



West Orange Public Schools
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Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Hayden Moore

April 29, 2026

Dear Members of the West Orange Public Schools Community,

As we move toward the final adoption of the 2026–2027 school budget, let us begin from a place of understanding. West Orange Public Schools is facing an approximately **\$13.5 million budget deficit** and this must be addressed responsibly and immediately.

This is about more than a single budget cycle; it is about breaking a long-standing inherited fiscal structural pattern that has led us to this budget shortfall. In my third year as Superintendent, I cannot continue to address the budget shortfalls using the typical band-aid process. My commitment is to build a new, sustainable foundation that ensures our district remains fiscally strong and resilient against future budget challenges.

This letter provides perspective and rationale for the difficult budget choices we have made. Included are charts that detail the specific cuts across each building and department, along with a comparison chart designed to offer taxpayers clarity on how much more West Orange taxpayers are paying in salaries and benefits and how these costs are outpacing the tax revenue we receive.

Over the past several weeks, I have received and read your emails, listened to your comments, reviewed your petitions, and heard the deep concern so many of you have expressed about the difficult decisions before us. I have felt the emotion, the urgency, and the care behind every message, every statement, and every act of advocacy.

I know emotions are high. I know people are worried. And I know that many in our community are speaking from a place of genuine care; we all care for our students, care for our staff, and care for the future of our schools. Your concerns are real. Your advocacy is meaningful. And in many ways, **your hopes for this district are my hopes as well.**

I would like to first acknowledge the approximately **77 full time and part time staff members** whose positions were impacted by this budgetary setback. Addressing a deficit of this magnitude left us with no choice but to make these incredibly difficult reductions. To ignore the reality of our fiscal situation would have been a false promise to these individuals and to our community. We simply cannot fiscally afford to sustain these roles at this time.

Please know that this decision was made out of necessity, not a lack of appreciation for your dedicated service. To assist in your transition, I have [attached](#) a list of neighboring school districts that are currently hiring and have expressed an interest in reviewing applications from our talented educators. While these districts cannot guarantee employment, I have reached out to my superintendent colleagues endorsing the staff leaving for budgetary reasons.

Our fiscal deficit necessitated the **reduction of non-instructional support staff**, including paraprofessionals, security, A/V media tech, public relations, greeters, school counselors, deans, and CST members. This was a difficult, but necessary, decision driven entirely by our budget constraints.

To maintain the optimal educational experience, my duty as superintendent required a laser focus on prioritizing students

and preserving reasonable class sizes: 25 for elementary and 30 for secondary. Without these staffing reductions and the redistribution of funds toward retaining more elementary and middle school teaching staff, our class sizes would have increased significantly—to 35 in elementary and approximately 38 in secondary. Research and experience clearly demonstrate that exceeding 25 students in an elementary setting negatively impacts learning outcomes.

I want to emphasize that this action in no way diminishes the personal and professional bonds we share with those departing. Many of these individuals were hired by me and have served our district for many years..

Moments like this require leadership to speak honestly even when the facts are difficult. And the facts before us are clear: At its core, this challenge is not about ideology or disagreement; it's about a budget gap that has implications on **what we value and what we want versus what we need and what we can afford.**

Like school districts across New Jersey, West Orange is facing rising costs in every area including gas, electric, transportation, health insurance, supplies, facilities, and maintenance required to keep our schools running. These costs are projected to rise year to year. But the largest and most significant pressure on our budget is also the most human one: **salaries and health benefits.** These costs comprise more than **70%** of our budget and these costs rise from year to year.

Our tax revenue is not keeping pace with the rising costs of operations, salaries and benefits. These costs are growing faster than the increase of tax revenue available to sustain our school district fiscally **now and long term.**

For those who have suggested to increase our taxes above 3% and up to 6%, I appreciate the generosity and I understand the intention is to use the tax levy as a bridge, but unfortunately it is a bridge of uncertainty. Since the funding formula has yet to change in favor of our district, we cannot depend on it. Therefore, I feel a compromise can be made safely which is why we are recommending a 2.5% tax levy increase.

