

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

July 9, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also presents on the videoconference were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks, Director of Student Services Abigail Hanscom, and Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis recognized the live stream of the meeting, which was provided for real-time, public access to the activities of the School Committee. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the meeting via the Internet at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live and via Westwood Media Center's platforms.

Superintendent's Report

Mrs. Lewis recognized Ms. Parks, who presented her report.

Ms. Parks acknowledged that former High School Principal Phil Flaherty passed away a few weeks ago. Mr. Flaherty began his career in Westwood as a high school social studies teacher in September 1954. He was named High School Assistant Principal in September 1972; and High School Principal from 1982 through 1995.

Ms. Parks announced that Amy Davenport was named High School Principal, effective July 1. Mrs. Davenport previously served as Dean of Students. Ms. Parks shared that this vacancy creates an opportunity to rethink and restructure the Dean of Students position in light of some of the other work around efforts to support students and families of color. Given the time-crunch, however, Ms. Parks will be appointing an interim Dean – likely and internal candidate -- in its current, traditional role for 2020-21. This will allow time to articulate the role and, by December or January, recruit for the new position with internationality.

Extended School Year Program

Ms. Parks acknowledged the great effort taken to launch Extended School Year this summer. She asked Mrs. Hanscom to present on the program.

There are 100 students participating in-person:

- 7 Preschool students
- 65 Elementary students
- 11 Middle School students
- 17 High School/Transition students

The students are supported by approximately 81 staff:

- Preschool: 4 staff members

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with Executive Order of Massachusetts Governor, March 12, 2020

- 1 teacher
- 1 Speech-Language Pathologist
- 1 ABA Tutor
- 1 Instructional Assistant
- Elementary: 53 staff members
 - 14 teachers
 - 12 ABA Tutors
 - 21 Instructional Assistants
 - 3 Speech-Language Pathologists
 - 1 Occupational Therapist
 - 1 BCBA
 - 1 Physical Therapist
- Middle School: 10 staff members
 - 2 teachers
 - 3 ABA Tutors
 - 1 Instructional Assistant
 - 1 BCBA
 - 1 Occupational Therapist
 - 1 Teacher of the Visually Impaired
 - 1 Orientation and Mobility Specialist
- High School/Transition: 14 staff members
 - 3 teachers
 - 1 BCBA
 - 7 ABA Tutors
 - 3 Instructional Assistants
 - Plus, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Nurse

Programming takes place for students in three categories:

- Students with complex needs/multiple providers
- Students who did not engage frequently in the remote learning approach
- Students who staff felt were vulnerable for other reasons

A Remote Extended School Year Program is also taking place. Those include:

- Preschool: 5 students
- Elementary: 27 students
- Middle School: 33 students invited
- High School/Transition: 29 students invited

The goal is to continue in-person instruction through August 14 without interruption. The keys to this include social distancing, hand washing/hygiene, mask-wearing, and daily cleaning procedures.

COVID-19 Updates

Ms. Parks indicated preliminary DESE guidance for fall reopening was received on June 25. A letter was sent to families that afternoon which articulated to goal of returning

students to in-person learning. Ms. Parks then asked Mrs. Jn-baptiste to share an update on closing out the FY'20 budget.

Mrs. Jn-baptiste shared:

- Working on timeline for closing to ensure all charges are accounted for.
- Westwood received CARES funding to address some COVID-19 impacts. Approximately \$148k was relieved as a result. This was mostly cleaning expenses and personal protective equipment. In the immediate term, it helps not to deplete circuit breaker funding.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Project Update

Mrs. Plotkin shared that the School Building Committee approved a final project: a new building on the Hanlon site for 560 students. The Preferred Schematic Report, the report that includes the final option, was submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority this week. They have already acknowledged receipt. The project now moves into schematic design, which fine-tunes finishes, space, costs, etc. This design phase lasts 7-9 months. Feedback will be solicited from the community as part of the process.

