



Board of Finance
Public Hearing/Special Hearing Minutes

Wednesday, March 25, 2026
Town Hall Auditorium 7:00 pm

Present: Chairman Glenn Patterson, Bill Sheehan, Robert Tuneski, Michael Rocchetti, Ann Peabody, Joseph Filippetti (via cell phone), and Jerry Fischer

Elected: First Selectman Robert Brule; David Campo, Town Clerk; Susan Driscoll, RTM Moderator; Deb Roselli Kelly, BOE Chair; Marcia Benvenuti, BOE

Staff: Jeffrey Robillard, IT Manager; Paige Walton, Assessor; Thomas Giard, Superintendent of Schools; Christine Walters, Director of Human Resources; Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works; Chris Haley, Director of Fire Services; Steven Sinagra, Director of Emergency Management; David Ferland, Lieutenant Police Department; Mark Wujtewicz, Planning Director; Ryan McNamara, Director Recreation & Parks; Dani Gorman, Human Services Administrator; Christine Johnson, Library Director; Jill Stevens, Director Utility Commission; Rebecca Hall, Admin Assistant Finance Office/BOF Recording Secretary

1. **Establishment of a quorum and call to order:**

A quorum was established and the Public Hearing of all Town budgets for Fiscal Year 2026/2027 of the Board of Finance was called to order at 7:00pm on March 25, 2026.

An opening statement regarding the final action budget process was made by Glenn Patterson, Chairman.

2. **Public Comment (all attached to these minutes):**

- a. Marcia Benvenuti, 1 Raymond Lane (read at meeting)
- b. James Nicholas, 15A Shore Road (read at meeting & email)
- c. Jennifer Nicholas, 15A Shore Road (read at meeting)
- d. Chelsey Roberts, 8 Trumbull Road (read at meeting)
- e. Karryne Fox, 261 Shore Road (email)
- f. Brianna Hogarty, 50 Dimmock Road (email)
- g. Becca Brody, 57 Lamphere Road (email)
- h. Laura Rodriguez, 20 Shore Road (email)
- i. Erin McNamara, 25 Tiffany Ave (email)
- j. Maggie Sullivan, 10 Perry Ave (email)

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
WATERFORD, CT
2026 APR - 1 P 2:37
ATTEST: *David J. Campo*
TOWN CLERK

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Robert Tuneski to adjourn the public hearing at 7:24pm.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Robert Tuneski to reorder the agenda to hear Board of Education as first line item.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

3. Final Budgetary Action:

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Michael Rocchetti to consider the budget requests as designated by the series subtotals above without individual motions for each series and department to expedite the meeting. Bill Sheehan will make the motion on all budgets and Michael Rocchetti will second the motion.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Standing Motion to consider the Board of Education budget request for \$62,540,629.

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Ann Peabody to add \$330,000 back to the Board of Education budget to give a revised total of \$62,870,629.

Vote: 3-4-0

No: Patterson, Rocchetti, Filippetti, Tuneski

Motion: Failed

Motion by Jerry Fischer and seconded by Ann Peabody to restore \$100,000 back to the Board of Education budget to give a revised total of \$62,640,629.

Vote: 5-2-0

No: Rocchetti, Tuneski

Motion: Passed

- Board of Education (10160) in the amount of \$62,640,629

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Board of Selectmen (10101) in the amount of \$207,470

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Registrar of Voters (10102) in the amount of \$126,410

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Board of Finance (10103) in the amount of \$86,406

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Glenn Patterson and seconded by Bill Sheehan to reduce the Assessor's budget by \$12,064 to give a revised subtotal of \$311,296.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Assessor (10104) in the revised amount of \$339,196

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Board of Assessment Appeals (10105) in the amount of \$5,693

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Tax Collector (10106) in the amount of \$233,609

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Finance Department (10107) in the amount of \$805,507

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Legal Department (10108) in the amount of \$295,000

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Town Clerk (10109) in the amount of \$271,688

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Planning & Zoning Department (10110) in the amount of \$699,654

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Building Maintenance (10111) in the amount of \$1,217,876

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Michael Rocchetti to reduce the Insurance budget by \$58,715.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Insurance (10112) in the revised amount of \$5,863,439

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Economic Development Commission (10113) in the amount of \$25,407

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Conservation Commission (10114) in the amount of \$18,250

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Zoning Board of Appeals (10115) in the amount of \$4,310

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Glenn Patterson and seconded by Jerry Fischer to reduce the Retirement budget by \$1,183,112.

- Retirement Commission (10116) in the revised amount of \$6,112,411

Vote: 6-1-0 No: Sheehan Motion: Passed

- Representative Town Meeting (10117) in the amount of \$17,802

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Building Department (10118) in the amount of \$355,537

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Youth & Family Services (10119) in the amount of \$292,078

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Social Service Grants/Misc. (10120) in the amount of \$122,825

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Contingency (10121) in the amount of \$285,000

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Emergency Management (10122) in the amount of \$1,270,180

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Fire Services (10123) in the amount of \$4,345,218

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Police Commission (10129) in the amount of \$7,307,124

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Public Works (10130) in the amount of \$5,312,218

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Conservation of Health (10132) in the amount of \$160,368

Vote: 7-0-0 Motion: Passed

- Public Health Nursing Service (10133) in the amount of \$17,280

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Senior Services Commission (10135) in the amount of \$528,682

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Waterford Public Library (10136) in the amount of \$1,045,991

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Recreation & Parks Commission (10137) in the amount of \$1,608,405

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Flood & Erosion Control Board (10141) in the amount of \$1,104

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Ethics Commission (10143) in the amount of \$900

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Human Resources (10145) in the amount of \$256,477

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Information Technology (10147) in the amount of \$1,380,069

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Debt Service (10139) in the amount of \$7,922,996

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Glenn Patterson and seconded by Bill Sheehan to reduce the Current Year Capital Improvement budget by \$175,000.

- Current Year Capital Improvement (10138) in the revised amount of \$3,364,490

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Transfers to Capital and Non-Recurring Expenditure Fund (10140) in the amount of \$816,971

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- General Government Operations Subtotal in the amount of \$40,619,584

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Total Capital & Debt Service in the amount of \$12,104,457

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Motion by Robert Tuneski and seconded by Michael Rocchetti to accept the Total of General Government Operations + Capital & Debt Service in the amount of \$52,724,041

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

- Town of Waterford total budget FY26-27 in the amount of \$115,364,670, and forward on to the RTM.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

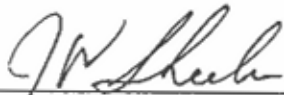
4. Adjournment:

Motion by Bill Sheehan and seconded by Robert Tuneski to adjourn the Budget Meeting of the Board of Finance at 8:15pm.