The strength of our community is entrenched in our diversity. West Orange is not only racially and religiously diverse, but it is also socio-economically diverse. As your superintendent, I also speak for the tax payer who may be struggling, and also for individuals and families who do not support an increase. Therefore, a 2.5% increase is both reasonable and a means to support and help maintain our socio-economically diverse population.

Our township has already conducted a re-assessment on property values and most of West Orange was impacted with a tax increase last year. And even more recently our town council has proposed to raise taxes another 7% in order to balance their budget.

West Orange taxpayers have made a significant investment in this school district **historically.** Year after year, they have funded salaries, benefits, raises, and programs. Our community deserves transparency. The chart below displays the financial reality facing **West Orange taxpayers.** The chart is a fiscal comparison displaying how much more West Orange tax payers contribute in salaries and benefits in comparison to your neighbors in nearby districts with similar demographics.

If we don't make cuts...

West Orange taxpayers spend significantly more on staff salaries and benefits than our neighboring districts.

District	Estimated Total Student Population	Estimated Total Staff	Salary + Benefits Total	Difference in Salaries and Benefits cost VS. West Orange
West Orange Public Schools	7,000	1,320	\$152,036,857	This is over 70% of our budget. West Orange tax payers pay more in salaries & Benefits than our neighboring districts.
Livingston Public Schools	6,500	1,201	\$146,011,146	\$6,025,711 West Orange Tax Payers Pay This Much More
Montclair Public Schools	6,100	997	\$110,000,000	\$ 42,036,857 West Orange Tax Payers Pay This Much More
East Orange Public Schools	8,800	1,300	\$115,120,000	\$ 36,916,857 West Orange Tax Payers Pay This Much More
Orange Public Schools	5,800	970	\$95,820,027	\$56,216,830 West Orange Tax Payers Pay This Much More
South Orange Maplewood	7,252.00	793	\$109,453,664.78	\$ 42,583,192 West Orange Tax Payers Pay This Much More

Here is the bottom line: West Orange employs 300+ more staff members than our comparable neighboring districts and spends between **\$6-\$56 MILLION MORE** in salaries and benefits. Salaries and benefits represent over **70%** of our budget. Costs continue to rise year after year. Our tax revenue has not kept up with the rising costs of these expenses. This fiscal imbalance is the primary driver of our estimated **\$13.5 MILLION BUDGET DEFICIT**.

These are not opinions nor are these fear tactics. Our decisions are based on facts. The numbers don't lie and the numbers are real. They reveal something very important: West Orange taxpayers already contribute significantly more in salaries and benefits than most school districts in the state of New Jersey, not just school districts in our area.

Please understand that appreciation and advocacy no matter how sincere cannot close the \$13.5 million budget shortfall.

This is why the district must consider strategic and sustainable options, **including the outsourcing of paraprofessional services**. That consideration is not about disrespect but is a substantial **\$3 million savings that will reoccur year after year**. It is not about a lack of gratitude. It is about fiscal sustainability. We are being forced to confront a large budget gap while trying to **preserve core classroom instruction**, maintain much needed student services, and protect the programs and co-curricular activities that our students benefit from.

Our criteria of the outsourcing of paraprofessionals includes a seamless continuation of employment here in our district, in the same schools with **salary, healthcare benefits and retirement options**. It is a true pathway to immediate employment and an opportunity for our paras to maintain relationships and a job within our district.

While the employer of record may change, the people do not—our students will continue to see the same familiar faces they rely on. With our paras, we are trying to provide job security and retain them - keeping them in our schools. To clear

up any misconceptions: there will be no rotation of paras as most paras are IEP driven. The administration and I will demand consistency for our students receiving special services.

