Chapter 766 evaluations because teachers are not getting aide support in their classrooms.

At the middle level, this reduction has also resulted in much larger numbers of students in tutorial classes than in the past, reducing the effectiveness of the tutorial programs.

### **MCAS Programs**

The District did not meet the criteria for State funding of MCAS programs, and the appropriation reduction eliminated District funding for MCAS programs, effectively canceling all school year intervention programs that at have taken place at each Middle and Elementary School within the District. Principals reported that in past years these intervention programs were very effective in assisting students improve performance on MCAS tests. In addition to the elimination of these programs, there were very limited funds for schools to purchase specifically designed MCAS preparation materials for teachers to use with their students.

### **Purchase of Instructional Materials and Equipment**

The appropriation reduction lowered school instructional support to 1996/97 levels and has impacted on each school's ability to purchase instructional materials and equipment. At the high school, textbook and library purchases have been severely impacted. The

high school was unable to add to the library collection this year further contributing to its already diminished condition. Follett Library Resources had analyzed the high school library collection recently and it was concluded that the overwhelming number of volumes in our library are obsolete. In some cases, almost all volumes in a particular category are obsolete. For example, 299 of the 326 titles in Geography were deemed obsolete, while 89 of 103 volumes in Biology were similarly aged.

There are areas where textbooks are desperately needed, but could not be purchased this year. Approximately 270 Biology students are using a book that is ten years old; 90 Biology students are using a book that is 14 years old; 200 Chemistry students are using a 10-year book and 125 others are using a book that is 8 years old. Other departments report similar problems.

Mountview Principal John Sullivan reports that supplies for the school are being rationed. The rate of consumption, not a concern in the past, has necessitated the allocation of limited amounts of resources on a monthly basis to staff. This has resulted in the termination of a number of classroom 'bulletin' or 'newsletter' type communications. The shortage has also reduced the number of student publications that teachers have published in the past. Additionally, this shortage has changed some instructional and assessment strategies; for instance, tests are now run off in packets of 30 and student responses are written on separate yellow lined paper. This has presented problems for parents reviewing less than successful test results. The school is working on alternative strategies that will not lessen parental ability to assist their children.

Mountview will not be able to continue to purchase Spanish/French texts for grade 7 and 8, which have been purchasing in lots of thirty for the past two years. The purchase of athletic supplies has undergone a 50% reduction. The school will also not be able to meet its School Improvement Goal for the purchase/installation of three Smartboards per year.

Principal Gruszka reports that all purchasing at Dawson has been restricted to absolutely essential items with the priority being placed on materials required for transmitting the curriculum to students in the classroom. There has been no purchasing of any computer hardware, specifically SmartBoards. There has been no purchasing to replace copy equipment, such as the Risograph machine, which is incurring chronic, considerable repair costs.

Principal Gaskin reports that the reduced budget will affect the purchase of Everyday Mathematics materials and Handwriting Without Tears materials at Davis Hill. Additionally, the school will be unable to acquiring the next round of Harcourt Brace

Science Unit texts being purchased to meet the new science framework requirements. Materials to institute the Second Step violence prevention program in grade 4 will not be purchased this year.

Principal Evans reports that Central Tree will not be able to order grade 5 science texts scheduled to replace outdated 1980 editions, nor will the school be able to re-stock the 5<sup>th</sup> grade science kits. At grade 6, the purchase of Worldly Wise and Writer's Express will be put on hold along with the purchase of Daily Oral Language Plus materials. Literature and grammar books at for grade 8 will also be delayed and art supplies are at very low levels as purchasing has been limited.

Chocksett Principal Snow reports that they will not be able to purchase Language Arts texts for 6th grade for the upcoming year and there will be no technology purchases.

Principal Cipro has indicated that he will be unable to purchase books for the library impacting the School Improvement Goal target of increasing children's book collection. In addition purchasing of multi-level multiple copy reading books grades K-2 Guided Reading will be postponed for at least one more year. There will be no computer purchases to upgrade the classroom computers.

Naquag reports that they may not be able to purchase the Open Court Reading Series consumable materials, which is part of the program that was instituted two years ago. Hands-on materials for science at all grade levels will be put on hold along with calculators to go along with the Everyday Math program for grades 1 and 2. The scheduled purchase of a copy machine to replace two older machines will be put off for another year

Paxton Center School will be struggling to purchase all the Everyday Math materials that will be need for the program for next year. Principal DeFrino also reports that supplies are in short supply and that only required purchase will be made for the remainder of this year.

Equipment purchases at all schools have been put on hold. Each school depends on making incremental improvements to equipment and a whole year has been eliminated, from which it will be difficult to recover. This is the case not only with computers, but also with other simpler pieces of equipment such as Smartboards, overhead projectors, copiers, student furniture and the like. This will be compounded by the fact that it is anticipated that there will be limited funds, if any to purchase these same items in the upcoming

## **Central Office Reductions**

### **Administrative Reorganization**

The reductions and resultant reorganization of the Central Office staff has also had significant impact. The reduction of the Director of Pupil Personnel/Information Technology shifted the responsibilities for the oversight of Special Education and Pupil Personnel to the Director of Operations and Technology Information to the Director of Administrative Services. This shift has meant that more time needs to be spent by the Directors of Operations and Administrative Services submitting state reports, implementing grants, organizing the Mid Cycle Review and submitting progress reports for the Special Education Corrective Action Plan. The District has requested extensions twice this year in order to complete reports for submission. The additional time requirements have resulted in less time for classroom visitation and school inspections. It has also impacted on the time available to consult with the Curriculum Liaisons, Curriculum Specialists and technology assistants.

