

Westwood School Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 23, 2015

Present:

Brian T. Kelly, Chairperson
Josepha A. Jowdy, Vice Chairperson
John J. O'Brien, Clerk
Carol Lewis, Committee Member
Charles Donahue, Committee Member

John Antonucci, Superintendent
Allison Borchers, Interim Assistant Superintendent
Abby Hanscom, Director of Student Services
Heath Petracca, Director of Finance and Business

Meeting Called to Order at: 7:26 p.m. by Brian Kelly

Mr. Kelly apologized for the late start. Another meeting had run over. Note the meeting was not recorded.

Pledge of Allegiance

Superintendent's Report (7:26 – 8:02)

Student Recognition: Thurston Middle School Scholar Leaders

Dr. Antonucci welcomed Kyle Grady, the middle school interim principal and two middle school teachers who were honoring the Thurston Middle School Scholars. The following students were recipients of the award:

- Isabella Conary
- Isabella Messina
- Enahm Oscar-Phoenix
- Zachary Salvatore

The teachers noted that the award is given out to 8th graders each year who aim high, have consistently high academic achievements and are viewed as leaders. Eighth grade teachers Debi Peterson and Tony Cohutt talked about the candidates. They stated, "These students embody the reason the achievement is offered. Most middle school students want to fit in and these students have the courage of their convictions. They are willing to test ideas in public and they are creative thinkers. It is truly a privilege to be their teacher and team leader. These students exemplify what you are looking for in students. They are a dream to work with. It is not just about grades, these students are curious about the world. It is even the small things such as saying hello and thank you—they even thank you for receiving a test."

High School French Exchange-Nancy Aykanian, HS Teacher

Dr. Antonucci welcomed Nancy Aykanian and Dan Jibson from Westwood High School to share

their French foreign exchange experience. It exceeded their expectations. Unexpectedly, the group was in France when the tall ship the Hermione was launched. This is the largest and most authentically built tall ship in the last 150 years and it will be coming to Boston on July 11 and 12. Though the students and teachers did not get to board the ship, they were there for the launch and participated in the national ceremony to kick-off the voyage. The French President and many other dignitaries were there as well. The Westwood High School students were on stage, they sang the French National Anthem and spoke to the over 15,000 people in attendance. Ms. Aykanian said that even better than that experience were the relationships that they formed. They took the school committee through a presentation containing pictures and quotes from the students. It was remarked to be a true study of the French culture.

Looking ahead to 2015, interest is growing for another exchange. In order to assist with the funding there are grants, donations and fundraisers that will take place.

Feedback on PARCC testing from Westwood Teacher's Association-Carolyn Casey, WTA President

Dr. Antonucci invited Andy Frankenfield and Carolyn Casey to speak about the PARCC testing feedback from the teachers' perspectives. Ms. Casey noted there was a lot of feedback in the March rollout regarding the technology issues. This was discussed in a previous meeting so she wanted to focus on the teachers' feedback. The test is timed and students did not have ample time to finish the test and they struggled with trying to figure out tools such as the equation editor. This all took time away from the test taking. For the math portion, there were too many long word problems and multi-step questions. For English Language Arts, elementary school students were frustrated by the time it took scrolling to read the passage. In the middle school, some of the ELA text was above grade level and there were unclear instructions. There were teacher constraints as well, such as technology and other specialists not available for regular classroom instruction; SPED services were interrupted and overall loss of time with specialists and administrators. It was also noted that many more students showed visible signs of anxiety as compared to the MCAS.

Ms. Jowdy asked if PARCC does not perform well, are we required to use it. Dr. Antonucci reminded the school committee that this is a pilot year and does not count and the state decides in the fall what testing method will be used in the commonwealth. Ms. Jowdy asked if these issues mentioned tonight would be fixable. Dr. Antonucci replied they are asking for feedback, which is a positive sign they are looking to make changes.

Dr. Antonucci noted that currently there are several bills filed that would put a moratorium on all testing for the next three years. Mr. Kelly inquired as to why they changed from MCAS to PARCC. Ms. Casey stated the state was looking for a common core test that used problem solving versus rote memorization. The sense was that this type of testing requires a higher level of thinking. Ms. Borchers noted the state is willing to make changes to the testing which is positive.