Again, outsourcing our paras is a vital **\$3 million** annual recurring savings which contributes to the district's closing the budget deficit and providing us with fiscal sustainability. The **\$3 million savings will be distributed back into the classroom** and help us retain essential core instructional teachers as opposed cutting additional teaching staff which, as you know, will result in an increase in classroom sizes and have a negative impact on a student's educational experience. Without these savings our class sizes would increase significantly, from 25 to 35 in elementary and from 30 to 38 in secondary.

Regarding our co-curricular activities; these are very important. It would be devastating to remove all music, band, art, step team, theater, color guard, ROTC and athletics from the student experience, as programs like these from the student's perspective help provide opportunities for students to demonstrate pride, school spirit, teamwork, camaraderie, a sense of belonging and an opportunity for students to showcase their skills and talents outside the classroom. For some students, these activities provide motivation, life lessons and character building. While we have reduced certain aspects of these programs, and unfortunately eliminated all middle school sports, these changes helped in preserving teaching staff and redistributing funds towards the purpose of closing our structural deficit and placing the district on a sustainable path toward future growth financially.

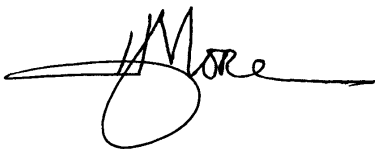
Caring about staff and being fiscally responsible are not mutually exclusive. We face a \$13.5 million dollar deficit that we must close and require us to take away from every area. Every single department has been impacted. To our staff, I want to say this: I know this moment is painful. I know there is uncertainty, fear, and frustration. And I understand why. Behind every position, every title, and every line item is a **human being** who has given time, energy, and care to this district. That matters and it will always matter.

This moment calls for honesty; truth over slogans; facts over emotionally driven narratives; courage over avoidance.

Leadership also means making decisions not just for one person or for one group, but for the entire district and for every child in every classroom, for every family counting on strong schools, and for every taxpayer who is helping to financially sustain our educational system.

My commitment remains the same: **students first, truth always, and the long-term stability of the West Orange Public Schools above all else.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hayden Moore". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "H" and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hayden Moore, Superintendent of Schools

Reductions by Category	
Athletics	\$501,014
PreK- 5	\$1,488,948
Capital Projects	\$2,300,000
C&I	\$1,168,939
Central Office	\$907,407
Middle Schools	\$1,855,689
High School	\$2,078,678
Paras	\$3,000,000
Transportation	\$176,382
TOTAL	\$13,477,057

	Reduction in Force (RIF)			Not Replacing (Retirement/ Resignation/ Nonrenewals)		
	TOTAL	Instructional	Non Instructional	TOTAL	Instructional	Non Instructional
BMELC/ WOELC	1	1 SE		-		
District/ Central Office	4		1 Admin Asst 2 Techs 1 PR	4	1 Reading Spec	1 Dir 1 Sup 1 Plumber
Edison	7	1 Art 1 English 1 Librarian 1 Math 1 PE/ Health 1 SE	1 Admin Asst	3	1 Sci 1 Math 1 SAC	
Gregory	3	1 Music 1 Gen Ed	1 Counselor	5	2 SE	1 Admin Asst 1 Nurse 1 Guard
Hazel	-			-		
Kelly	3	1 Music 1 PE	1 Counselor	1	1 Gen Ed	
Liberty	5	1 Math 1 Music 1 Sci 1 SE 1 WL		1	1 SE	
Mt Pleasant	2	1 Music 1 Gen Ed		-		
Redwood	1	1 SE		1	1 Gen Ed	
Roosevelt	4	2 SE 1 SS	1 Admin Asst	-		
St Cloud	2	1 Art 1 Music		-		
Washington	-			-		
WOHS & Athletics	26	2 Art 2 English 1 Librarian 2 Math 2 Science 1 SS 2 WL	1 Trainer 8 Coaches 1 Dean 1 AV 3 Greeters	4	1 SS 1 SE	1 Admin Asst 1 SAC
77	58	36	22	19	11	8