WESTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUBSTITUTE TEACHER HANDBOOK



Westford Public Schools

23 Depot Road

Westford, MA 01886

Updated 2025-26

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Westford Public Schools

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Strategic District Improvement Plan 2023-2026

Our Overarching Mission and Values

We value the development of curious lifelong learners who are responsible, empathetic members of the community, demonstrating innovation through a wide variety of opportunities within inclusive, joyful learning environments that embrace their variability and honor their diversity. We believe in preparing our students for active, positive participation as both local and global citizens by developing and fostering creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Core Values

S	P	I	R	I	T
Safety: physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing	**Perseverance:** fostering resilience and growth mindsets	**Inclusion:** committing to equality for all	**Respect:** both of ourselves and those around us	**Integrity:** in our work, in our actions, in our choices	**Teamwork:** collaborating with others toward a common goal

Strategic Objectives

1. **Ensure Equity:** Infuse our equity work into our curriculum and instruction, the heart of what we do.

2. **Ensure Equity:** Assess our organizational structures to ensure equitable learning environments for all of our students

3. **Promote Social Emotional Wellbeing:** Prioritize mental health and wellness for all of our students and staff by exploring strategies to minimize academic and or social emotional "pressure valves" that negatively impact performance

4. **Increase Sustainability:** Collaborate with our Town partners to support goals outlined in Westford's Climate Roadmap authored by the Clean Energy and Sustainable Co.

- Westford Academy - Blanchard - Stony Brook - Abbot - Crisafulli -
- Day - Miller - Nabnasset - Robinson - ROUTES -

WELCOME

Welcome to Westford Public Schools: Join Our Team as a Substitute Teacher! 🍎

We invite you to join the highly-regarded Westford Public School District, where you can make a meaningful impact on the lives of approximately 4,451 students across our nine schools (PreK-12). As a substitute teacher, you'll be an essential part of a community committed to high-quality education.

Westford Public Schools is known for its excellence, consistently ranked as a top-tier district in Massachusetts.

- Positive Learning Environment: The district's commitment to quality education is reflected in state data, with students showing strong proficiency in both math (around 73%) and reading (around 68%) on state tests, according to state and external data sources.
- Strong Staff-to-Student Ratio: You'll be supporting classrooms that foster personalized attention and strong instructional support.
- Community Support: You'll be substituting in a town that values its schools, providing a supportive environment for educators and staff.

The following information is intended to be a resource to help make your entry into this community a positive experience for all – substitute teacher, regular staff, and students alike.

We hope you find the information helpful. Knowing these details in advance may free you to enjoy the challenge of daily changes, which is a defining feature of substitute teaching.

Welcome to the challenge. We are here to support you in every way we can.

For up-to-date general and school specific information on our website, please visit our website, www.westfordk12.us .

For copies of the Student Handbook, please visit this link.

For a copy of the 2025-26 school calendar, please visit this link.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is paramount within the Westford school community. As a substitute teacher, you play a vital role in maintaining the trust and privacy of our students, staff, and families. It is essential to safeguard sensitive information, such as student records, academic performance, and personal circumstances. Respect for confidentiality extends to conversations overheard, emails exchanged, and documents accessed during your time here. Your commitment to discretion ensures a safe and supportive learning environment for all.

Confidentiality is the obligation not to disclose willingly any personal information obtained by any means about another person. Confidentiality is based on four (4) basic principles:

- Respect for an individual's right to privacy.
- Respect for human relationships in which personal information is shared.
- Appreciation of the importance of confidentiality to both individuals and society.
- Expectations that those who pledge to safeguard confidential information will do so.

When in doubt, a substitute should:

- Remember that confidentiality resides with the student.
- Advise the administration.
- Know the pertinent laws and expectations.
- Be accountable for all decisions regarding the student.
- Above all, act professionally.

Please refer to FQAs for further information on confidentiality.

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION

The Westford Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, homelessness, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability in admission to, access to, employment in, or treatment in its programs and activities. Accordingly, no person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privileges, and courses of study of such public school or in employment in its services in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI); on the basis of sex, in accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; on the basis of disability, in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II); or on the basis of age, in accordance with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (Age Discrimination Act) and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967. Nor does it discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, gender identity or sexual orientation, in accordance with Chapter 622 of the Acts of 1971 (M.G.L. c. 76 s. 5) and M.G.L. Chapter 151B. The District also does not discriminate on the basis of homelessness in a manner consistent with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

HOW TO APPLY TO SUBSTITUTE IN WESTFORD'S SCHOOL SYSTEM

Candidates must complete a substitute teaching application, found here. Once the online application is processed, qualified candidates will be invited to interview with an administrator for final approval. Once approved, the substitute will be contacted by the Human Resources Department to complete employment paperwork, including the training modules found on page XX in this handbook.