Mrs. Lewis indicated that she received letters from some Martha Jones parents asking on understanding where the Committee stands on reopening. The correspondence is form letters from "Bring Kids Back," a Massachusetts organization advocating for students to return to classrooms full-time and distance learning for families who do now wish to have their children return in-person. Mrs. Lewis responded on behalf of the Committee and the Superintendent. Mrs. Lewis shared that the return to in-person learning is the goal and is what is being planned for. However, it is highly depending upon public health metrics. Alternate models are being planned in case they are needed at some point. Teachers and administrators are working over the summer to ensure the best education for Westwood students in the safest possible environment.

Public Participation

Mrs. Lewis opened the meeting for public participation. Members of the public were invited to participate in writing via a form posted on the District website.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street asked if a decision has been made on whether students will be supplying their own personal protective equipment. The District will soon be sending a supply list to parents that will look different than it has in the past. It is expected that students will need to wear masks that will be supplied by parents. Other items will likely include hand sanitizer, safety goggles for science labs, and headphones.

Antigone Grasso of Oak Street expressed concern about getting kids back in the classroom.

The District is proceeding with, based on current health metrics, to be able to fully open for in-person instruction in the fall. District administrators have been spending the past week assessing the feasibility of this. In short, can the District bring back all 3,000 students and implement health and safety guidelines put forth in the Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) guidance. The early assessment is that this is possible, although school will look different under these parameters. At the same time, all Districts are required to have models in place in case something were to change.

Ms. Grasso had a follow-up question on what opportunities Westwood has to share feedback with DESE about applying the guidance. Ms. Parks responded that the Commissioner of Education has been holding weekly videoconferences with Superintendents. In addition, there are regional Superintendent groups throughout the Commonwealth that have a mechanism to interacting with DESE and the Commissioner.

Discussion Items

2020-2021 School Committee Liaison/Subcommittee Assignments

Mrs. Lewis will contact Committee members to discuss liaison and subcommittee assignments.

Fall Reopening

Mrs. Lewis recognized Ms. Parks.

DESE Guidance

The premise of the guidance is that medical evidence suggests that it is possible to safely return to school by using a combination of health and safety measures. Districts are required to create, and submit by July 31, a plan for three models, as needed:

- In-person (5 days per week)
- Hybrid (No specific requirement for how to do it)
- Remote (For students who cannot return to school, or for everyone if school closes)

In addition, a plan for special populations to receive services and accommodations is also required. Even in a hybrid model, high-needs students could be full-time in-person.

Guidance indicates that adults and students must wear a mask or face covering, with an exception for medical circumstances. Mask breaks will need to occur throughout the day and be provided by the student/family, although extras will be available from the school as needed. Masks would be required for everyone on the school bus, although guidance on transportation has not yet been issued by DESE.

The guidance also speaks to physical distancing. The aim is for physical distance of six feet when feasible, with a three foot minimum allowed. There is not enough square footage in Westwood classrooms to have desks spaced six feet apart. Largely, the math does work when aiming for the three foot standard. Furniture needs throughout the district are being assessed. Larger spaces like the cafeteria, library, and auditorium may need to be repurposed for classroom space.

To the extent possible, students need to be placed in the same groups throughout the day, breaking students into cohorts. There is no maximum size for groups or cohorts, as long as it adheres to physical distancing requirements. In high schools, families need to be in the same cohort when possible and limit traveling within the building.

The fall reopening guidance includes providing information to families about how to symptom check. It is expected that families will assess their own children before sending them to school. Screening is not required at school entry, but staff are encouraged to refer students to the school nurse when concerned.

Students and staff will need to wash and sanitize their hands upon arrival at school, before eating, before putting on and taking off their masks, and before dismissal. Hand sanitizer will need to be placed in key locations, such as building entrances, cafeteria, and classrooms.

Schools will be required to have an isolation space, separate from the nurse's office.

There remain some unknowns. Pending guidance includes:

- Further guidance on mask breaks and information about how to properly put on and take off masks
- More information about how to dismiss students from isolation, if symptomatic
- Statewide support and resources for remote learning
- Process for handling a COVID-19 positive case in the school community
- Transportation guidance (e.g., bus scheduling options, addressing bus capacity, etc.)
- Athletics and extracurriculars
- Music programs
- More information about operational issues, such as food distribution, signage, cleaning, etc.