Vote: 7-0-0

Motion: Passed

Respectively Submitted,



Bill Sheehan, Clerk



Rebecca L. Hall, Secretary

Attachments:

Marcia Benvenuti, Public Comment
James Nicholas, Public Comment
Jennifer Nicholas, Public Comment
Chelsey Roberts, Public Comment
Karryne Fox, Public Comment
Brianna Hogarty, Public Comment
Becca Brody, Public Comment
Laura Rodriguez, Public Comment
Erin McNamara, Public Comment
Maggie Sullivan, Public Comment

Marcia Benvenuti 1 Raymond Lane - BOF 3/25/26 BOF

I am addressing you tonight as a very, very, senior citizen,
a lifelong resident, a graduate of WHS, a mother and grandmother
whose children and grandchildren attended and graduated from
Waterford Public Schools with one still attending WHS.

I am a homeowner.

I am on a fixed income.

I am not extravagant nor irresponsible when it comes to spending
money, and some might even call me frugal.

I am also, however, a firm believer in the value of education as an
avenue to economic and emotional success in life.

A great education can change one's future.

Waterford residents realize that and choose to live here because of
our excellent educational system.

The town boards must weigh the pro's and con's of funding a system
that is not just adequate, but aggressive in fulfilling the needs of all its
students.

That costs money.

An astronomical sum of millions, which is higher than the town
budget.

But why is that?

Well it's because the BOE maintains more buildings and grounds than
the town.

It employs more staff than the town and delivers more services to its'
citizens than the town.

Those services are life changing for many of its' students.

Because the BOE budget is so large, it is an easy target for a quick fix
to the projected mill rate. So the BOF has proposed a \$459k
reduction. That figure was compiled using \$129k in insurance
savings, \$45k for a family liaison position, \$75K for an IT person and
\$220k for two elementary teachers.

The \$129k is a given reduction, proposed by the superintendent. The teaching positions -and even the IT position, however, are critical to the delivery of an educational system Waterford citizens deserve and expect.

The BOE received numerous letters and heard from a multitude of taxpayers - all pleading for the reinstatement of elementary teachers, the diverse needs of their children, and the value of small class sizes.

They cited research explaining the benefits of small class sizes especially at the elementary level. They spoke of the increasing emotional and social developmental needs of the classes. They reiterated how intervention is more effective and often remedied at an early age when classes are kept small, leading to academic proficiency and emotional stability.

Thus, the BOE's budget included two more elementary teachers than the Superintendent's budget proposal.

So now the question for the BOF is: can the taxpayers afford it?

The answer is YES.

The cost to the average Waterford taxpayer for \$330k is \$18 per year, as calculated using current total budget figures.

Can I - that single homeowner on a fixed budget and other taxpayers afford that?

Yes I can, and I think others can as well.

For that \$18, it will see the educational standards Waterford residents expect continue.

It will see student thrive and not just survive.

All for an extra \$18 per year!

Therefore, I ask you the BOF to rethink your previous motion and restore \$330k to the BOE budget.

Rebecca Hall

From: Jimmy Nicholas <jimmy@jimmyconsulting.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 5:51 AM
To: gpatters512@gmail.com; Rebecca Hall; Kimberly Allen; Joseph Mancini
Cc: Jennifer Nicholas
Subject: Supporting the BOE Budget as Approved - Research and Data Enclosed
Attachments: Jennifer-Nicholas-Letter-March-2026.pdf; Waterford-Data-Addendum-March-2026.pdf; Waterford-Fact-Sheet-March-2026.pdf

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization.

Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender's email address and know the content is safe.

Chairman Patterson, Ms. Allen, Ms. Hall, and Mr. Mancini,

My name is James "Jimmy" Nicholas. I've been a Waterford resident for 39 years, a business taxpayer for 25, and a resident taxpayer for 20. I currently serve on the Economic Development Commission. My wife, Jennifer, has been a resident taxpayer for 20 years and has volunteered at Great Neck Elementary for four years. Our son Carter is finishing fourth grade there.

I am writing to ask the Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting to support the Board of Education's FY27 budget as approved.

I understand the fiscal pressures facing Waterford. As a business owner and EDC member, I constantly think about the town's economic competitiveness. That perspective is exactly why this budget matters.

Carter's cohort is directly affected. His class is moving from four sections of 15-16 students to three sections of 21-22, a 37% increase. The class below him faces an even larger jump: 41 students currently in three sections of approximately 14 will move to two sections of 20-21, a 43% increase. Same students. One fewer teacher. Back-to-back grade levels at the same school.

Jennifer wrote a letter to the Board of Finance about this, which I have attached. To supplement her letter with research and data, I have also enclosed a one-page fact sheet and a full data addendum that includes citations from peer-reviewed studies, verified enrollment data, competitive school rankings, and economic analysis.

Three points I'd ask you to consider:

1. First Selectman Brule stated in his FY27 budget message that Waterford continues to prioritize "a level of education we expect in town." The enclosed research supports that commitment and shows what maintaining that level requires.
2. Electric Boat is bringing 3,000 to 5,000 employees to the Crystal Mall on Route 85 starting mid-2027. Where those families choose to live will be determined largely by school quality. Waterford and Groton have nearly identical home values (\$404,000 vs. \$411,000). Our schools are the only differentiator.

3. The two teaching positions cost approximately \$214,000, as calculated by the BOE's Director of Finance at the February 26 meeting. That represents 0.3% of the total budget increase. The BOE voted to retain them with no opposition. We are asking the Board of Finance and RTM to support that decision.

Waterford has been making smart investments in education for years, and the results show: top 25% of Connecticut districts, WHS ranked #21 statewide, teacher attrition at 4.7% versus the state average of 6.8%. This budget keeps that commitment intact.

Thank you for your service to the town and for your time reviewing these materials.

Respectfully,

James "Jimmy" Nicholas
&
Jennifer Nicholas

Public Comment by James Nicholas

Board of Finance FY27 Budget Public Hearing

March 25, 2026

Before I begin, I do want to thank each and every one of you for your service to this town. I get it's a thankless job, and you have to put a lot of long hours in and make very tough decisions for this community.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear from a concerned parent and taxpayer tonight. Many of you know me. For those of you who don't, I've lived in Waterford since I was about six years old. I went to Quaker Hill, Clark Lane, and Waterford High School. I started my first official business as a sophomore at Waterford High. That same business, I had office space in many different locations throughout Waterford until one day I sold that business to private equity.

Today, I'm proud to serve on the Economic Development Commission and be starting my second business. My wife, Jennifer, submitted a letter to this board about class sizes. I submitted a data addendum with research to support it and a one-page fact sheet. You should have both, but I will submit them as written to give to you as well.

As a business owner and a member of the EDC, I can certainly appreciate being fiscally responsible. Cutting teachers and combining classes can look perfect on a budget spreadsheet. However, there are intangibles that don't show up on any spreadsheet. Thankfully, we have a forum like this where concerned citizens can share some of those intangibles.

I'm going back probably about 35 years ago. My mother and father attended a meeting just like this one while I was attending Quaker Hill School. Class sizes were on the table then, too. The board at the time made the right call and kept them small.

My parents have been residents of Waterford and taxpayers for about 39 years. They are still here, still paying around \$8,000 a year in taxes. My mother still substitutes at Great Neck because she loves these kids. She taught in the New London public school system for over 30 years. She would tell you the same thing that the research says. Bigger classes mean less individual attention and more behavioral problems. That was true in her 30 years of experience, and it is true today.