Please note that your employment is contingent upon receiving favorable results from the National Background Check (fingerprinting) as well as a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information).

Cori Forms: Background checks play a crucial role in maintaining safety in our schools. On November 27, 2002, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted Chapter 385 of the Acts of 2002, An Act Further Protecting Children. This statute requires that all schools conduct Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) record checks on all current and prospective employees, volunteers, school transportation providers, and any others who may have direct and unmonitored contact with children.

Fingerprinting: In January 2013, Governor Patrick signed into law Chapter 459 of the Acts of 2012 "An Act Relative to Background Checks." All employees for public schools must complete a National Background Check by way of fingerprint.

WHO WILL CALL YOU TO SUBSTITUTE

Westford Public Schools utilizes Frontline Education, an online absence management system. Once you have completed the necessary new hire paperwork and completed the required substitute training, a login and PIN will be emailed to you.

Once Registered as an end user in Frontline, you will have access to Westford Public Schools' daily openings. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the database and reach out with any questions.

There are three ways to get jobs, by phone - the system will call you (not Westford Public Schools). The usual call times are: the day before the assignment from 6:00pm - 10 p.m., or the day of the assignment between 6:00a.m. and 8:00 a.m. The substitute teacher is given all information necessary for the assignment. Or you may call into ABSENCE MANAGEMENT at 1-800-942-3767 to search for potential jobs.

Internet - the substitute may also go on-line to the ABSENCE MANAGEMENT website at https://app.frontlineeducation.com to search for jobs.

PLEASE NOTE: Absence Management relies on you being available at all times. If there are days you are not available, you must enter those days as NON WORK days. To remain active as a substitute you must enter any work NON WORK days in Absence Management. This is especially important if you are a college student and will not be available for large periods of time. If your schedule shows you are available and you do not accept any work for 30 or more days, you will be listed as inactive. You must contact the Office of Human Resources to be reinstated. If you do not contact the Office of Human Resources within 90-days of deactivation, you will be considered to have voluntarily resigned and must reapply if you wish to return to subbing.

If a change occurs more than two hours prior to the start of your assignment, you may cancel your assignment through Frontline.

Please note that any change in availability within 2 hours of start time must be communicated directly to the school. Please refer to school contact information on page 1.

COMPENSATION

Full Day $100 / Classroom Teacher
Full Day $100 / Teacher Assistant
Half Day $50 / Classroom Teacher
Half Day $50 / Teacher Assistant

The pay rate for a full day of work is over 4 hours per day. The pay rate for a half day is considered 4 hours or less of work in one day. ANY amount of work over 4 hours is considered a full day of work.

Substitutes must fill out the appropriate payroll slip. To obtain necessary paperwork please report to the Administrative Assistant at your assigned school at the beginning of each workday.

In the event that school or your placement is called off ahead of time for a day you were scheduled to substitute, **no** compensation will be paid. If a scheduling error occurs and a substitute must be sent home AFTER arriving for work, the substitute **will** be compensated for that day.

A biweekly paycheck, received on Thursdays, will list the number of full and half days worked in the two-week period covered, year-to-date amounts, and deductions taken. Substitutes' salary checks will be mailed to your home or Direct Deposited to your bank from the Business Office on each payroll date.

The Town of Westford participates in a mandatory Massachusetts Deferred Compensation Plan for government employees as an alternative to FICA contributions. The plan is in accordance with the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (OBRA) and subsequent Massachusetts GENERAL Laws, Chapter 494. As an OBRA classified employee, you must contribute a minimum of 7 1/2% of your gross pay to this retirement fund. Once enrolled, this amount is automatically deducted from your pay. You may request more to be withheld, but not less or none. It remains untaxed until retirement payout. Contact Empower Retirement Services @ 1-877-457-1900.

State tax is not withheld except when the amount of a given paycheck is high enough to trigger a tax liability for you if you earned that amount consistently. Any paycheck below this amount will have no state tax withheld, no matter how much you have earned during the year. If this is a second paycheck, or you otherwise expect to have a tax liability from income earned by substitute teaching, you may wish to plan ahead. You can have the Payroll Office withhold a specific dollar amount from each paycheck or a specific percentage of whatever you make. Alternatively, you may want to consider whether you need or want to make quarterly estimated tax payments on the state or federal level. Federal tax is withheld likewise. Also, an amount (.0145%) is withheld for Medicare.

