



Wayland SEPAC

March 5, 2023

Dear School Committee, Finance Committee, Select Board and Dr. Graham,

The Wayland SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) is reaching out to you because we are extremely concerned about the elimination of two new teaching positions from next year's school budget: a full-time special education (SPED) teacher for the Spanish Immersion program at Loker school, and a full-time English Language learner (EL) teacher to be shared across the three elementary schools.

Currently, the entire Spanish Immersion program, representing five classrooms (one class in each grade K-4), is being serviced by just one, 0.7 SPED teacher. Both the Interim Director of Special Education and Principal at Loker School have confirmed that Wayland Public Schools (WPS) will be unable to meet its legal obligation to provide special education services outlined in existing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) without adding another full-time SPED teacher at Loker School. This means WPS will be out of compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and families may be entitled to compensatory services/reimbursement for missed services from the Town of Wayland under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Not funding this special education position does not absolve the district from providing special education services. If WPS does not possess resources needed to provide special education services as outlined on an IEP, the district is still responsible for providing those services, possibly through outside tutoring, parent reimbursement, and even Out of District placements. In fact, Out of District special education funding represents \$2.2 million of the \$5.3 million special education budget requested for next year. In other words, almost half of the special education budget would go to paying for Wayland students to go to other schools.

In the past few years Wayland has experienced an increase in English language learners. If funding for the requested full-time English Language (EL) teaching position is not restored, this growing population of students will face reduced access to academic support in critical areas that are particularly important for the development of reading and writing. This position would service EL students at all three elementary schools, highlighting how urgent the need is town wide for an additional full-time EL teacher at the elementary level.

In addition, the Wayland SEPAC is concerned proposed cuts to the school budget will result in the loss of crucial support services at the middle school. The middle school principal explained that because next year's 6th grade class is so large, each of the five major subjects require a 0.4 increase in teaching staff.

The middle school had requested the district fund 2 FTEs to meet this need. However, due to proposed budget cuts those positions will not be hired. The result is staffing cuts at the writing and math centers, resources in place to help students who are struggling and/or require reteaching. Again, budget cuts, that will disproportionately impact students with learning difficulties/disabilities who rely on these services.

The Wayland SEPAC is extremely concerned that the proposed budget cuts will begin a habit in WPS of underfunding special education services; further exasperating the existing strain within our district's special education department.

Time missed on learning is detrimental to all children, but it is especially detrimental to children with learning disabilities and special needs. We would like to remind the Town of Wayland that an IEP is a legally binding document, mandated and enforced by both Federal and State education laws. The failure to comply with IEPs is both wrong and may prove more costly to the town in the long term.

The Wayland SEPAC strongly recommends the Finance Committee, Select Board, School Committee and Acting Superintendent immediately reconsider the proposed cuts to the school budget, and restore funding for the much needed full-time, Spanish Immersion SPED teacher, full-time elementary EL teacher, 2 full-time teachers at the middle school. These budget cuts do not represent a “Top Performing” school district, disproportionately impact students with disabilities and will put the district in violation of both state and federal education laws.

While these cuts may look appealing on paper in this moment; at best they will end up costing Wayland more money in the long run (through reimbursement for special education services missed, out of district placements, and legal fees); and at worst prevent the most vulnerable children in our district from receiving services they need, and have a legal right to receive, to help them reach their full potential.

Town budget cuts should not be made on the backs of children with disabilities.

We appreciate your careful consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Katy Andrus and Courtney Conery
Co-chairs, Wayland SEPAC

About the Wayland SEPAC

The mission of the Wayland SEPAC is to help foster an innovative educational environment in which students with special education needs have equal access to educational opportunities and a school environment where ALL CHILDREN are encouraged to reach their potential. Membership to the Wayland SEPAC is open to any resident of Wayland, or person affiliated with the Wayland Public Schools. Massachusetts state law requires every public school district in the state to establish a SEPAC, with both an advisory and participatory function.

The Wayland SEPAC may be reached at: waylandsepac@gmail.com or www.waylandsepac.com