Now, while I can't prove that keeping my class sizes small throughout my Waterford education is the reason why I'm standing here today as a successful business owner paying over \$40,000 a year in property taxes on my home, vehicles, and businesses, the research is unequivocally clear. Investing in children during elementary school is critical for long-term development. If keeping class sizes small helped me even a little, that one decision produced a \$40,000 a year taxpayer. I'm just one student.

Many of my high school classmates who I see here tonight, and others who aren't here, live in Waterford. That most likely has a lot to do with the school system here. Beyond being a taxpayer, I enjoy helping this town grow through my business expertise and through my role on the EDC.

It is my understanding that the Board of Education voted to retain two of three teaching positions. That vote passed with no opposition. Now, this board has reduced their budget by another \$330,000 on top of that. That puts everything that the Board of Education fought to protect at risk.

This could directly affect my son's cohort. The same group of students who went from four classes down to three just a couple of years ago. It did not last more than one year. Behavioral issues increased. The class could not even go on their end of the year field trip. The district reversed it, and this year there are four classes with a lower number of students and the kids are thriving. Now, under this plan, that same cohort could go backwards again for their final year at Great Neck. We already ran this experiment with these exact students, and we already know the outcome.

As we know, Electric Boat is bringing thousands of employees to the Crystal Mall facility right here on Route 85 in Waterford. One of the biggest factors those families will use to choose where to live is school quality. Right now, Waterford and Groton have nearly identical home values. Our schools are the only thing separating us. If our rankings decline, we lose families to East Lyme and Old Lyme. If they hold, we capture families and tax revenue for decades.

These problems end up costing the town far more than a teacher's salary. The research shows that early intervention in elementary school costs about \$200 to \$500 per student with an 85% to 95% success rate. When you miss that window and have to intervene later, that cost jumps to \$10,000 to \$20,000 per student with only a 15% to 30% success rate. Grade retention alone costs the district \$5,700 to \$6,600 per student. Special education referrals triggered by unidentified learning differences cost \$6,500 or more per year. We can invest now or pay significantly more later.

I understand this board reduced the Board of Education budget in terms of what they asked on their increase by about \$330,000, and I'm asking you to restore that reduction. That budget reflected the 5.3% increase of which 5% is contractual and fixed costs, salaries, health insurance, things that cannot be negotiated away. The money this board removed is where the students feel the impact. It is where the class sizes get decided.

I'm not asking you to tell the Board of Education how to spend it. I know you can't do that, and that is their job. I'm asking you to give them the tools to do it right. Everything is moving faster today. The last thing we should be doing is making class sizes bigger.

Not every student who goes through this system will stay in Waterford, but the ones who do stay for a reason. I stayed, my parents stayed, and we are very grateful for our teachers. Let's keep them in our town where currently the attrition is lower than surrounding towns.

Investing in education invests in the town's future. The Lyme-Old Lyme High School principal, James Wygonik, whose school ranks number eight in Connecticut, described the district's investment philosophy at a January 2026 board meeting: "It's the price we pay for the success we have."

Waterford has been paying that price for years, and the results show. By restoring the \$330,000 that was removed, it keeps the same investment philosophy intact.

I cannot speak directly for First Selectman Brule. However, he said it himself in his budget message: Waterford prioritizes a level of education we expect in town. By adding back in that \$330,000, I am personally asking this board to fund that expectation.

Thank you.

DATA ADDENDUM

Supporting Research for Maintaining Smaller Class Sizes in Waterford Schools

A Companion to Jennifer Nicholas's Letter to the Board of Finance

+14 Elementary Enrollment Growth	43% Class Size Increase (GN Gr. 4)	\$214K Cost of Two Teachers	0.3% Budget Share
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James and Jennifer Nicholas

Waterford Residents and Taxpayers

Business Taxpayer | Economic Development Commission Member

Parents, Great Neck Elementary School

March 2026

1. Gratitude and Context

The Nicholas family is grateful to the Board of Finance, the Board of Education, and the Representative Town Meeting for their continued investment in Waterford's public schools. We recognize that the FY27 Board of Education budget received an increase, and we understand the fiscal pressures facing every department in town.

This addendum is not about opposing the budget process. It is about providing research and data that we believe strengthen the case for maintaining smaller class sizes at the elementary level, particularly at Great Neck Elementary School.

The attached letter from Jennifer Nicholas was written entirely without AI assistance. It reflects the personal concern of a parent whose son, Carter, will be directly affected by the proposed section reductions. This addendum supplements her letter with **peer-reviewed research, verified enrollment data, competitive school rankings, and economic analysis** drawn from 32 research reports across multiple platforms.

CONTEXT

First Selectman Brule stated in his FY27 budget message that Waterford continues to prioritize "a level of education we expect in town." This addendum provides the research showing what that level of education requires.

2. What the Enrollment Data Actually Shows

Waterford's elementary enrollment is **growing**. The district-wide enrollment increases from **2,219 to 2,227 students (+8)** in FY27. Elementary enrollment grows from **1,004 to 1,018 (+14 students)**, the fastest growth of any level. Cutting class sections in a growing district is a staffing decision, not an enrollment necessity.

Level	FY26	FY27	Change
Elementary (K-5 + PK)	1,004	1,018	+14
CLMS (Middle School)	506	499	-7
WHS (High School)	686	687	+1
Total District	2,219	2,227	+8

Source: Waterford Public Schools 2026-27 (FY27) Projected Enrollment, as of October 1, 2025.

The FY27 Great Neck Grade 4 Example

The strongest example in the enrollment data involves 41 students currently in Grade 3 at Great Neck Elementary. These students are spread across **three sections of approximately 14 students each** in FY26. In FY27, the same 41 students will move to Grade 4 with only **two sections of 20-21 students each**. No students left. No students arrived. The only change is one fewer teacher. Class sizes increase 43%.

Great Neck Grade 4 FY27	FY26 (Current Gr. 3)	FY27 (Projected Gr. 4)
Students	41	41
Sections	3	2
Students per Section	~14	20-21
Change in Class Size		+43%

PRECEDENT

Great Neck Elementary already tried reducing sections for this same cohort in a prior year and had to reverse the decision. The district has direct experience showing this approach does not work for these students.

The pattern repeats in the grade above. Current Grade 4 students at Great Neck move from **4 sections of 15-16 to 3 sections of 21-22 in Grade 5, a 37% increase**. Back-to-back grade levels at the same school would face the same reduction.

3. The Research on Class Size and Academic Outcomes

The Tennessee STAR study remains the most rigorous class-size experiment ever conducted. It followed **11,571 students** across 79 schools using randomized assignment. Students in smaller classes (13-17 students) outperformed those in larger classes (22-26) by **0.22 standard deviations**, equivalent to two to three additional months of schooling per year. The study tested **exactly the range Waterford is considering moving from 14 to 21 students per class**.