LONG-TERM SUBSTITUTE AND INTERIM STATUS

Long-term substitute teachers shall be paid at the current substitute teacher per diem rate ($100 full day, $50 half day) for the first 15 days of a long-term assignment. Once a substitute has worked 16 or more days continuously, starting at any time in the school year, for the same absent teacher, a pay rate will increase to the rate they would be paid if they were a permanent teacher on Step 1, of either the Bachelors or Masters salary scale reflecting the substitute's educational degree.

Long-term substitute teachers assigned to a period of eight (8) or more consecutive weeks, starting at any time in the school year, for the same absent teacher shall be paid at the rate they would be paid if

they were a permanent teacher on Step 1, of either the Bachelors or Masters salary scale reflecting the substitute's educational degree, beginning on day one of the assignment.

A retired teacher of Westford Public Schools acting as a Long-term substitute teacher assigned to a period of three (3) or more consecutive weeks, starting at any time in the school year, for the same absent teacher shall be paid at the rate they would be paid if they were a permanent teacher on Step 1, of either the Bachelors or Masters salary scale reflecting the retiree's educational degree, to a maximum of the Masters salary beginning on day one of the assignment.

Any long-term substitute teacher recommended for an assignment period of twelve (12) or more consecutive weeks will be considered interim status. Interim status (an assignment of 12 or more consecutive weeks and ending on the final day of the school calendar) is awarded by the Superintendent of Schools at the building principal's request. The building principal must initiate this process and **the candidate must hold a valid DESE license.**

A sick day taken by a long-term substitute will not be considered "breaking the chain" of continuous days worked when considering eligibility for interim status. An interim status substitute teacher will receive the same number of sick days and personal days as a first-year teacher on a prorated basis (10 sick days and 2 personal days).

Long-term substitute service ends when the classroom teacher returns to the classroom.

Individuals filling a long term substitute assignment for positions other than a teacher, such as an Educational Support Professional or Interventionist will continue to be paid at the daily substitute rate of $100.

GENERAL PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

1. **Arrive early:** at least 15 minutes before school starts

2. **Report to the school's main office:** Verify your placement for the day as principals may need to reassign your placement upon your arrival. Pick up an identification badge and fill out your pay slip. Check the teacher's mailbox for items meant for distribution that day or information, which affects your day. Ask if this school requires you to send the attendance slip to the office or whether someone will collect it.

3. **Report to the assigned room:** Teachers will have a substitute teacher's plans folder right on the room desk, some teachers may also upload substitute teacher plans to Frontline for you to review in advance. Student health plans will also be provided. If not, check if the teacher has a desk somewhere else, such as a department office. Locate the plan book or written description of lessons for the day and review. Locate and review textbook pages and resource materials.
   - Find the class list(s) and seating plan(s). Find the attendance slip to list absences when students arrive. Include yourself in the number of those buying lunch if this is noted on the attendance slip. Send all notes regarding attendance, early dismissal, and bus change needs to the office with the attendance slip (or leave all for pick-up by the office). They will be returned to you later for your teacher's records. Attendance records must be completely accurate! They constitute a legal record and carry the weight of proof in a court of law.
   - Required morning exercises include: Pledge of Allegiance (conscientious/religious objectors may refrain), patriotic song (some classes omit this), and a moment of silence (for personal thought or meditation). Require excellent behavior during these exercises.

In some schools exercises are led by the principal over the intercom; in others, the teacher conducts them. Substitutes should follow the lesson plans and directions as provided. Teachers suggest that when specific directions are left to do an activity as "class work," try to finish the task in class, rather than giving students the option of finishing it for homework. Teachers usually know the work pace of their class and leave such directions to keep their classes constructively engaged.

- Ask neighboring teachers, the team leader, department head, principal, or assistants for information or help as needed.

4. **Discipline:** Substitute teachers should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. Please avoid making threats and never lay a hand on a student. At the same time, require and expect good behavior.
   - Substitutes should be in the room when students arrive – a legal responsibility that will help establish good discipline and effective control. Never leave the group unattended unless totally unavoidable.
   - Inquire about school-wide rules particular to your school, such as bans on wearing hats or chewing gum in the building. Check if your school has banned specialized items like cell phones in the classroom or extra-long key chains.
   - In the case of serious behavior problems or unusual emergencies, you should speak directly with the office through the intercom or wall phone, or reach the team leader, department head, principal, or assistant principal. Unruly students may be removed to the main office for discipline. Weapons found in the school require immediate disciplinary action and school leadership should be informed. Assistant principals and deans typically take care of discipline.
   - Generally, all staff are asked to be alert for suspicious circumstances. All visitors should have entry passes. Ask if your school has special emergency procedures in place.

