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[Home](#) > Punxsutawney Phil...update! WPS 2-2-22

Punxsutawney Phil...update! WPS 2-2-22

I have truly never grasped the concept of a groundhog seeing his shadow and interpreting that to mean more winter. But that's what happened apparently and we are being told to expect six more weeks of this. I don't know how to feel about that, but it does appear, at least in the short term, like more challenging weather is on its way for Friday...you might be hearing from me again sooner than later.

At Monday night's School Committee meeting, we were able to provide an update on the FY23 Budget proposal with specific suggestions to make sure our budget is balanced. Since December, our Director of School Finance, Patricia Leonhardt, and I have been collaborating with Town Manager Jodi Ross and Director of Finance Dan O'Donnell to proactively address the initial difference between the WPS identified needs and the Town's available allocation. This is a very long process and is also dependent on the release of the Governor's proposed budget which took place last week. Just as our local community goes through the process of identifying needs and allocating resources with the checks and balances of multiple committees, the Governor's budget must be approved by the state legislature. The School Committee will be deliberating and voting on the proposed WPS FY23 budget over the next few weeks. That budget is then discussed with the Select Board and the Finance Committee in March and ultimately the school budget is included in the overall town budget that is voted on at the annual Town Meeting taking place this year on June 11, 2022. Recordings of both the initial WPS budget proposal on January 10, 2022 and the updated proposal from January 31, 2022 are available on WestfordCAT and I would encourage anyone with questions to review those presentations as well as log on to watch the School Committee deliberations on February 14, 2022. What says Happy Valentines more than watching budget discussions?

This week we transitioned from our previous Test and Stay program to the new DESE COVID testing option of symptomatic testing and providing at-home rapid tests to students and staff who opt-in to participate. Throughout the duration of the program, students and staff can elect to opt-in or discontinue participation. The initial deadline of 1/27 for opt-in information was specifically designed to provide us with an accurate number for ordering tests for the first week of the program. We submit the orders on a two week cycle, so it is possible to change participation on an ongoing basis moving forward but adjustments need to be made within the ordering windows for each cycle so there could be a delay. All of the information is available on our website:<https://www.westfordk12.us/district/news/covid-19-school-related-information-0>.

Finally, as much as I try to bring levity and humor when appropriate to my monthly updates, hopefully, you all received my email last night that was sent out to all of our families regarding the offensive comments heard from our student section at a recent WA basketball game. While it is clearly our responsibility as a school system to acknowledge the importance of learning opportunities and teachable moments when addressing behavior with children, it is also important to name, address and respond to discrimination of any kind to ensure that the environments that we

create within Westford Public Schools are safe and welcoming for all students. Next week, I will be recording a special update with WestfordCAT along with members of our WPS DEI Response Team to address more specifically how our district responds to incidents of bias and or discrimination. That video will also be sent out to all families after it is recorded. If you did not receive my email from last night for some reason you can access it here: [Feb1 Email from Dr. Chew regarding offensive comments at WA event](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y4MdxFSmdwOLfKSZHjkS3vdBAKT-oPr5JEgf...)
(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y4MdxFSmdwOLfKSZHjkS3vdBAKT-oPr5JEgf...>)

Sincerely,
Chris

Dr. Christopher Chew
Superintendent of Schools
Westford, MA

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