These gains are amplified for the students who need them most. Effects were **2-3 times larger for minority students**. For students eligible for free lunch who spent four years in small classes, graduation rates rose from **70% to 88%**. This is directly relevant to Waterford, where multilingual learners have increased **117% since 2019 (from 62 to 135 students)**, approximately **33% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch**, and **19% have IEPs**. Smaller classes are not equally important for all students. They matter most for the students whose needs are growing fastest in Waterford.

Harvard economist Raj Chetty's analysis of the STAR data found that students in smaller K-3 classes were **2 percentage points more likely to attend college by age 20**. He estimated the lifetime value of a single year in a high-quality kindergarten classroom at approximately **\$750,000 per student**.

The Tipping Point

Research identifies a clear threshold pattern. Below 15 students, academic gains are strongest. Between 18 and 20, returns begin to diminish. Above 20, negative effects on learning become consistently measurable across studies.

Individual Attention

Peter Blatchford's study of 34,420 classroom observations found that for every 5-student increase in class size, the odds of a student receiving individual attention dropped by **27% (odds ratio 0.73)**. Teachers in classes of 14 provide approximately **26 minutes of individualized feedback per student per day**. At 21 students, that drops to **17 minutes, a 35% reduction**. Learning difficulties are identified **9 weeks earlier** in smaller classes. *Sources: Finn & Achilles (1990), Tennessee STAR Study; Chetty et al. (2011); Blatchford et al., CSPAR study (34,420 observations).*

4. Behavioral Impact and Teacher Burden

STAR data shows students in larger classes are **twice as likely to be off-task** during instruction. Research documents a **30-53% increase in behavioral incidents** for lower-attaining students with every 5-student increase in class size.

Teachers in larger classes lose approximately **2.4 hours per week to behavioral disruptions**. Over a school year, this equals roughly 15 lost instructional days. A 2025 Danish study confirmed that larger K-2 classes significantly increase physical and emotional distress among young students.

Teacher Retention

A 3-student decrease in class size reduces teacher departure probability by **4.2 percentage points**. Waterford's teacher attrition rate is **4.7%** compared to the state average of **6.8%** and New London's **20.1%**. This retention advantage is Waterford's competitive strength, and research shows class-size benefits flow almost entirely through experienced teachers. Replacing experienced teachers with novice hires eliminates the academic gains small classes provide.

The Connecticut Education Association's 2024 survey of **5,016 Connecticut teachers** found that 98% cite burnout and 70% would discourage others from entering the profession. Connecticut currently has **1,221 unfilled teaching vacancies**, with 71% of districts reporting open positions.

Sources: Tennessee STAR Study; Blatchford et al.; CEA 2024 Survey (n=5,016); CT State Department of Education vacancy data.

Waterford's Changing Demographics

As noted in Section 3, Waterford's student population is growing more diverse and more complex. The district now serves **24 languages daily across 270+ families**. Great Neck is legally required by Connecticut law to maintain a bilingual program. SBAC scores remain **10-12 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels**. Elementary schools have no counselors, only social workers covering IEP hours. Larger classes compound every one of these challenges.

5. Where Waterford Stands Competitively

Waterford's schools currently rank in the top 25% of all Connecticut districts on the state's Next Generation Accountability Index, which measures 22 indicators of school quality. Waterford is ranked first among districts with similar free and reduced lunch rates (28-38%) and second in its DERG-D peer group of 26 demographically similar towns.

These rankings are the product of years of investment, including a commitment to smaller class sizes at the elementary level. BOE Secretary Marcia Benvenuti stated on February 12, 2026: **"Elementary students improved substantially because of our commitment to small class sizes over the last few years."**

US News Elementary School Rankings (out of 835 CT Schools)

Town	School	US News Rank
Old Lyme	Mile Creek School	#50
East Lyme	Lillie B. Haynes	#105
East Lyme	Flanders	#117
Old Lyme	Lyme Consolidated	#124
Waterford	Oswegatchie	#127
Waterford	Great Neck	#146
East Lyme	Niantic Center	#159
Waterford	Quaker Hill	#264

Waterford's elementary schools currently compete with East Lyme and Old Lyme. Groton's district ranks **#102 of 158 statewide on Niche (grade: B)** compared to Waterford's **#35 (grade: A-)**. Old Lyme's high school jumped from #34 to #8 in Connecticut during a period when it protected small class sizes. Oswegatchie improved from #340 to #127 during a period of declining enrollment and stable staffing. The trajectory matters.

Sources: US News & World Report 2025 Elementary Rankings; Niche.com 2025 District Rankings; CT Next Generation Accountability Index.

6. The Electric Boat Opportunity

General Dynamics Electric Boat acquired the Crystal Mall on Route 85 in Waterford in October 2025. The **542,000 square-foot facility on 42 acres** will house **3,000 to 5,000 employees** beginning mid-2027. EB is hiring **8,000 workers in 2026** (2,250 in the Groton area). A **\$15.4 billion Columbia-class contract modification** was secured on March 23, 2026. This is decades of sustained growth, not a temporary spike.

Research shows **82% of Groton's 27,000 workers commute from outside the city**. School quality is the primary reason families choose surrounding towns over Groton. Among military families, **37% moved specifically for school quality**, twice the civilian rate. Waterford is described as "the most requested school district among SUBASE families with children."

THE WINDOW

The 2026-2028 window is Waterford's leverage point. As thousands of new EB employees choose where to live, school quality will determine which town captures their families, their property tax revenue, and their community investment. Once families settle, word-of-mouth reinforces the pattern for years.

7. The Economic Case

Brookings Institution research shows that homes near high-performing schools are valued **\$205,000 higher** on average. Properties in districts rated 9-10 on GreatSchools command a **22-28% premium**. Among homebuyers, **52% rank school district as important** in their purchase decision. For buyers in their 30s (the EB hiring demographic), that figure rises to 75%.

Competitive Positioning

Town	Median Home Value	Niche Rank / Grade
Waterford	\$404,000	#35 / A-
East Lyme	\$500,000	#18-21 / A
Old Lyme	\$621,000	Top 10 / A+
Stonington	\$587,000	#41 / A-
Groton	\$411,000	#102 / B
New London	\$304,000	#147 / C+

Waterford and Groton have **nearly identical home values (\$404,000 vs. \$411,000)**. School quality is the only differentiator separating Waterford from Groton in the eyes of homebuyers. If Waterford's school rankings decline toward Groton's level, no home-value cushion exists. The two teaching positions cost **\$214,000**. The competitive positioning of Waterford's schools protects a Grand List of **\$4.5 billion**.

Sources: Brookings Institution; National Association of Realtors; Zillow/Realtor.com median home sale data, 2025.

8. The Pipeline Effect

Elementary school quality is not an isolated outcome. It is the foundation of the entire district. Research consistently shows that decisions made in grades K-5 cascade upward through middle school and high school for years.

STAR study advantages persisted through 8th grade even after students returned to regular-sized classes. The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that students who are not proficient readers by 3rd grade are **4 times more likely to drop out of high school**. For the approximately 33% of Waterford students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, **that multiplier rises to 6 times**.

Early intervention costs **\$200 to \$500 per student with an 85-95% success rate**. Crisis intervention in later grades costs **\$10,000 to \$20,000 with only a 15-30% success rate**. Investing at the elementary level is not only better for students; it is dramatically less expensive for the district.