5. **Duties:** Substitutes should perform all school-wide duties expected of the classroom teacher. Assume the same responsibility for order in the classroom, corridor, lavatories, or playground as the regular teacher would.
   - The substitute assumes all responsibilities for school-wide regulations, such as fire drills. Acquaint yourself with building specific procedures.
   - Substitute teachers should expect their schedule for the day to be the same as the schedule of the absent teacher. Common sense should rule in non-typical situations where an absent teacher has several "free" periods (i.e. some teachers are part-time administrators with scheduled responsibilities substitutes would not be asked to fill).
   - Middle and high school teacher schedules usually include one preparation period per day, which the substitute would also have as "free." Otherwise, substitutes should be available to fill reasonable school scheduling needs as requested.

6. **Specialists/Enrichment:** Schools often have special teachers who help individuals, and sometimes whole classes, with reading and math skills. Note if these teachers are expected in your room during the day and how they can be best utilized within the regular teacher's lesson plans. Some specialists actually take over the classroom for you, conducting their own lesson. Special education teachers also may visit to help individuals with other special needs in your class.
   - In elementary schools classes, such as art and music, may occur in your room or in the specialist's room. Inquire what your role should be during these classes.

7. **Lunch:** Every schedule should include time for lunch. You may buy lunch from the menu offered to students or make selections from a separate service area for teachers, if one is available. While students pay a subsidized price for their lunches, teachers and substitutes

pay a somewhat higher price. Like teachers, substitutes are allowed to go before students in lunch lines. Each school has a teacher's lounge where you may eat or you may choose to eat in your room.

- Students who come to school without their lunch money can usually borrow or get an IOU at lunchtime or just before. New lunch tickets must be purchased directly from the cafeteria when staff is there and the student's schedule allows.

8. **End of the Day:** Substitutes may consider their duties generally concluded at the close of school, when buses and walkers have left, or whenever all of your scheduled responsibilities are over. You do not need to check out at the office.
   - For safety, students may not leave the room until their bus is called or walkers are dismissed. Walkers are usually dismissed last to keep them safe from bus traffic. Students who will be picked up from school are paged by the office when the parent comes to sign them out. Keep them in the room until then.
   - Please leave the room in good order. Leave pertinent information in a note for the classroom teacher to find.

9. **Confidentiality:** In the course of your work, you may become aware of confidential information about students, etc. Substitute teachers should be mindful to respect privacy and student confidentiality.

10. **Professional Dress & Grooming:** All employees are expected to come to school clean and to wear clothing that meets or exceeds their high regard for education and presents an image consistent with their job responsibilities.

FIRE DRILLS / CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Fire drills are practiced randomly during the year. Room specific exit routes are posted on the wall of each classroom. Check school-specific information when you arrive, but generally this procedure is used:

- Students should be kept silent during the drill
- Line up immediately, taking jackets if needed and conveniently located
- Take the class list with you in case you need to verify that all the students are outside with you
- Leave the building quickly but in orderly fashion (lines) through the nearest exit that leads to an outdoor area where students can reassemble at a safe distance from the building. Notice where other teachers assemble their classes
- Students remain orderly and silent outside
- Wait for word from the administration to reenter the building

RESPONDING TO ACCIDENTS, INJURIES, AND ILLNESSES

- Notify the main office. Do not touch a student where they are bleeding, even if you use gloves. Provide the student with tissues or paper towels, instructing them to hold it on their wound.
- If appropriate, send the student to the office or nurse for further care.
- Adhere to Universal Precautions training at all times.
- Do not administer medicine of any kind to students. (No aspirin, cough medicine, prescription or non-prescription drugs.)
- If you or a student in your classroom is injured (no matter how insignificant the injury), you must report the injury to the nurse immediately.

UNIVERSAL HEALTH PRECAUTIONS OF SCHOOL SETTINGS

Universal precautions should be used in order to reduce the health risk associated with all blood-borne organisms, such as AIDS or hepatitis B. These precautions (listed below) should be used for all injuries, such as bloody noses, in the classroom.

1. Wear latex gloves whenever coming into contact with or cleaning up blood or other body fluids (urine, vomit, feces). Get janitorial help if necessary
2. Treat human blood spills with caution
3. Clean up blood spills promptly. Get janitorial help if necessary.
4. Always wash hands after any contact with body fluids. This should be done immediately in order to avoid contaminating surfaces or parts of the body.
5. Be especially careful not to touch your eyes before washing up. Soap and water will kill HIV.

