WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To: Westport Board of Education Members
From: Thomas Scarice, Superintendent of Schools
Re: Special Meeting Redistricting
Date October 30, 2024

In preparation for tonight, and in response to parent requests, our demographers ran a model in which all current 51 LLS students zoned to be redistricted are "grandfathered" and remain at LLS.

In addition, in this model all new kindergartners, and new "in-migration" students (i.e. students who move into LLS in the "Option A1" area in grades 1-5) will begin school at SES. For the purposes of clarity, I call this the "Grandfather All/A1 for New Students" model.

I have provided the Board with the following three attachments for tonight's meeting which are posted for public review:

1. excel sheet with 10 year enrollment projections
2. slide deck from demographers with "Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students" analysis
3. "Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students" section analysis from John Bayers

To summarize the impact on sections and total enrollment, the following comparison illustrates all three models (Status Quo, Option A1, Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students) for the next five years.

I have listed the number of sections required in the building with the total enrollment in parentheses next to the number of sections:

YEAR	STATUS QUO	OPTION A1	GRANDFATHER ALL
25-26	**29 (604)**	**27 (546)**	**29 (597)**
26-27	**30 (623)**	**29 (558)**	**29 (602)**
27-28	**31 (630)**	**28 (566)**	**29 (599)**
28-29	**31 (625)**	**28 (562)**	**29 (583)**
29-30	**31 (632)**	**28 (576)**	**29 (584)**

I do not believe there is any support for "Status Quo" (i.e. do nothing). For the purposes of this message, I will focus on Option A1 and "Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students".

As you can see in the chart above, by implementing Option A1, there is immediate relief next year (2025/2026) by reducing two sections to an already crowded school, from 29 to 27. Section numbers are then projected to be equal at 29 in 2026/2027, and then there is one less section projected in Option A1 in the subsequent three years.

This may not seem like much of a difference but given the following reasons I cannot recommend the "Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students" option.

I continue to recommend that the Board implement Option A1.

I do not recommend "Grandfathering All/A1 for New Students" for the following reasons:

- **Does not meet Board's Goals of Redistricting**
    - To summarize, explicitly in the Board's Redistricting Resources and implicitly in the Guiding Criteria the following are the goals of redistricting:

        - equitable access/parity (special education spaces, IR Program, intervention spaces, specials, etc.)
        - balance across the five schools (avoid under/over utilizing and given school)
        - prepare for an enrollment increase due to imminent construction of a new LLS
        - long term sustainability (i.e. sufficient headroom/flex rooms to accommodate enrollment bubbles and foreseeable projected growth)

- **Current State of LLS is Overcrowded and Warrants Immediate Relief** (in addition to long-term rightsizing)

    - Three classrooms are permanently offline reducing available space for programming.
    - Three special education resource teachers share one classroom, along with a part-time literacy interventionist who uses the entryway of this room as a small group instruction space.
    - IR Program:
        - our most fragile learners served in this program
        - one IR space is a small classroom and the other is a 1/2 classroom
        - programming for students with this profile necessitates a paraprofessional assigned to each student, in addition to special education teachers
        - students flow in and out of these spaces, accessing the mainstream classroom as prescribed in their special education IEP
        - I observed 4 students, with 4 paraprofessionals and 2 teachers in a very tight space delivering programs to students. I was informed that this was a typical day. The team is effective but the spaces are much less than optimal.
    - Four Literacy and Math Interventionists (4 separate teachers) share one space (the old art room)
        - the Workshop program is also delivered in this space (by one of math interventionists)
        - the setting is less than optimal for all programs, intervention and Workshop
        - at times there are three math or literacy intervention groups receiving services while the Workshop program is simultaneously engaged in a hands-on learning experience (e.g. bridge building), leading to increased levels of distractibility
    - The Art room was moved to a smaller classroom.
    - No Computer lab
    - The Science lab is in the former Computer lab and as a result, this is a less than optimal space for programming

- **Kindergarten**

    - Over the past 10 years, the district's greatest variability for projections, and actual enrollment, is the LLS Kindergarten.
    - Cohorts have ranged from 70-102 new Kindergarteners over the last 10 years.
    - There is also an average of an 8% growth rate from K to 1st grade at LLS over the past 10 years, the highest in-migration growth rate in the district.
    - This does not factor in any impact from the new school.
    - LLS is projected to average 91 new kindergarteners in first 3 years of the projections provided (2025/2026, 2026/2027, 2027/2028)
        - LLS has experienced historic swings and in-migration growth factors (i.e 8% growth from K to 1st grade, and the 10 year average for the growth of cohorts across the school is +3.2%, both are the highest in the district).
        - This can plausibly add a section in K, or in subsequent grades, increasing the number of sections in the school.
    - From 2020/2021 to 2024/2025 there was a wide swing in birth rates. According to our demographers, the larger the swing, the less confidence in the projections. These swings can plausibly lead to unknowns in enrollments.
    - There was a statutory change to the kindergarten entrance law and this is the first year of implementation. This could contribute to additional volatility in future years.

- **In migration patterns**

    - LLS has the greatest growth of in-migration cohorts (i.e. students who move into LLS after Kindergarten) with a 10 year average for in-migration growth at LLS of +3.2%,
    - Again, the greatest growth in the district is in the LLS K/1st grade level at 8%.

- **Impact on Students**

    - There was a deliberate decision to delay redistricting at least two years from when it was first discussed at the elementary level. (2019 was focused on the middle school level)
    - This delay was recommended to mitigate the impact of additional movement on students just following the pandemic.
    - The district has averaged 278 new students moving into our schools over the past 4 years (i.e. in-migration across all grades).

    - We do not have widespread reports of this being traumatic to students.
    - Transitioning to a new school can certainly be a challenge for some students, but with appropriate supports from families, in partnership with our schools, this does not have to be psychologically or emotionally harmful in any way that would lead to any serious problems.
    - Programming and quality of services, instruction, etc., are equally high across our schools. Our students will be served very well and continue to grow with the appropriate supports.

- **SES Underutilized**

    - SES continues to be underutilized.
    - By balancing out our enrollments over the near term, but also the long term, the Board can ensure parity with sufficient headroom/flex rooms to accommodate enrollment bubbles.

- **Transportation**

    - A neighborhood is served by one school's transportation routes.
    - If the Board were to grandfather in students I would recommend that this is done with the understanding that parents will have to provide their own transportation.

- **Projections Can Lack Precision**

    - The district must use data to plan, but there is no absolute precision to these projections as the numbers could be off as much as 10% (which they have been in the past)
    - There is no mechanism to project precisely how many students will surface from the identified Option A1 neighborhood, either Kindergarteners or in-migration students.
    - Given the factors above and the historical volatility of LLS enrollment numbers, I highly recommend the Board errs on the conservative side and make plans with an appropriate enrollment buffer that will likely be needed.

Recommendation

As outlined above, there are numerous "unknowns" that could lead to increased enrollment and stressors on the capacity of LLS. The unknowns are what can happen in the remainder of the LLS attendance zone and not in the redistricted neighborhood. There is a large catchment area, a historically dynamic enrollment with high growth and in-migration rates, and a new school is scheduled to open in September 2027.

Grandfathering all current 51 LLS students to be redistricted means giving up the buffer that could likely be needed. Additionally, the school is currently overcrowded and needs immediate relief.

For all these reasons, I recommend that the Board act prudently and err on a conservative side by adopting Option A1, transitioning 51 students from LLS to SES for the 2025-2026 school year and beyond.