Waterford's own data confirms this pattern. Board Chair Benvenuti noted that **elementary performance improved under the commitment to small class sizes**. Waterford High School currently ranks **#21 of 145 Connecticut high schools** with three consecutive years of SAT increases. The students arriving at WHS today went through elementary school when class sizes were smaller. That is the pipeline. Protecting it protects the district's strongest competitive asset.

Sources: STAR longitudinal data; Annie E. Casey Foundation; WSIPP cost-benefit analyses; Waterford BOE minutes, 2/12/26.

9. The Cost of Getting This Wrong

The Economic Policy Institute and Alan Krueger's analysis of STAR data found that the lifetime benefits of smaller classes run **twice the costs**, generating a 6% internal rate of return. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy calculated a **99% probability that kindergarten class-size reduction breaks even fiscally**.

Hidden Costs of Larger Classes

Research documents costs that do not appear in the year a class section is cut but accumulate over time: grade retention costs the district \$5,700 to \$6,600 per student. Special education referrals triggered by unidentified learning differences cost \$6,500 or more per year per student. Behavioral intervention programs require additional staffing and resources.

The Enrollment Spiral

Bellwether Education Partners analyzed 9,300 school districts and found 68% are experiencing declining enrollment. The pattern is consistent: perceived decline in school quality triggers departure of higher-income, more engaged families first. Every **100 students lost costs a district approximately \$1 million in state funding**. Once an enrollment decline begins, it persists for **10 or more years**.

Cautionary Examples in the Region

Montville's elementary enrollment has declined 35% over the past decade, resulting in 28 teachers cut. Norwich has cut 160 employees since 2010 while absorbing \$9 million or more in special education costs. New London's teacher attrition reached **20.1% (three times the state average)**, graduation rates fell from 82% to 67%, and math proficiency dropped to 12.5%. Groton spent \$90 million or more on new magnet schools and still ranks #102 of 158 districts on Niche. *Sources: EPI/Krueger STAR cost-benefit analysis; WSIPP; Bellwether Education Partners; CT State Department of Education.*

10. What We Are Asking

The Board of Education voted to retain two teaching positions at Great Neck Elementary. That vote passed with one abstention and no opposition. The final FY27 BOE budget of \$62,999,628 passed with no opposition or abstentions. The cost of those two positions is approximately \$214,000, representing 0.34% of the \$63 million budget and 0.3% of the total budget increase.

THE ASK

Board Chair Roselli-Kelley stated on February 26: "It really is only a 0.3% increase. I think we can live with that in Waterford and deliver the right education for our students."

We ask the Board of Finance and the Representative Town Meeting to support the Board of Education's budget as approved. The research is clear: maintaining smaller class sizes at the elementary level is an investment in Waterford's academic performance, competitive positioning, property values, and long-term fiscal health.

Lyme-Old Lyme High School Principal James Wygonik, whose school ranks #8 in Connecticut, described the district's investment philosophy at a January 2026 board meeting: 'It's the price we pay for the success we have.'

Waterford has been paying that price for years, and the results show. This budget keeps that commitment intact for \$214,000."

11. Sources and Citations

Finn, J.D. & Achilles, C.M. (1990). Tennessee STAR Study: Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio experiment. 11,571 students, 79 schools, randomized design.

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Economic Policy Institute / Krueger, A. STAR cost-benefit analysis: 6% internal rate of return.

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Brookings Institution. "Housing Costs, Zoning, and Access to High-Scoring Schools."

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US News & World Report (2025). Connecticut Elementary School Rankings.

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CT Next Generation Accountability Index. 22-indicator school performance framework.

CT State Department of Education. Teacher vacancy and attrition data.

Waterford Public Schools. FY27 Projected Enrollment, as of October 1, 2025.

Waterford Board of Education meeting transcripts: January 8, February 5, February 12, February 26, 2026.

Town of Waterford. FY27 Budget documents and First Selectman's budget message.

General Dynamics Electric Boat. Crystal Mall acquisition (Oct 2025); Columbia-class contract (\$15.4B, March 2026).

WATERFORD SCHOOLS | CLASS SIZE FACT SHEET

Supporting the BOE Budget as Approved | March 2026 | James and Jennifer Nicholas

+14	43%	\$214K	0.3%
Elementary Enrollment Growth (FY27)	Class Size Increase, GN Grade 4	Cost of Two Teachers	Share of Total Budget Increase

THE CENTRAL FACT: At Great Neck, 41 students currently in 3 sections of ~14 will move to 2 sections of 20-21. *Class sizes increase 43%.*
Same students. One fewer teacher.
 Current Grade 4 students face the same pattern, moving from 4 sections of 15-16 to 3 sections of 21-22. *Class sizes increase 37%.*

THE RESEARCH

0.22 SD

Academic gain in smaller classes (STAR)
 11,571 students, randomized. Effects 2-3x larger for minority students. Waterford multilingual learners up 117% since 2019.

35% Reduction in individual attention
 From 26 min/student/day at 14 to 17 min at 21. (Blatchford, 34,420 observations)

2x More likely off-task in larger classes
 Behavioral incidents increase 30-53% per 5-student increase.

70% to 88%

Graduation rate with 4 yrs small classes
 Free-lunch eligible students. 33% of Waterford students qualify. (STAR longitudinal data)

\$200-\$500

Early intervention cost per student
 85-95% success rate. Crisis intervention later: \$10K-\$20K with 15-30% success. Invest now or pay more later.

THE RANKINGS

Top 25% Waterford among all CT districts
 Next Gen Accountability Index, 22 indicators. #1 in FRL peer group.

#21 / 145 WHS high school ranking in CT
 Three consecutive years of SAT score increases.

4.7% Teacher attrition (vs. 6.8% state avg)
 Retention IS the competitive advantage. CT has 1,221 unfilled vacancies.

#35 A- Waterford district (Niche)
 East Lyme: #18 A. Groton: #102 B.
 School quality is the only differentiator.

\$404K vs \$411K
 Waterford vs. Groton home values
 Nearly identical. If rankings decline toward Groton, no cushion exists.

THE OPPORTUNITY

3,000-5,000
 EB employees at Crystal Mall (mid-2027)
 542,000 sq ft on Route 85. \$15.4B Columbia-class contract secured March 2026.

82% of Groton workers commute from outside
 School quality is the primary reason families choose surrounding towns.

37% of military families moved for schools
 2x the civilian rate. Waterford is the most requested district for SUBASE families.

\$205K Home value premium near top schools
 Brookings Institution. 52% of buyers rank school district as top factor.

2026-2028 The leverage window
 Once EB families settle, word-of-mouth reinforces for years. This is Waterford's moment.

"It really is only a 0.3% increase. I think we can live with that in Waterford and deliver the right education for our students."
 Board Chair Roselli-Kelley, February 26, 2026

Sources: Tennessee STAR Study; Chetty et al.; Blatchford CSPAR; Brookings Institution; NAR; US News; Niche; CT Next Gen Index; Waterford BOE Enrollment Data (Oct 2025)

Tuesday, March, 24 2026

Dear Board of Finance,

My name is Jennifer Nicholas and I'm a mother of a 4th grader at Great Neck Elementary School. I'm writing to express my concern regarding a possible increase in the classroom size for the upcoming school year affecting all the Waterford schools.