Mr. Donahue asked if the technology changes are not made, are those things that can be taught to better prepare the students. Ms. Casey said they are hoping they are changed, but certainly can be taught. Ms. Jowdy asked what happens if the students do not score well. It was noted that all students are in the same position. This was a trial year and many districts had the same issues that Westwood had. It was pointed out that 10th grade still takes the MCAS.

Public Participation (8:02-8:03)

Mr. Kelly asked for public participation. None at this time.

Discussion Items

Update on Westwood High School's NEASC status-Sean Bevan (8:03-8:20)

Mr. Bevan reviewed the status of NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges). This organization provides accreditation to New England public and private schools and colleges. The review process is a ten-year cycle including self-study, peer review and then follow-up. It is an extensive and time consuming process that results in teacher and staff doing a significant amount of work. Thus in 2014, the school district decided to delay the self-study and site visits to ensure the NEASC's goals and process were aligned with the districts. Since this time the NEASC had made adjustments to their process and are working under different standards to include less duplication of effort, utilizing the school's own improvement plans, and help to support initiatives being worked already in the schools. They are also trying to reduce cost by having quicker, smaller visiting teams and more efficient web-based submission.

Westwood is currently still in a hold pattern. If the school were to rejoin the process now, they would be a year behind. There is currently no outside pressure from NEASC to join, but there may be in the future. Many other schools chose to delay as well.

Ms. Jowdy asked if there was a count of how many schools chose to delay. Dr. Antonucci noted many schools chose to still participate and Westwood does need to get back into this process at some point. The changes NEASC made were a direct result of concerns by those not participating.

Mr. Kelly pointed out the major issue was the process was very time consuming. Mr. Donahue asked about the benefit to having this accreditation. Mr. Bevan noted that it helps on many levels. Commission Standards are high and focus on virtually every aspect of a school or higher education institution's operation. These standards often are accepted in substitution for standards set by state departments of education. Mr. Donahue asked about the cost and Mr. Bevan explained that it is the cost of man-hours more than dollars.

Dr. Antonucci pointed out that schools have had little input in the past and we can now benefit from the other schools going through this new process.

Mr. Kelly asked about the necessary action on this item. There is no action at this time. The timeline for clarifying status is October 2015. They are simply keeping lines of communication

open and know that in the future they will need to reengage in the process.

WPS Mental Health Study Committee-Sean Bevan/Kyle Grady (8:20--8:28)

Mr. Bevan took a few minutes to introduce the committee to the WPS Mental Health Study Committee. This committee was created this past year and grew out of the need to make sure the program regarding mental health is uniformed and consistent across the district There are 15 committee members. They are broken up into subcommittees whose goals are to research programs at other schools, inventory current programs K-12, design and develop programs that meet the needs of the school district. This is a coordinated effort with the Thurston Middle School and Westwood High School and other town resources.

Ms. Lewis asked how the committee is defining mental health. Mr. Bevan stated that it is a very broad definition. He then referenced as an example the recent SOS program at TMS and how that would be modified to meet the needs of the High School. Another example is to focus on stress and anxiety in general terms and more parent and family education.

New elementary spelling program-Josh Baumer (8:28-8:41)--presentations

Barbara Lindsay district literacy specialist and Josh Baumer Deerfield Principal reviewed a presentation regarding the new spelling program. The program was last reviewed and changed in 2004. In 2008-2009 they had revisited the existing program to ensure that it was consistent with the Massachusetts standards.

The committee was formed to review K-2. They are currently waiting on grades 3-5. The committee surveyed teachers, reviewed research from experts, and crosschecked criteria against current practices. The final recommendation was to adopt the Foundations Program based on the Wilson Reading System. This program met all of the criteria. Foundations will be used in addition to the reading and writing workshop, as these are still valuable resources for different types of learners. Over the course of 2015-2016, there will be professional development for the teachers including full day training and coaching session by literacy specialist.