Current work includes:

- Principals assessing feasibility of implementing guidance for in-person return
- District leadership team reviewing survey feedback from all constituents
- Discussing the process for the working groups with the Westwood Teachers' Association
- Meeting with Superintendents in surrounding communities to discuss approaches
- Establishing the plan/framework for working groups next week:
 - Principals: Focusing on logistics of in-person return with safety guidelines in place
 - Teaching and Learning: Focusing on creating hybrid and remote instructional models
 - Health and Safety: Initial focus on issues related to in-person return
 - Human Resources: Assessing and addressing staffing issues/levels with in-person model

- Operations: Initially looking at cleaning protocols, food service, and transportation

Results of the remote learning survey will be shared back to parents. Parents will also be asked to complete a very short survey to assess percentage of families that may opt out of in-person instruction and to get a sense of potential bus ridership. A Site Council representative will be asked to serve as a member of an advisory group. The purpose of this group is to vet, in real-time, decisions that are being made and to provide parents' perspective.

There are budgetary issues, which include:

- No information about Chapter 70. The State is moving to a 1/12th budget scenario
- Additional State funding: \$225/student
- Consider purchasing devices for students in Kindergarten through grade 2 at a cost of approximately \$200K
 - Possibility of leasing with a cost spread out over three years
 - There is a difficulty with the supply chain and a need to act quickly
- Sense of the scale of PPE costs
 - Supplies for the first twelve weeks would total approximately \$212K
- Community building use and custodial costs

Mr. Donahue and Mrs. Phillips expressed their support in having the District move toward renting or purchasing devices for students in kindergarten through grade 2 and would like to take it to a vote in the future.

Mrs. Lewis asked to serve on the Advisory Committee as the School Committee representative. The Committee agreed.

Ms. Parks asked the Committee for flexibility in potentially re-allocating FTEs within a building. For example, a teacher may be licensed in two areas and it would be valuable for the District to allocate some of that to another discipline. This would not change any financial impact, just the distribution of the FTE. There was common understanding and support from the Committee.

WPS Remote Learning Survey Results

A total of 820 parents and 728 students in grades 3-12 responded to the remote learning survey.

Based upon the results, families agreed that communication from the District and their child's school contained clear information and consistent messaging.

Over 99% of students responded that they have been participating in distance learning.

Analysis:

- Most families thought everyone did their best given the circumstances

- If remote learning continues in the fall, families hope planning and delivery can be improved to better engage all students
- Some families will need more support to ensure a more rigorous academic and social experience for their children, if a remote learning model has to be implemented again
- Majority support an in-school approach for 2020-21; also acknowledge need to follow health and safety guidelines

Action Items

Resolution regarding COVID-19 State Funding

Mrs. Lewis shared that a resolution for School Committees has been drafted to request that the State should fund what schools need to do to ensure students can safely return to school.

Mr. Donahue made a motion to approve the resolution to request State funding to address what is being asked to address COVID-19. Seconded by Mrs. Plotkin.

Mrs. Plotkin read the resolution aloud:

WHEREAS, if schools are to re-open this fall in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the responsibility of each school district to do so safely and responsibly; and

WHEREAS, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that each school district is able to pay for the enormous additional staffing, transportation and material expenses required to do this; and

WHEREAS, the state cannot expect mandatory COVID-19 safety guidelines to be followed without also ensuring that each school district has the funds required to implement these guidelines; therefore, let it be

RESOLVED: that the state must guarantee every school district full reimbursement for whatever COVID-19 expenses are required to follow state mandates.

We must ensure a statewide school re-opening that is safe, responsible and equitable.

There can be no unfunded mandates for COVID-19.

Mr. Mullin asked to have a discussion at a later meeting on the School Committee taking a political stance on issues.

Roll-Call Vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes

Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Nay
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 4-1-0 (Approved)

Approval of June 4, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Mullin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 4, 2020. Seconded by Mrs. Plotkin.

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Abstain

Result: 4-0-1 (Approved)

Approval of June 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 19, 2020. Seconded by Mr. Donahue.

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Donahue.

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID-19 State Funding resolution

- Draft meeting minutes of June 4, 2020
- Draft meeting minutes of June 19, 2020
- School Committee Liaison Assignment List