Classroom size matters a great deal for our young children and our teachers. Common sense and quite a bit of research confirms this.

Studies have shown that children in smaller classes (1:15 or so) as compared to larger classroom sizes, have higher test scores, participate more, demonstrate improved behavior and have a closer relationship with their teachers. The research also shows that smaller classroom sizes allow for more individual attention, which is especially helpful in reading and math where students advance at different speeds. Additionally, smaller classes are linked to higher test scores and better comprehension which improves academic outcomes. Teachers are able to build closer connections, allowing the kids to feel comfortable seeking help when needed.

The Tennessee STAR Study, a landmark research project, demonstrated that students in smaller classrooms (1:13-1:17) achieved long-term success and higher test scores, including higher graduation rates. These benefits are particularly evident in younger grades, where early literacy and numeracy skills form the foundation for future academic success (California Department of Education).

Large class sizes not only negatively affect students but also contribute to teacher burnout. According to research by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), overcrowded classrooms significantly increase teacher stress levels, making it difficult to manage the learning needs of their students. Burnout leads to a lower level of instruction, higher teacher turnover, and overall instability in the learning environment (Kidsdata.org).

Wouldn't we want to set up our children and our teachers for success? We can do better for our Waterford kids and our teachers, who are the backbone of our schools.

By addressing class sizes now, the BOE can position itself as a district that not only values education but also listens to its community and actively works to provide an environment where students can thrive. This will ensure that parents feel confident in keeping their children within the district and encourage new families to join.

Sources: The School Superintendents Association, Glen Robinson's synthesis of class-size research in the issue of Educational Leadership, work by Robert Slavin and others at John Hopkins University, Tennessee's Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) experiment, The American Federation of Teachers, Kidsdata.org and Harold Wenglinsky's 1997 Education Testing Service study titled "When Money Matters".

Respectfully,

Jennifer Nicholas

Parent, Great Neck Elementary School
Waterford, Connecticut

Good Evening,

I would like to begin by sharing that I was raised in Waterford and attended Great Neck Elementary School, Clark Lane Middle School, and Waterford High School. My parents continue to reside in the same home on Goshen Road where my two siblings and I were raised. I have chosen to remain in Waterford to raise my own children, who now attend Waterford Public Schools.

I am writing as a parent of two children at Great Neck Elementary School, one of whom is currently in 3rd grade and will be directly affected by the proposed class size increases next year. I spoke at a recent Board of Education meeting, but I would like to further outline my concerns and frustration regarding the proposed budget cuts eliminating the potential for three classroom teacher positions at Great Neck for next year.

I am particularly concerned about the current 3rd grade, which has three classes this year and is proposed to move to two next year. There are significant behavioral needs within this grade. My daughter's class includes a student with paraprofessional support due to unsafe behaviors. Increasing class sizes will not improve this situation; instead, it increases the number of students impacted by those unsafe behaviors and places additional strain on staff.

Additionally, Great Neck has previously condensed the current 4th grade class from four classes down to three, and it was not successful. The unique dynamics and varied needs of students made the classroom environment more challenging and less effective for both students and staff.

Early intervention is imperative for students. As a teacher myself, I see firsthand the long-term impact when children miss critical foundational skills in their early years. When those gaps are not addressed in elementary school, they follow students into middle and high school, where they become increasingly difficult to remediate. We must intervene at the elementary level to ensure success at the secondary level. Increasing class sizes does not support this goal. Larger classes make it more challenging to provide the individualized attention, differentiation, and targeted instruction necessary to ensure foundational skills are effectively taught, especially given the diverse and unique needs of students.

These changes would significantly increase class sizes during the years when students have the highest social-emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs. Early elementary is when class size matters most — for regulation, connection, learning, and overall well-being. Larger classes at this stage risk diminishing the individual attention and support that young students require to build strong foundations.

It is also important to consider the ongoing housing development in the Great Neck area, including construction behind Clark Lane Middle School, on Willetts Avenue, and along Great Neck Road. These developments are likely to impact enrollment and class sizes—if not immediately, then in the near future.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that while data and numerical metrics may appear favorable on paper, they do not fully capture the day-to-day realities within our classrooms. Without being actively present in the schools and observing the dynamics of students and their individual needs, it is difficult to gain an accurate understanding of the challenges educators face.

I strongly encourage you to visit our schools and witness firsthand the unique classroom environments and the diverse needs of our students. Decisions such as reducing classroom teaching positions should take into account not only numerical data but also the lived experiences of those working directly with students each day. For staff members dedicated to supporting these children, it can be both discouraging and frustrating to see critical decisions made without this on-the-ground perspective.

I understand that developing a budget that meets everyone's needs is extremely challenging. However, I respectfully and strongly urge you to reconsider cutting the three classroom teacher positions at Great Neck Elementary School. Our children have diverse academic, social, and behavioral needs, and maintaining reasonable class sizes is essential to supporting their success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chelsey Baude Roberts

8 Trumbull Road

Rebecca Hall

From: Glenn Patterson <gpatters512@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 3:02 PM
To: Rebecca Hall
Subject: Fwd: Projected class sizes GN 26-27

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I missed the morning window but here they come...

Email #1

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Karryne Fox <kfox@waterfordschools.org>
Date: Tue, Mar 24, 2026 at 12:59 PM
Subject: Projected class sizes GN 26-27
To: <kallen@waterfordct.org>
Cc: <gpatters512@gmail.com>, <rhall@waterfordct.org>

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing as a concerned Great Neck parent regarding the reported plan to reduce the number of classrooms for next year's rising fifth grade class from four classes back down to three. While I understand that difficult decisions sometimes need to be made regarding district budgets, I hope the district will also take into consideration the broader impact that class size has on students, teachers, and the overall learning environment.

Last year, this grade level was split into three classrooms, and it quickly became clear that the class sizes and classroom dynamics created significant challenges. The situation ultimately required the addition of a fourth classroom this year in order to better support both students and staff. That adjustment made a meaningful difference.

During their third grade year, teachers spent much of their time focusing heavily on behavior management and classroom regulation rather than being able to dedicate the time and energy needed for academic instruction. Larger class sizes can make it difficult to address individual student needs, provide appropriate support, and maintain an environment that allows all students to learn effectively.

This year, with the smaller class groupings, teachers have finally been able to shift more of their attention back to academics and student growth. After the disruptions to learning that many students experienced over the past

several years, it is especially important that classrooms remain structured in a way that allows teachers to focus on instruction, targeted support, and helping students close learning gaps.

On a personal level, my daughter was diagnosed this year with ADHD and anxiety. These needs were not identified last year, and I believe the large class sizes and the amount of time teachers had to spend managing behavior made it extremely difficult for individual student needs like hers to be recognized. With more manageable class sizes this year, her challenges were finally noticed and addressed, allowing her to begin receiving the support she needs to succeed.

