

**Westwood School Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
November 5, 2018**

**Present:**

Charlie Donahue, Chairperson  
Tony Mullin, Vice Chairperson  
Joseph Jowdy, Clerk  
Carol Lewis, Committee Member  
Maya Plotkin, Committee Member  
Chris Bezdedeau, WHS Student Representative- not in attendance

Emily Parks, Superintendent  
Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent  
Heath Petracca, Director of Business and Finance  
Abby Hanscom, Director of Student Services

**Meeting called to order 7:00 pm  
Pledge of Allegiance**

*Meeting was recorded by Westwood Media Center*

**Superintendent's Report (7:00-7:45)**

The Middle School was closed today because a pipe burst. There was flooding on the first floor. Service Master has been in, removed the water, a dehumidifier is running, and plan to be open for school tomorrow. Wanted to thank Ken Aries, Director of Operations, and the operations team for their work on this issue today.

**Life-Threatening Allergies Protocol Update**

Ms. Hanscom reported. A group of people are working on creating a Life-Threatening Allergy guideline. There has been two meetings, with eight people represented by parents and school staff, including food service and transportation. They wanted a third meeting this month to make sure it has all been discussed. Asked if a School Committee member would join the third and final meeting. Ms. Lewis said she would attend the meeting. Will plan to provide this guideline next month.

Ms. Hanscom also reported on the Substance Abuse Screening. A letter has been sent to 500 families. Received two responses back with positive support. 250 letters to 10th grade families, and 250 letters to 7th grade families. Planning to start the screening January/February 2019. The staff has had two trainings so far for this screening.

## Security Audit Update

The bid has been awarded to Dynamic Security Strategies. The two consultants are Bonnie Michelman and David Corbin. They have decades of experience. Will be holding a kickoff meeting with the district leadership team tomorrow to start the process. The goal is to have a recommendation report for the schools within 90 days. After this recommendation, they will begin working with the municipal buildings. This was paid for by a warrant article passed at Town Meeting for \$125,000. The cost for the consultants is about \$30,000 less than \$125,000. This money can be used to start implementing the recommendations in the report.

## Parent and Student Programming

2018-2019 Parent Programs have been set for the year. Parents have reached out thanking the district for having these programs: Teaching our Children to be Good Digital Citizens, Limit Setting in the Age of Technology, Elementary Science, Talking About Race with our Children, Preventing Biased-Based Bullying, and How to Emotionally Equip our Kids.

The High School is continuing with the Courageous Conversations series, one will be held each term. Term 1: Klijptown South African Gumboot Dancers, Term 2: LGBTQ Alum Panel, Term 3: Mental Health Speaker from "Minding your Mind", Term 4: Healthy Relationships.

## MS and HS Class Size Report

The Middle School overall enrollment this year is starting to decline, decreasing by 50 students from last year. Next year will decrease by another 35 students. It is expected to decline over the next several years. The staffing has remained the same. Guidelines for middle school are 18-24 students per class, ideally not higher than 28 students. Across the 164 core academic classes, only 15 sections (9%) currently have 25 or more students.

The High School enrollment is at a 10-year high with 1012 students. This enrollment will stay the same for the next two years, and then begin to decline. By 2024-2025, the high school enrollment is projected to dip under 900 students, which has not been the case since 2010-2011. The School Committee guideline is 18-24 students per class, ideally not larger than 28 students. Currently of the 224 core academic classes, 52 classes (23%) have 25 or more students including 18 sections with 28 or more students. About 20% of classes are below 15 students.

By adding a math teacher and science teacher for this school year, it dropped in class size. In 2017-2018, 13 sections (25%) had 25 or more students in Math and 19 sections (33%) had 25 or more students in Science. In 2018-2019, 8 sections (14%) have 25 or more students in Math and 10 sections (17%) have 25 or more students in Science. By not adding a teacher in ELA and Social Studies, the class size increased. In 2017-2018, 12 sections (21%) had 25 or more students in ELA and 11 sections (21%) had 25 or more students in Social Studies. In 2018-2019, 13 sections (23%) have 25 or more students in ELA and 15 sections (29%) have 25 or more students in Social Studies.