Every teacher's desk is equipped with school-provided band-aids and a pair of latex gloves for use when needed. You may wish to ask the school nurse for your own pair of gloves to carry with you. If you are allergic to latex, ask the school nurse to get vinyl gloves for you.

Every new substitute teacher should receive orientation information about the use of universal health precautions.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

In accordance with the Code of Massachusetts § 63.2-100, any teacher or other school employee who has reason to suspect abuse or neglect of a child, including any child who may be abandoned, is a mandated reporter and must immediately report all instances of suspected abuse and neglect to the principal or principal's designee of the school in which the child is enrolled.

HARASSMENT

Westford Public Schools is committed to maintaining a learning/working environment free from harassment based on gender, sexual orientation or preference, race, national origin, disability or religion. Therefore, Westford Public Schools prohibits harassment based on gender, sexual orientation or preference, race, national origin, disability or religion of any student or school personnel at school or at any school sponsored activity.

ANTI-BULLYING

Westford Public Schools is committed to maintaining a school environment where students are free from bullying and cyber-bullying and the effects thereof. Our plan applies to students and members of a school staff, including, but not limited to educators, administrators, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity and paraprofessionals.

If there is an indication or suspicion of bullying, a staff member must immediately report to the principal or designee or to the Superintendent or designee when the principal or assistant principal is the alleged aggressor or to the school Committee when the Superintendent is the alleged aggressor when they witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may possibly be bullying or retaliation. It is the responsibility of the staff member to intervene in the behavioral incident consistent with the district's policies and procedures and report the incident to the proper administration. For additional information, please see Westford's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan.

SCHOOL CLOSURE | DELAYED OPENING

In cases of inclement weather or other emergency, cancellations and delayed openings will be posted on the district and school websites as well as local news stations.

In the event of a delayed opening, school will be postponed by 2 hours. All activities in the schools will continue as usual including the same dismissal time.

SMOKING

Schools are smoke-free environments. Smoking is not allowed by anyone in school buildings or on school grounds under penalty of fine.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG POLICIES

Alcoholic beverages and drugs are prohibited at all schools and on school grounds. The school nurse's office manages all prescription medications.

WPS TRAINING MODULES

- Module 1: Civil Rights, Student Rights, Confidentiality, 51As (required)
- Module 2: Anti-Bullying (required)
- Module 3: Epi-Pen Training (required)
- Module 4: Bloodborne Pathogens (required)

** Affirmation of Completion Form **

WESTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARKING

Nabnasset School	Park in front or on the side of the building
Miller School	Park in any parking lot
Robinson School	Park in the front or back parking lot.
Abbot School	Park in the lot to the right of the building.
Crisafulli School	Park in any parking lot.
BlanchardMiddle School	Park in the lot in front of the building.
Stony Brook Middle School	Park in front or on the sides of building.
Westford Academy	Park in the front of the building.
Central Office	Park in the lot to the right of Abbot, which is shared by both schools.

DISCLAIMER

The laws, school committee policies, and school rules stated in this handbook are intended to ensure the safe, orderly, and educationally sound operations of the schools in the WestfordRegional School District. In addition to these written provisions, there may be times where, to further ensure the safe, orderly, and educationally sound operation of these schools, the school administration may enforce a standard of conduct upon students and employees of the District that furthers this end. Furthermore, the school administration has the right to enforce any law, ordinance or school committee policy not written in this handbook. If a new law is passed, it supersedes current rules.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

Are there laws requiring confidentiality in schools?
Yes. Confidentiality is guaranteed to all students through the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (1974). This law applies to all schools in the United States that receive federal funding and covers students from age 3 to any person enrolled in college. This law is reinforced by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1991), which protects parents and their children with disabilities ages 3-21.

Who is responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of student records and information?
Any employee of a public school district has the responsibility to ensure the trust and protection of confidentiality.

Exactly what information is confidential?
Information including, but not limited to test scores, personal problems of both students and co-workers, counseling data, student records, student progress, student scheduling, disciplinary actions etc. are considered confidential. In short, information that you learn about a coworker, child, or other child's family as a result of working in the school is confidential.

Can personal information ever be shared with anyone?
Information may be shared with co-workers who directly affect the advancement of the education of the child or with agencies concerned with the child's welfare. Always consult with the building administration, and ensure that conversations are held privately.

As a substitute, am I responsible for special education students?
Substitute teachers frequently serve students with learning characteristics/challenges of varying degrees. Some helpful information in regards to learning differences can be found in Westford's District Curriculum Accommodation Plan.