When teachers are responsible for very large groups of students, it can become more difficult to identify children who may need additional support, evaluations, or accommodations such as 504 plans or special education services. Adequate class sizes allow educators the opportunity to observe students closely and ensure that those who need help are identified and supported as early as possible.

In addition to being a parent, I have also worked in the building as the building substitute for the past four years. This has given me the opportunity to work closely within these classrooms and see firsthand the difference between when the grade level was divided into three classes and now when it is divided into four. The difference in classroom environment, teacher capacity, and student support is significant. With smaller class groupings, teachers are able to give more attention to students academically and behaviorally, and the overall classroom environment is much more conducive to learning.

While I understand that budget considerations are often part of decisions like this, increasing class sizes will be undoing the progress that has been made. Larger classrooms can sometimes lead to additional costs later if more students require academic interventions, behavioral supports, evaluations, or specialized services that might otherwise have been prevented with earlier attention and support in the classroom.

Many parents value the progress that has been made this year and are concerned about the potential impact of increasing class sizes again. We all share the same goal of providing students with the strongest possible learning environment, and maintaining classroom structures that support both teachers and students is an important part of that. I respectfully hope the district will take these perspectives into careful consideration before final decisions are made.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to our students.

Sincerely,
Karryne Fox

Rebecca Hall

From: Glenn Patterson <gpatters512@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 3:02 PM
To: Rebecca Hall
Subject: Fwd: Urging the Board of Finance to Preserve Four 4th Grade Classes at Great Neck School

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Email #2

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Brianna Hogarty <briannaleigh7@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Mar 24, 2026 at 1:08 PM
Subject: Urging the Board of Finance to Preserve Four 4th Grade Classes at Great Neck School
To: kallen@waterfordct.org <kallen@waterfordct.org>, gpatters512@gmail.com <gpatters512@gmail.com>, rhall@waterfordct.org <rhall@waterfordct.org>, jmancini@waterfordct.org <jmancini@waterfordct.org>
Cc: rbruhle@waterfordct.org <rbruhle@waterfordct.org>

Dear Members of the Great Neck Board of Finance,

I am writing to respectfully urge the Board to maintain four classrooms for the current 4th grade class rather than consolidating to three. While I understand the Board faces difficult budgetary decisions, I believe this particular reduction would have meaningful and lasting consequences for our students — and I hope the following points will merit serious consideration.

This Class Has Already Shown That Three Sections Don't Work

This is not a hypothetical concern. This specific group of students has already experienced a three-class configuration, and it did not work. The Board would not be making a neutral budget decision — it would be repeating an approach that has already been tried and found inadequate for these particular children. That history matters and should weigh heavily in this discussion.

A Class with Significant Challenges Needs More Support, Not Less

This cohort of students has well-documented challenges that require greater individualized attention and more targeted support. Concentrating 62 students into three classrooms — averaging over 20 students per class — moves in exactly the wrong direction. Teachers working with high-needs students require the time and bandwidth to address each child's needs effectively. Larger class sizes make that increasingly difficult, and the students who already face the greatest obstacles are the ones who will suffer most from the reduction.

Class Size and the Teacher-to-Student Ratio

Research consistently shows that smaller class sizes produce better academic outcomes, particularly for elementary-age students and for those with learning or behavioral challenges. With 62 students divided among only three classes, teachers will be stretched beyond what is reasonable given the demands of this particular group. The ability to identify struggling students early, differentiate instruction, and maintain a productive classroom environment all depend on manageable numbers.

A False Economy

Eliminating one teaching position may appear to produce savings on a spreadsheet, but the downstream costs — in remedial support, intervention services, and the challenge of re-scaling should enrollment grow — often outweigh the short-term budget relief. Investing adequately in this class now is far more cost-effective than addressing the consequences of under-resourcing their education later.

The evidence is clear, and precedent has already been set: this class needs four classes. I urge the Board to make the decision that serves our children rather than simply the bottom line.

Thank you sincerely for your time and for your service to Great Neck's students and families.

Respectfully,

Brianna Hogarty

Rebecca Hall

From: Glenn Patterson <gpatters512@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 3:03 PM
To: Rebecca Hall
Subject: Fwd: Petition for Maintaining Current Class Sizes for Upcoming 5th Grade At Great Neck

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Email #4

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Becca G Brody <beccagbrody@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Mar 24, 2026 at 1:38 PM
Subject: Petition for Maintaining Current Class Sizes for Upcoming 5th Grade At Great Neck
To: kallen@waterfordct.org <kallen@waterfordct.org>, gpatters512@gmail.com <gpatters512@gmail.com>, <rhall@waterfordct.org>

To the Members of the Board of Education,

My son is currently in 4th grade at Great Neck Elementary School. I am writing to formally express my concerns regarding the proposed plan to reduce the number of 5th-grade classes from four to three for the upcoming school year. Transitioning from classes of 15–16 students to larger groups of 20 or more comes at a critical developmental juncture. Fifth grade serves as a vital bridge to middle school, where students are expected to master complex academic concepts and increased personal responsibility. Smaller class sizes allow teachers to provide the essential one-on-one mentorship and differentiated instruction necessary to ensure every student is emotionally and academically prepared for the rigors of secondary education.

The high quality of our school system is precisely what makes Waterford such a desirable place to live. Our town's reputation is built on an education system that prioritizes student success and fosters a supportive environment where every child is known by their educators. Maintaining smaller class sizes is a key component of that excellence; it allows our schools to remain competitive and ensures that our community continues to be a top choice for families who value academic rigor and personal attention.

With 15 to 16 students, educators can foster a more cohesive community, identify learning gaps early, and provide immediate feedback. Increasing the class size by nearly 30% risks diluting the quality of individual attention each child receives and may overwhelm the social-emotional support systems currently in place. I urge the Board to prioritize the proven benefits of smaller class sizes and maintain the current four-section structure to ensure our students have the best possible foundation as they complete their elementary years.

Sincerely,

Becca Brody

--

Becca Brody
beccagbrody@gmail.com
860 705 4354

Rebecca Hall

Public Comment

From: laura rodriguez <levelynrodriguez@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 1:30 PM
To: Gpatters512@gmail.com; Rebecca Hall; Kimberly Allen
Subject: Public Commentary for the BOF Meeting on 3/25/2026

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Dear Members of the Board of Finance,

Please accept this letter to be read during public commentary at the Board of Finance Meeting on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

I am writing to express concern regarding the proposal to decrease the BOE budget for the next school year. It is proposed that with the decreased budget it would lead to the elimination of three classrooms and increase class sizes for the upcoming school year at Great Neck Elementary School. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective and offer input on how this change may impact students and learning.

Smaller class sizes in elementary school give teachers more time to really get to know each child and support their learning in meaningful ways. With fewer students in the room, it's easier to notice and address learning gaps earlier, gives the ability to know students strengths and needs more deeply, and allows smoother transitions reducing behavior issues.