This will be looked at in the upcoming budget process to add additional teachers in both ELA and Social Studies.

### Director of Business and Finance Search

Heath Petracca will be retiring in March. Mr. Petracca has worked in the district since 1999. He first started as the Director of Food Services, then became the Director of Operations prior to becoming the Director of Business and Finance. He will be here through budget process and MSBA vote.

The position will be posted in the next two weeks. It will be posted for a July 1, 2019 start date unless an earlier start date can be determined. Would look for an Interim Director of Business and Finance from April-June 2019. Someone who has already had experience in this type of position would be hired as the interim.

### MSBA Project Update

The first sit-down meeting was held last week. Ms. Parks, Mr. Petracca, Mr. Donahue, Ms. Plotkin, Mr. Walsh and Mr. Jaillet attended this meeting. The meeting was good. It was a reminder that Westwood is very fortunate to be in the MSBA system. There is a generally good feeling about how Westwood has engaged the MSBA. We have clearly communicated all of our needs in this process. MSBA has heard us loud and clear what all of our building needs are. There is nothing further to do to express our needs. It all comes down to the budget of money they will have and how much they can provide to us. The base 2018 reimbursement rate was 33.98% rate. We had anticipated 31%, so this is good news. MSBA has shared their enrollment projections. This is the first step, agreeing on enrollment numbers to build for. Westwood now needs to compare and work with these numbers and come to an agreement with the MSBA and provide them with possible options we would like to study during the feasibility study. The timeline was also clarified. The enrollment deadline is February 28<sup>th</sup>, not November 28<sup>th</sup> as originally listed in the initial letter. Ms. Parks would like to update the community with this project update through the town newsletter. The School Committee will plan to come up with some suggestions on what to study during the feasibility study period for the upcoming December School Committee meeting.

An author visit is coming to the Downey School in December. The book is called *Rescue & Jessica* and it about a rescue dog. This visit with the author and illustrator will be live streamed. Other classrooms and librarians across the nation can register to be a part of this program.

The High school political newspaper, *We the People*, with articles about the midterm elections was published. Chris Bezdedeau is one of the editors.

### **Public Participation (7:45-7:45)**

No participation.

### **Discussion Items (7:45-8:30)**

Report on J-Term Pilot (7:45-8:24)

Jonas Sherr will be presenting. He is the District Professional Development Coordinator and Social Studies teacher at the high school.

### J-Term Refresher:

- This is a five-day intensive immersive learning experience held in June
- Students choose one course
- This is pass/fail course of 1.25 credits
- Courses are designed to evoke authentic engagement in learning
- An opportunity for students to experience a different kind of learning that isn't possible in 47 minute chunks.
- A creative, professional experience for teachers to work without the confines of state standards, assessments, and time pressure.

Vision for J-Term was for students to be authentically engaged.

*Vision statement for J-Term: J-Term at WHS provides an opportunity for students to dive deeply into an existing area of interest or explore a new interest during an immersive learning experience of their choosing. J-Term courses are challenging and experiential; they involve, not just inform. Students explore, create, study, think and do. J-Term allows students to experience learning without the external controls that steer much of their education (e.g. classes constrained by bells and achievement measure by a grade). While each J-Term course is unique, all courses culminate in: a final product or performance, and/or a shared experience, and/or a reflection upon what was learned.*

### 2018 facts and figures

- 36 courses
- 750 students total (9th, 10th, 11th graders)
- Co-Taught courses (34 of 36 classes)
- Courses mixed by all grade levels
- Average class size: 20.8 students
- Student/Faculty ratio: 8:1
- 58% of students received first choice course, 89% top 2 choice, 98% top 3 choice
- 26 of 36 courses involved some form of off-site travel during the week
- Instructional Aides are assigned to courses based on special education needs
- Average number of student absences per day 35.5 (4.7%). This is less than absence on the first day of school.

