



**Superintendent of Schools**

**Mr. Hayden Moore**

March 23, 2026

Dear West Orange Public School Community,

As we prepare to present the Preliminary 2026–2027 Budget at the upcoming Board of Education meeting, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to transparency, responsible planning, and meaningful community engagement. Beginning in September, the district intentionally initiated a series of monthly public budget sessions to build awareness of emerging fiscal challenges and to ensure that our community would be informed, prepared, and actively involved in understanding the difficult decisions ahead.

The Preliminary 2026-2027 Budget presentation will take place at the next regular Board of Education meeting on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. This meeting was rescheduled from March 16 due to the delayed release of state aid figures, which were announced on March 12, 2026 when the district was informed that it will receive \$34,532,959 in total general fund state aid.

While this figure represents a 6% increase in our state aid allocation from last year, unfortunately it is not enough to offset the increases in expenditures that the district faces. When combined with the tax levy, federal funds and other sources of revenue, our total revenues are only expected to increase by about 2.6% to roughly \$206 million.

Many of the district's costs are increasing at a greater rate year over year when we account for projected increase in cost for existing programs, our budget would need to increase to roughly \$220 million. This leaves a shortfall of between 14 and 15 million dollars. Without other sources of revenue, our only option is to continue to improve efficiencies and make targeted cuts to bring these expenditures in line with our revenue.

Below is a summary of the primary annual budget drivers, along with the anticipated percentage increases for the 2026–2027 fiscal year:

Compensation & Benefits

- Union contracts are currently under negotiation; the county average increase is projected at 3.5%.
- Health benefits are projected to increase by 17.8%

Tuition & Insurance

- Out of District Special Education Tuition costs are projected to increase by 6%.
- Property and casualty insurance is projected to increase by 8%.

Transportation

- Consumer Price Index 3.58%

As a result of this shortfall in funding, difficult districtwide budget cuts will be made. Our team is tasked with this incredible challenge. However, we remain laser focused on prioritizing the academic, social/emotional, and co-curricular experience, while at the same time, striving to be fiscally responsible and minimize taxpayer impact.

I want to be clear that these decisions are not taken lightly. I am an employee of the district, as well as a resident and taxpayer in our township, and most importantly, a parent. I am committed to representing the interests of all members of our community. With this in mind, some of the areas considered for reduction are as follows:

Consolidation of Courses:

- In our 2025/2026 assessment, we found ways to reduce the number of courses by consolidating classes with low enrollment without negative impact on students.

- For 2026/2027, we are conducting an audit of course options as well as class size across the district. Where we find under enrollment, strategies to consolidate or combine classes with very low enrollment will be implemented which may result in fewer sections being offered, course elimination and/or staff reassignment.
- At the elementary level, the district will continue to prioritize maintaining balanced class sizes while supporting high quality instruction for all students. Where possible, we are planning for an average class size of approximately 25 students per class. Our Title I schools will continue to follow the class size guidelines outlined in the district's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) grant assurances, which include specific limits to support the needs of those school communities.
- At the middle and high school levels, class sizes across core academic courses, related arts, and elective offerings may increase modestly, generally ranging between 25 and 30 students per class. These adjustments are being made as part of the district's ongoing efforts to responsibly manage budget constraints while maintaining a full range of academic, intervention and enrichment opportunities for students.

#### Middle Schools:

- As we had hoped, the middle school reconfiguration implemented for 2025/2026 not only saved transportation costs and preserved staff, but it positively impacted the academic experience for our middle school students.
- This coming year we are considering changing the middle school schedule to an 8-period day. By prioritizing essential activities and repurposing existing resources, this will align our middle school programs more closely with our high school and better prepare our middle school students for future success.

#### Facility Use:

- When analyzing the 2025/2026 budget, we looked to minimize the use of our facilities as a means to reduce the ongoing wear and tear, property upkeep, and staff overtime that became a financial burden for the district.
- As we look toward 2026/2027 fiscal shortfalls, we will continue to reduce the use of our facilities moving forward, and find ways to trim in this area yet again.

#### School Busing & Transportation Options:

- Last year, we reviewed late runs after school, field trips, and consolidated bus stops while maintaining safe transportation services for eligible students.
- For 2026/2027, transportation services will be fine tuned yet again as costs have increased, challenging our current transportation options to which we have grown accustomed.

#### Staffing:

- As we had done in preparation for the 2025/2026 school year, reductions in certificated/non-certificated, tenured and non-tenured staff, co-curricular and in class support will be approached strategically, with careful consideration of the impact on instruction for 2026/2027.
- With non-renewals due to a reduction in state aid and budgetary restrictions that occurred for 2025/2026, we realized reductions at the administrative level as well. We anticipate to continue this practice as we prepare for the 2026/2027 budget.

#### Co-Curricular Programs:

- We are looking at our Athletic and Fine & Performing Arts programs to examine ways to reduce costs with minimal impact on the student experience.

Importantly, these challenges are not unique to our district. School systems across New Jersey are navigating escalating operational costs, funding constraints, and increasing demands to sustain educational excellence. You may watch our next meeting and all Board of Education meetings on our district Youtube Channel: [WOBOE TV](#). Our work continues until we finalize the budget. Of course, your feedback is welcome and we encourage everyone to complete the survey - [please click this link](#). You have our commitment and pledge to act in the best interests of our students, families, and staff.

Sincerely,



Hayden Moore, Superintendent of Schools