Our schools are already facing significant behavioral challenges that require consistent support, resources, and trained staff to ensure a safe and productive learning environment for all students. With our diverse student population there is a greater range of learning styles and needs, including many different primary languages among students and families. These diversities are a strength and they also require support and resources. Smaller class sizes will make it easier to meet all those needs without anyone falling through the cracks. Reducing the budget at this time would make it more difficult to meet these needs effectively and I fear could negatively impact the overall school environment.

The smaller classroom setting will help students feel supported and confident as they build the foundational skills that matter so much in the early years. I respectfully ask that the board consider maintaining the current budget as decisions are made for the upcoming school year. Doing so would help preserve the quality of instruction and support that our students benefit from each day.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Laura Rodriguez
20 Shore Road

Rebecca Hall

Public Comment

From: Erin McNamara <erinmcnamara524@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 4:24 PM
To: Kimberly Allen; Gpatters512@gmail.com; Rebecca Hall
Subject: For Public Comment 3/25/2026 – Concern Regarding Proposed BOE Budget Cuts

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Dear Members of the Board of Finance,

Please accept this letter to be read during public commentary at the Board of Finance Meeting on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

I am writing as a parent of a second-grade student at Great Neck School, a grade level currently under consideration for the removal of one classroom and teacher. I respectfully urge you to reconsider this proposed reduction.

I am also the mother of a fifth grader who has had an amazing experience throughout her time at Great Neck School. Our family has seen firsthand the positive impact that appropriate class sizes, strong teacher support, and a well-structured learning environment can have on a child's growth—both academically and socially. It is because of this experience that I feel so strongly about protecting those same opportunities for our younger students.

In my professional life as a local realtor, I am regularly in conversation with prospective homeowners who ask about the schools and what it's like raising a family here. While I am mindful not to speak in a professional capacity about the school system, I am fortunate to be able to share my personal experiences as a parent. The strength of our schools—and the classroom environments we provide—play a significant role in how families view and choose our community.

At the elementary level, learning is not solely academic. Social and emotional development plays an equally critical role. These are formative years where students are learning how to regulate emotions, build relationships, and develop confidence in the classroom environment.

In my son's current classroom alone, there are at least three students who require additional support and accommodations throughout the day. I am aware of this not only as a parent, but through my son's experiences—he is often asked to accompany classmates during breaks or transitions. He has also shared that there have been multiple occasions where the entire class has had to evacuate the room due to behavioral outbursts.

I share this not as criticism, but as context. My son is compassionate, patient, and inclusive—qualities I am incredibly proud of. However, these experiences highlight the very real demands placed on both teachers and students in today's classrooms.

Reducing the education budget in a way that eliminates classrooms will directly result in larger class sizes. This means more students per teacher, fewer opportunities for individualized attention, and an increased concentration of students with varying academic, behavioral, and emotional needs within a single classroom.

If just one classroom has multiple students requiring additional support, it is reasonable to assume similar needs exist across the other three second-grade classrooms. Reducing from four classrooms to three would significantly increase class sizes while simultaneously concentrating the number of students requiring additional attention.

Educational research consistently shows that:

- **Students in smaller classes demonstrate stronger academic performance and improved behavior outcomes.**
- **Classrooms with higher numbers of students requiring individualized support benefit from lower student-to-teacher ratios, allowing teachers to effectively meet diverse needs.**

As someone who has worked within the special education department at Waterford High School—as both a paraprofessional and long-term substitute—I have firsthand knowledge of what it takes to support all learners. Providing equitable access to education often requires one-on-one support, differentiated instruction, and additional time and attention from educators.

Increasing class sizes while reducing staff does not serve:

- Students who require additional support
- General education students
- Or the teachers responsible for meeting all of these needs simultaneously

It creates an environment where everyone receives less of what they need to succeed.

Additionally, this current second-grade class represents one of the last cohorts allowed to enroll in kindergarten prior to turning five. Since then, enrollment requirements have changed, resulting in significantly smaller incoming class sizes—dropping from four kindergarten classrooms to two in subsequent years.

Given this shift, it seems both reasonable and responsible to allow the current second-grade cohort to continue through Great Neck School with the classroom structure they entered with. This would maintain appropriate class sizes for this group while naturally benefiting from smaller enrollment numbers in future grades.

My son is a student who loves school. He is curious, engaged, and genuinely excited to learn each day. As a parent, I worry that placing him—and his peers—into a larger, more demanding classroom environment with fewer resources risks diminishing that enthusiasm.

We should be doing everything we can to protect and nurture that love of learning—not placing it at risk due to preventable structural changes.

I respectfully ask that you consider the broader impact of this decision—not just financially, but on the educational experience, classroom environment, and long-term success of our children.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our community.

With Respect and Appreciation,

Erin McNamara

25 Tiffany Avenue

Mother of current 2nd grade and 5th grade students.

Rebecca Hall

Public Comment

From: Maggie Sullivan <maggie.sullivan@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 7:39 PM
To: Rebecca Hall
Subject: Public Comment Regarding Board of Finance Vote on the Board of Education Budget

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Good Evening Rebecca,

Please forward the below public comment regarding the Board of Education budget, to the members of the Board of Finance.

Thank you,
Maggie Sullivan
10 Perry Ave

Waterford Board of Finance,

My name is Maggie Sullivan, and I am a Preschool Teacher at Great Neck Elementary School. I have taught at Great Neck for eight years and have been a resident of Waterford for 36 years. In 2020, residents of Waterford hung hearts in their windows to demonstrate care and connection during a difficult time. However, that spirit did not begin with COVID—it reflects the longstanding strength of this community. Waterford is a place where people look out for one another and strive to do what is best. Now, we must do what is best for our students.

In my years teaching at Great Neck, I have witnessed moments that define the importance of our work: a parent hearing their nonverbal child say "I love you" for the first time; young children supporting a classmate through serious illness and later supporting each other through loss; students arriving from another country and beginning school immediately while navigating a new language and unfamiliar routines; and children learning empathy by supporting peers with significant needs. These experiences reflect the reality of today's classrooms.

This is not the Great Neck School I attended 30 years ago—it is a school that has significantly evolved. As the needs of our students and families continue to change, so must we. Great Neck and Oswegatchie are now certified bilingual schools. Our preschool program is fully inclusive, meaning all students learn together, regardless of need. We provide a rigorous, engaging, and diverse curriculum while also supporting a wide range of developmental, behavioral, and emotional needs.

Research, such as that discussed in *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, highlights the shift from a play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood. This shift has had a significant impact on students' executive functioning skills—their ability to manage attention, emotions, and behavior. As educators, we are not only teaching academic content, but also helping students develop the foundational skills they need to be ready to learn. Many of our students require increasing levels of support to access their education.

Our district has worked hard to respond to these evolving needs, but we cannot continue to do so without adequate resources. Reductions to the proposed Board of Education budget would directly impact class sizes, limit supports for students, and reduce our ability to connect families with critical resources.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider any reductions to the proposed education budget and to support the needs of Waterford's students and families.

As educators, we welcome you to visit our schools and see firsthand the learning, growth, and challenges our students experience each day.

Sincerely,
Maggie Sullivan
Preschool Teacher, Great Neck Elementary School

10 Perry Ave