### Course development process

- April 27, 2016: J-Term concept introduced to faculty during Professional Development. There was an overwhelmingly positive response from the faculty.
- A J-Term steering committee was created of 17 members (12 teachers, 4 administrators, 1 school committee member).
  - 12 meetings between November 28, 2016- June 4, 2018

- Tasks: Assess viability and value of proposed courses, meet with teams to provide feedback for course development plan and execute logistics (transportation, budget, supplies, etc.), gather and analyze feedback from staff and students, develop faculty PD sessions.

### Professional Development

2016-2017 Full day PD, plus 6 additional Early Release Wednesdays

2017-2018 7 Early Release Wednesdays

Structure of J-Term PD sessions varied, including:

- Faculty-wide training on skills of design thinking, creativity, and on curriculum and instruction (e.g. tying courses and units around essential questions, structuring varied learning experiences, etc.)
- Small-group peer feedback sessions
- Individualized time for teaching teams to develop courses

### Student Focus Groups

- November 2016 : 50 students (9-12, cross level); Discussion and open-ended survey questions; Course titles only, no teacher names.
- February 2017: 100 students; Discussion and open-ended survey questions; Course descriptions with teacher names

Of the 36 courses that ran last year, 9 will not run this year. The main reason a course isn't running is because the faculty member is no longer a teacher at Westwood. Some not running due to low enrollment.

### Parent Communication

- Flyers were made up and distributed as well as a coffee and conversation was held at both the High School Curriculum night and Parent Teacher Conferences
- Course shopping took place November 20-21, 2017. Teaching teams run 10 minute sessions to introduce their course to students. Students select 8 courses to "shop".

### Cost: Pilot Year

Total cost :	\$52, 385
Less value of durable goods:	<u>\$ 9,939</u>
	\$42,446
Cost detail: Transportation	\$13,158
Consumable materials	\$11,638
Entrance fees	\$10,098
Speaker fees	\$ 355

Food (course-related)	\$ 4,107
Other	<u>\$ 3,180</u>
	\$42,446

With the exception of SCUBA which resulted in a certification and necessitated that students purchase their own equipment, there was no cost to students. The per-pupil cost (less the cost of durable goods) was \$57/student. The Foundation for Westwood Education provided a grant in the amount of \$20,000. The remainder of the cost of the pilot was supported by the operating budget, both through funds specifically earmarked for J-Term and through the district's curriculum and instruction budget.

Feedback from Students, Faculty and Parents:

#### Students' Quantitative

- 95% felt J-Term courses were successful in achieving their mission
- 85% would be excited to participate in another J-Term course next year

#### Students Qualitative

- Students were generally excited to attend school, viewing J-Term as a less stressful learning experience without the external pressures of grade or homework
- Students enjoyed the change from the traditional structure of school
- Students enjoyed having more self-direction than in their normal school experience
- Students showed a preference for courses that included off-site travel
- Students experienced the end of the school year prior to J-term (end of term 4, final exams) as more stressful than in previous years
- Students wanted to learn more about what was happening with other J-Term courses
- Students were able to articulate specific learning outcomes for themselves

#### Teachers' Quantitative

- 85% felt J-Term courses were successful in achieving their mission
- 46% felt the experience or developing and teaching J-Term course had an effect on their overall teaching practice going forward.

#### Teachers' Qualitative

- Teachers experienced high levels of student motivation without the use of grades
- Many teachers noted that the structure of J-Term allowed them to develop more meaningful relationships with students

- Many teachers made connections about how J-Term might impact their thinking about their traditional course of instruction
- Similar to students, many teachers experienced increased stress in the days leading up to J-Term (end of 4th term and final exams)
- Co-teaching was a positive and new experience

#### Parent feedback

- A lot of unsolicited e-mails/communications with positive responses regarding the J-Term

#### 5 days of J-Term impact on the other 175 days

##### Teachers

##### Lessons of student engagement

- changing attitudes around student motivation
- increased use of self-directed and/or student-centered learning

##### Enhanced culture of professional collaboration

- practice offering and receiving peer feedback
- benefits of peer observation/co-teaching

##### Experience of curriculum development

- enhancing creative thinking
- use of essential questions
- varied methods of instruction