Mr. O'Brien asked is this replacing the existing program. Mr. Baumer noted it is to replace the program that was put in over 11 years ago. Ms. Jowdy asked if other districts use this program and it was confirmed that many other districts do use this program. Mr. Kelly asked if there was evidence that this turns students into better spellers. Mr. Baumer noted that historically we are better spellers than other school districts.

Space and Capital Needs Study/Elementary School Consolidation: Next Steps-John Antonucci (8:41-8:57)

Dr. Antonucci noted that there has been a great deal of time spent reviewing the proposals and it is time to make a recommendation. The preferred option being suggested is the consolidation of the five elementary schools into three, which would include closing Sheehan, Deerfield and

building a new school where Hanlon is now. There would be minor changes to Martha Jones and Downey. Dr. Antonucci understands and appreciates the magnitude of the project and believes it makes sense to pursue this option as it makes the best economic and logical sense. There is a tremendous amount of vetting that needs to be done and this is truly a community decision.

Mr. Kelly asked if this is to be voted on tonight. Dr. Antonucci said that it is worth it to take a vote and understand what the school committee supports. Ms. Jowdy noted that conversations would need to take place with the town regarding funding, etc.

The committee then discussed the need to vote or not vote at this time. Mr. Donahue noted a concern about the issues of safety, quality, cost and capital budget. He noted there is also an ongoing issue with the middle school. Mr. Donahue said that this should be discussed with the town prior to a decision being made. Dr. Antonucci agreed that those issues need to be discussed with the town and felt that approaching them with a proposal that is focused was the best course of action.

Mr. Kelly pointed out that the school committee members were elected to make certain decisions and need to select what is the best choice for the schools and then take that to the town to be vetted, seek feedback and then finally make decisions.

Mr. Donahue made a motion to reconsolidate the elementary schools from five schools to three. He again raised the issue of the middle school. It was noted that the more pressing issue is the elementary schools at this time. Mr. Donahue restates the motion to adopt option c1E pursuant to the master plan. Ms. Jowdy seconds the motion. All school committee members vote in favor.

Superintendent's 2014-2015 Evaluation (8:57-9:15)

Ms. Lewis, as the recently deposed chairperson, provided Dr. Antonucci with his performance evaluation. She noted the grades the school committee gave were either the same or higher than those Dr. Antonucci gave himself. Ms. Lewis noted that it has been quite a challenging year to be a superintendent with the bomb threat, underage drinking situation, the student suicide and most recently student accident.

She noted many successes this year such as the math improvements, reconfiguring X-block, general and improved communication across the school, to parents and with the town officials, and a tremendous job on budget transparency.

Action items (9:15-9:24)

Vote on School Choice

Dr. Antonucci noted that a state law requires school to vote on an annual basis as to whether the school will participate in school choice. The school choice program allows parents to send

their children to schools in communities other than the city or town in which they reside. Tuition is paid by the sending district to the receiving district. Districts may elect not to enroll school choice students if space is not available.

A yes vote declines participating in school choice. Ms. Jowdy makes a motion to decline participating in school choice. Ms. Lewis seconds the motion. All vote in favor. A roll call is then taken and all committee members voted to decline participating in school choice. Mr. Donahue wanted it included that the reason for declining this is the limited space available to meet the needs of such a program.

Non-bargaining unit salary increases for FY '16

Dr. Antonucci each year presents a list of those who are not part of the collective bargaining. A list was provided in the meeting packet. A motion is made to approve the salary increases. Mr. Donahue approves the motion and Ms. Jowdy seconds the motion. All vote in favor and the motion is approved.

Approval of Minutes-May 28, 2015

Ms. Lewis makes a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Jowdy seconds the motion. All vote in favor and the motion is approved.

Public Participation (9:23)

Mr. Kelly asked if there was any public participation. He reminds those in attendance to identify themselves and their street address.

A resident asked about those students that may not be available for the new spelling program. Mr. Baumer noted that all materials are available for next year. There are a lot of screening measures in place to catch all learning issues for students.

Adjournment (9:24)

Ms. Lewis asked for a motion to adjourn and Mr. O'Brien seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The meeting ended at 9:24 pm.