

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

July 20, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:03pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present 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 began the meeting by stating that there is no way to gain consensus from the community on how best to reopen in September and stressed the need to be realistic in all decisions. She then recognized Ms. Parks, who presented her report, updating the Committee on the District's response to COVID-19.

Ms. Parks asked Abby Hanscom to provide an update on the positive COVID-19 case of an Extended School Year staff member at Downey School.

Mrs. Hanscom stated that, on Monday, July 13 a staff member was informed during the workday of an inaccurate test result which caused the District to implement procedures to isolate and remove the ill staff member who was not symptomatic. This resulted in Westwood Public Health officials initiating contact tracing. Three students were identified as part of that process. Those three students are quarantining at home and will complete the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) procedure for testing negative prior to returning.

The District followed public health guidance, shutting down the Downey School for one day to clean and disinfect. If a future closure happens, the District will consider closing the physical Extended School Year Program and returning to remote learning, though this is undesirable.

Feedback from parents indicated that waiting to hear back on contact tracing was very stressful. However, Westwood's situation was responded to more quickly than is typical. The District is in the process of drafting a "What to Do If..." document which would be distributed to families during such waiting periods.

Mrs. Hanscom stated that new protocols from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the fall were received on Friday. It is being disseminated to nursing staff and they will be debriefing tomorrow. In addition, updates from the CDC are anticipated soon.

Ms. Parks then continued her report on the District's response to the pandemic. She stated that she has reached out to several officials since the situation last week. She was able to share insight to those drafting and disseminating protocols for a perspective on how they work "on the ground." She expressed appreciation for the diligence of Westwood Public Health officials throughout this process.

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

Ms. Parks indicated that she has spoken with the Commissioner of Education Jeff Riley, Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston, and Dr. Catherine Brown, Chief Epidemiologist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. She was pleased to have access to people with expertise that are willing to help and are appreciative of feedback.

Ms. Parks stated that the protocols in place are in line with all guidance. The protocols are predicated on access to testing and being able to have those results turnaround rather quickly. In Massachusetts, the turnaround is 7-10 days.

Ms. Parks announced parent forums have been scheduled for Wednesday. Later during the School Committee meeting, she will present information on the District's approach to reopening in the fall. Wednesday evening will be a series of virtual parent forums allowing for live participation.

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.

Jasmine Lellock of Chamberlain Avenue asked whether the District has considered the phased reopening proposal and safety checklist created by the Massachusetts Teachers' Association. She asked whether the District has considered in-person learning for elementary and at-risk students, and utilizing the available middle and high school buildings for social distancing of younger students. She also asked if using outdoor and town spaces has been considered. She further stated that outsourcing online education is a bad idea. She asked if the School Committee would consider real-time comments at a future meeting. She stated that student and teacher health should be a priority and expressed her thanks for the work being done.

Jennifer Atkins of High Street stated that she has seen teens in groups standing close to one another without wearing facemasks. She is concerned about having these students inside a school with insufficient distance, potentially causing viral spread. She suggested using town buildings as additional classroom space, changing student schedules, and grouping students when possible.

Jamy Sesselman of Baker Street urged the Committee to return to in-person learning in the fall. She stated that remote classes are putting working parents out of the workforce. She asked that, if the Committee considers remote instruction, teachers increase instruction time.

Karin Albers of Edgewood Road stated that she did not understand why there is a push for a full return to in-school instruction in the fall as the CDC guidelines of six feet of social distancing cannot be met, cohorts are not being planned at the high school, and HVAC systems are insufficient. She believes that a hybrid or remote option should be the focus. She also asked for the ability to discuss this with the School Committee and District Administrators in a more interactive way, through moderator-lead Zoom meetings.

Anne Donahue of Parker Street asked for an explanation on who the final authority is on what school will look like in the fall; is it the State or a combination of local and State? She asked for information on how parents can provide feedback.

Kathryn Travers of Alder Road expressed concern about the screen time required for remote instruction and its impact on children's brain function.

Elizabeth Friedman of Sunrise Road expressed thanks for the work being done on the learning plan options. She is concerned about the indoor air quality at Sheehan and Thurston. She would like to know about the HVAC maintenance plan and what other measures are being considered to ensure consistent fresh air reaches windowless rooms.

Jennifer Viano of Bayley Street asked whether the District considered meeting on-site with a consistent schedule of four-hour blocks which would allow core curriculum instruction on-site. She asked that, if on a hybrid model, the District would put siblings on the same schedule, allowing working parents to organize their work schedules. In addition, she would like the District to think about utilizing town spaces and outdoor spaces for teachers to hold classes.

