

WORCESTER REGIONAL

Chamber of Commerce



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February 1, 2016

Interim Superintendent Marco Rodrigues
Durkin Administration Building
20 Irving Street
Worcester, MA 01609

Dear Superintendent Rodrigues:

Over the past month there have been several articles in the *Telegram & Gazette* about the Worcester Public School Department's student enrollment levels and budget. The article that appeared in the January 12, 2016 edition of the *Telegram & Gazette* included projections from the Worcester Public Schools (WPS) that student enrollment levels for the fiscal year 2017 budget will likely remain at current levels. Additionally, it is expected that the state's Chapter 70 funding for the fiscal year 2017 budget will likely receive a modest increase from 2016 levels.

A subsequent *Telegram & Gazette* article on January 15 reported that, as a result of the likely level funding of Chapter 70, static student enrollment, and the City of Worcester's adherence to the state's minimum contribution funding requirement, the preliminary WPS 2017 fiscal budget would likely have an operational deficit of approximately \$5 million. It is important to note that the state funding formula does not include contributions made by the city to the Worcester Public Schools in the capital budget.

While these projected fiscal year 2017 figures are preliminary and the state budgetary process has just begun, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce would make the following suggestions to the school committee and interim superintendent so as to minimize budgetary impacts to the classroom. Many of our member businesses are active boosters of the Worcester Public Schools both in terms of financial resources and volunteer support. We would ask that the school administration and school committee review and consider the implementation of the following suggestions as budget discussions get under way this week at Thursday's school committee meeting.

1. Seek to have WPS personnel pay the same co-pays as municipal employees of the City of Worcester that were negotiated by City Manager Augustus in 2014. This alone would result in an estimated minimum annual savings of \$1.5 million.

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2. The Worcester Public Schools should immediately implement the process to access the net metering program which is estimated to be a \$1.7 million annual savings. The City of Worcester has realized significant savings through this program.
3. Review existing contracts and procedures that drive up school and athletic field maintenance costs.
4. Consider advertising request for proposals for the landscape and maintenance of the outside of all WPS school buildings and athletic fields.
5. Coordinate and streamline field and facility permitting with the city parks department for youth and athletic organizations to facilitate a true, one-stop permitting process.
6. Consider the creation of a budget taskforce of business, higher education, and health care chief financial officers to review the WPS budget to seek out possible savings or efficiencies.

Sincerely,

W. Stuart Loosemore
Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy

CC: Joseph M. Petty, Mayor
Worcester School Committee Members
Edward M. Augustus, City Manager

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