##### Added emphasis on student relationships

- social emotional learning

##### Students

##### Detachment of learning experiences from grades

- Increased interaction with other students
- Positive affiliations with school and learning
- Confidence and increased ability to self-direct learning
- Improvements in social/emotional skills
- Shifted relationship with teachers

#### Looking forward J-Term 2019

#### Continued Progress

##### Summer 2018: three meetings of steering committee subgroups

- Review Student Qualitative feedback
- Generate J-Term Summary Document
- Establish initial plan for Creation of New Courses and Distribution of New Teachers

September 28 meeting with Concord-Carlisle (Q5 Pilot) High School to compare experiences

October 10 Faculty PD session  
Consolidating takeaways about Teaching & Learning from J-Term 2018  
Generating new courses for J-Term 2019

October 12 application filed for grant from Massachusetts Cultural Council

October 15 steering committee meeting  
Review of New Course proposals

October 16-November 2 feedback meetings

Student focus groups will be run in the future

Lessons learned Changes for J-Term 2019

Less rushed end to term 4 and final exams  
changes to overall term calendar  
major assignments staggered with earlier due dates  
Added opportunities for interaction between course  
Restructuring of courses that lacked enough variety in daily structure  
Administrative changes to logistical processes  
equipment ordering and distribution  
course change process

Next steps

November 8-9 Student focus groups  
collect qualitative and quantitative feedback on proposed new courses  
feedback to be later shared with teaching teams

Late November: J-Term website updated with New Courses

December 17 J-Term shopping  
Six 10 minute sessions (1 day)

Late January 2019 Students notified of Course Placement

June 11-17 J-Term 2019 (Dates subject to snow days)

FY'20 Budget Priorities( 8:24- 8:38)

Initial discussion on what School Committee would like to see in the budget.

Class size was discussed at the Middle School and High School.

Turnover money and how it was used. The net difference, added several positions out of this turnover number: Added 1 teacher to Martha Jones, staffing in special education, a part time BCBA, 6 1/2 instructional assistants, a part time ABA tutor, a part time O/T, and part time speech. These positions will need to be incorporated in the budget for this coming year.



Final year of the teachers' contract; going into collective bargaining this late winter/early spring

Plan to eliminate tuition for kindergarten: Need to offset the cost of this program without the kindergarten fee.

J-term is budgeted for \$25,000 and it would cost around \$42,000; possibly look for outside sponsors. Ms. Lewis will work on outside sponsors.

Mr. Mullin asked that the curriculum leaders/directors at the Middle School be looked into. Ms. Jowdy also wanted this to be looked into. Also wanted a better understanding why the specials at the elementary schools are at different levels (e.g., librarians are 4.6 staff and other specials are at 3.6/3.8 staff). Wondering if re-allocating those funds may save some money.

Mr. Donahue asked with the coding being introduced in third grade, how can that be continued into 4th and 5th grade? Also look at other ways to help the students with special needs to improve in the science testing.

### **Action Items (8:38–8:40)**

Approval of Minutes: October 9, 2018

On page 6, Mr. Mullin made a comment on how he would like to hear about what is being done at the middle school and being planned for the long term on addressing the dips in test scores. He wanted to add that he wanted to hear about this at a School Committee meeting.

A motion to make the amendment to the October 9, 2018 minutes was made by Ms. Jowdy. Seconded by Ms. Plotkin.

Official Vote: Unanimous approval

A motion to approve the amended October 9, 2018 minutes was made by Ms. Jowdy. Seconded by Mr. Mullin.

Official Vote: Unanimous approval

Overnight Trip: Girls' Varsity Hockey Team to Barnstable, MA

A motion to approve the trip was made by Ms. Lewis. Seconded by Ms. Jowdy.

Official Vote: Unanimous approval

### **New Business/Liaison Reports (8:40-8:41)**

Diwali Celebration will be held at Westwood High on Saturday November 10, 2018. Sean Bevan will be the speaker welcoming to this event.

Ms. Lewis wanted to acknowledge that the play, "1984," at the High School was a tremendous production.

## **Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Jowdy . Seconded by Ms. Plotkin.

Official Vote: Unanimous approval

**Meeting adjourned at 8:41pm.**