Jackie Keaveney of Redwood Road asked about the District's affiliation with the teachers' union. She asked what Westwood could do if the District decides to have full-time, in-person instruction, and the union disagrees.

Dr. Stacey Greally of Pond Plain Road stated that students under the age of ten should return first and to spread them out among the schools and then to gradually return more and more students. She stated that online learning needs to be robust since a second shutdown will inevitably occur.

Erica Howe of Pond Street stated that Governor Baker is allowing only three feet of distance between students instead of the recommended standard of six feet. Updated guidance from the World Health Organization acknowledges that Coronavirus particles can linger in the air of poorly ventilated and crowded indoor spaces. She stated that this is causing anxiety for parents, teachers, and students about the safety of returning to school. She believes that the priority should be health and safety, focusing on a model that supports this priority. A hybrid model would allow for the safety of all, as well as a return to in-school instruction. She then expressed thanks to the District for its work.

Fran Fusco asked if a hybrid model would allow students off-site to view a live stream of the in-person class. She expressed concern that all students receive the same level of instruction as it matters for the equity of all.

Tom Tignor of Conant Road stated that the District should do everything possible to ensure safe, full, in-person instruction in the fall.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street asked for information on the utilization of faculty in a remote model. This would permit compromised faculty to continue teaching.

Kathleen Wyatt of Pond Street expressed concern about reopening guidelines from the State which reduce spacing to three feet and students in kindergarten through grade 2 not being required to wear a facemask.

Amy Wong of Arcadia Road asked for more information about the opt-out plan for families.

Christina Martin of Brookfield Road stated that the three foot minimum distance is a low bar. She was also concerned about ventilation in older buildings.

Heather McNamee of Lakeshore Drive asked whether the District would change policies and procedures with respect to teachers contracting COVID-19. She also asked if the District had its own testing kits so that teachers could be tested on-site in the school buildings.

Rebecca Canelli of Farm Lane wondered how the District would respond if classrooms are setup with three feet of distancing and six feet of distancing are required for mask breaks and lunch.

Lindsay Nozzolillo of Oxford Terrace asked who decided that adults involved with the situation at the Downey Extended School Year Program should be tested and whether the community thinks it is okay for an adult to be tested and return to school while awaiting results. She also expressed concern about staff members still teaching while awaiting test results.

Charles Walsh expressed thanks for all that is being done to react during unprecedented times.

Jen MacPherson of Willow Street hoped that Westwood would follow the lead of other districts that are committing to follow the CDC's six feet of social distancing and not the three feet allowed by DESE.

Kathleen Wyatt of Pond Street asked what is being done for those who have been in contact with staff or students awaiting test results.

Hannah Gardener of Highview Street asked for comment on conducting instruction outdoors and the need for ventilation in school buildings. She also asked whether recommended disinfectants from the American Academy of Pediatrics can be procured.

Ellen Rollings of Greenhill Road agreed that a successful reopening is incumbent on all parents and community members doing their part. However, given that parents historically send their children to school with fevers and there are some that do not believe COVID-19 is a concern, it is a huge leap of faith. She is concerned about the current proposed plans.

Jane O'Donnell of Cobleigh Street asked if individual school districts would be allowed to pick an option that is best for their community or whether it would be a statewide decision by the Governor.

Rachel Duncan of Briar Lane asked if there would be an option for remote learning for children even if the District chooses an in-person or hybrid model.

Keri DeAngelis of Warwick Drive expressed thanks for the work being done. She asked whether the School Committee has considered consolidating early release days and professional development days to deliver 180 days of instruction efficiently.

Discussion Items

Issues Related to Fall Reopening

In the spring, Superintendents were told by DESE that Districts would receive reopening guidance and that it would be prescriptive. The release date kept being delayed. As late as mid-June, DESE indicated that the plan for return would be a hybrid model, suggesting that students would attend on alternating weeks. The reopening guidance from DESE, which is still labeled as preliminary, was released on June 25. Superintendents were told guidance would set forth a goal of bringing all students back in-person using a parameter of three feet of physical distancing, in combination with other preventive safety measures. Districts were to aspire to six feet, but no less than three.

Districts were instructed to develop plans for three models--in person, hybrid, and fully remote—and to develop all three on the premise that districts transition from one model to the

other when warranted. The first step was to complete a feasibility test to determine whether there is enough physical space to accommodate all students at a three foot distance. If not, DESE would send a team to visit and identify what would need to be done to make it happen. The intent being that every district would work toward in-person model.

Prior, districts were encouraged to bring highest-needs students back for summer programming. Six feet of physical distancing is required for the Extended School Year Program. In early July, as presented at the School Committee meeting, an initial assessment of physical space was conducted. It is believed that that, with creativity and additional resources (e.g., libraries, gyms, replacing tables in classrooms with individual desks, removing bookcases to accommodate more student workspace, etc.), Westwood would be able to accommodate a full population of students with the three feet parameter.