Clerical reductions have resulted in only one payroll clerk to perform all the payroll needs for 750 District employees. As a result, the Assistant Comptroller has had to assist the remaining payroll clerk with the bi-weekly payroll. All other staff in the office has been trained as back up in payroll. Vacations and personal leave have needed to be more closely coordinated so as not to have the payroll clerk out the week of payroll production.

The reduction in the Special Education office has resulted in delays for gathering data for DOE reports. It has also resulted in an increase in time requirements to generate the paperwork required for out of District placements and contractual services.

The four Model teacher positions that were eliminated were replaced by two Curriculum Liaisons, which are grant funded positions that must attempt to provide instructional support to the over 400 District teachers, with limited funds for materials for new initiatives and/or creative programs. The liaisons are not as able to respond to requests for curriculum-based support in as timely a manner as has come to be expected and have focused the majority of their time on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year teachers and on only on a limited number of District initiatives such as Successmaker, Lightspan, and Everyday Math. They have also been able to focus on providing training to staff in the new social studies curriculum however, again it should be noted that this process took much longer than originally anticipated with only ½ the staff to provide this training.

Working to meet the technology needs of staff, the Liaisons require additional time to research, practice, and provide support as they are not as deft in the area of technology as the former Model Technology teachers in past years. In providing after school support for classroom teachers, curriculum liaison availability is limited as there are only two. Out of 80 school days, they have met with teachers, either individually or in small groups on over 50 of those afternoons. Often, due to training commitments, meetings must be scheduled several weeks in advance. This is over 1/3 less contact hours than the former model teachers provided in 02-03. Reduced funding has resulted in less research of new technology and initiatives.

In addition the reduction in funding has resulted in diminished participation by District Curriculum Staff in workshops for new curriculum areas and programming (i.e., going to presentations by consultants to learn the newest in educational research and programming) and in turn, training teachers in those deemed most valuable in reaching School Committee and District Goals.

**Curriculum Center**

The reduction in funds has resulted in no new materials for the Curriculum Center purchased this year. Curriculum Center use has diminished, with the reduction in model teachers and the ability to promote the center and coordinate District resources with teacher units. Curriculum liaisons continue to promote the center to the extent possible but ultimately at a decreased level. The table on the next page documents Curriculum Center Usage since July 1, 2003 as compared to the 2002-03 school year.

| <b>Curriculum Center Utilization</b> |         |         |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Month                                | 2003-04 | 2002-03 |
| July/August                          | 29      | 140     |
| September                            | 67      | 88      |
| October                              | 40      | 67      |
| November                             | 40      | 76      |
| December                             | 6       | 33      |

As part of the budget reductions, the curriculum secretary hour have been reduced and she is no longer available beyond 4:00 pm. Therefore, there is no one available to assist teachers in borrowing materials from the Curriculum Center after the elementary schools have dismissed students.

### **Technology Support**

The reduction of 2 technologists has created an increase in the turn around time in making repairs or providing technology assistance to staff. With the reduction there is no longer a technologist available at each school for the full day.

Technologist rotate from building to building and while they are dispatched to problem areas as soon as possible, they are not on site and able to trouble shoot problems as they have in the past. This has resulted in teachers having to cancel activities that are dependent upon technology when problems have occurred, even minor ones, without a technologist on site to respond in a reasonable time for the class to continue. When a school has had a major problem with servers or switches, staff are pulled from other schools to make corrective action, however this leaves the other schools without coverage or with scheduled repairs being pushed back. Additionally, when the District has to make upgrades or improvements to computers, the time to implement these has been proportionally increased.

### **Professional Development**

The District has reduced professional development, maintaining opportunities at a level that allows the District to meet its required responsibilities under State and Federal regulations. It should be noted that while the State removed the specific dollar amount that must be spend on professional development, it did not diminish the requirement to provide professional staff a **no cost** way to obtain sufficient professional development points for recertification. It also requires the District to have an Induction Program that provides mentoring to all non-professional status teachers. In addition, the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) placed stringent requirements upon the District to provide professional development that will allow all staff to become “highly qualified” by 2006. NCLB also requires the District to provide professional development to all paraprofessionals who must also meet the newly enacted “highly qualified” standards.

### **Reorganization of Speech Language Pathologists**

Speech/Language Pathology services have been reduced by 2.2 Speech Therapists. By centralizing the remaining pathologists, the District has been able to maintain the minimum required services as identified in IEP’s. Principals report however, that the reduction has eliminated those additional services and interventions that were performed with students who were identified as at risk and preventing them from requiring an IEP. The District has also found it difficult to hire Speech Therapists, as most candidates have expressed an apprehension of

working in multiple schools and prefer to be assigned to one only one school. The District currently has one Speech Therapist position that it has been unable to fill since September. Principals at the middle school level reported that the reduction has resulted in locating additional special education students who require no other services, on the same team and/or class as students who require significant services, in order to be able to schedule therapist in the time allocated.