The initial guidance indicated that DESE's final version would not be released until late July. DESE acknowledged that it did not provide guidance in several key areas [e.g., transportation, start/stop guidance (decision-tree protocols for positive cases of symptomatic students or staff) ventilation, athletics, physical education, and music]. Districts received stop/ start guidance Friday afternoon. Verbal indications are that transportation guidance will be using a three foot standard with everyone wearing facemasks. Districts have been encouraged to survey parents about transportation and to consider doing double bus runs to accommodate the reduced busing capacity. There has also been some verbal indication that band and chorus will not be possible in the fall.

All three models are subject to collective bargaining as they constitute a change in working conditions.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association has communicated its concern that the State-recommended three feet contradicts that of the CDC's six.

The District has a collaborative relationship with the Westwood Teachers' Association, consisting of level-headed, reasonable people that think in a student-centered way. Ms. Parks is pleased that conversations are approached with a problem-solving orientation.

The directive from DESE changed very quickly from its statewide plan for reopening schools in the fall. Now, since early July, superintendents have been told that each school committee will vote on the model for opening school. The Education Commissioner is encouraging school committees to wait until August 10, when final plans are due, to make a decision.

The preliminary plan asks to outline three models and is due by July 31. A comprehensive version must be submitted by August 10.

Ms. Parks then presented the District's approach to fall reopening.

Possible Models

- Those being presented tonight are draft, preliminary models to provide a sense of the direction District is considering
- Developed by District administrators and shared with Westwood Teachers' Association leadership
- Working groups will review and discuss the model this week
- Models considered feedback received about remote learning in the spring
- Both hybrid and remote models:
 - o More robust than implemented in spring; more like "regular school"
 - o Schedule driven

- Required
- Graded
- Much more synchronous time
- Establish consistency across classes
- Schedules remain consistent across all three models (i.e., fully in-person, hybrid, remote). This allows for flexible transitions from one model to another.

Hybrid Model Schedule

Ms. Parks shared a model hybrid schedule.

- Siblings would be in the same cohort to keep families' schedules consistent.
- All students will be issued a device by the District.
- There will be some students who will need to attend in-person Tuesday through Friday to receive specialized services.

The hybrid model:

- Provides for some in-person instruction and socialization
- Makes six feet of physical distancing possible
- Improves the ability to implement health and safety measures (e.g., time required for handwashing)
- Simplifies contact tracing and number of students needing to quarantine or be tested smaller (smaller cohorts)
- Groups also experience remote learning, allowing for a smoother transition when needed for short-term closures or if there is a need to go fully remote.
- Clear structure in place in the event that a student is home awaiting test results, quarantining, or ill.

Students who Individually Opt for Fully Remote

- Exploring the possibility of students virtually attending in-person class.
- If not feasible, likely model would be a self-paced, fully online curriculum through a learning management system that the state is working on, with some monitoring by Westwood staff.
- Still under discussion is if a student opts out, will there be opportunities to change their mind later?
 - Number of students who are fully remote impacts staffing models for in-person instruction
 - If changing is possible, it will have to be at specific intervals

Fully Remote Model (for everyone)

- Cohorts are "reunited"
- Same daily schedule
- Synchronous instruction led by classroom teachers
- Lowest risk in terms of health
- Least advantageous for learning and social-emotional support

Fully In-person

- In person five days per week
- Same daily schedules as in other models
- Likely the best model for learning, though it will still be different from "normal"
- Most challenging environment to maintain health and safety measures
 - Cannot achieve greater than three feet of physical distance
 - Larger cohorts

- Hardest model to manage if students or staff need to be out waiting for test results, quarantining, or ill.

Other Considerations

- How to be outside more
- Masks and mask breaks
- Calendar: Start date for students delayed by a few days to allow time for training and planning?

Dialogue with Students and Parents

- Students: Conducting focus groups with students this week to present ideas for models and hear from them.
- Parents: Wednesday, July 22, meeting virtually with live participation
 - Quick recap of information relevant to specific level.
 - Opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback/input

The Committee discussed the reopening plans for the fall. They offered their thanks to the District team for its hard work and asked what they could do to help. There was consensus that while the hybrid model is not ideal, it makes sense for the current situation.

New Business

There was no new business.

Executive Session

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining. Seconded by Mr. Mullin.

Roll-Call Vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

The Committee will not return to Open Session.

Adjournment

Mr. Donahue made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Mullin.

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 9:57pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Presentation on Fall Reopening, dated July 20, 2020