

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

October 8, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 6:48pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks; Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers; Acting Director of Business and Finance Lincoln Lynch; and Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom were present on behalf of the District. Mr. Donahue arrived at 6:58pm. 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.

Executive Session

The School Committee elected to go into Executive Session to conduct strategy with respect to both collective bargaining and potential litigation, both of which would have a detrimental effect on the position of the School Committee if discussions were held in Open Session. The Committee returned to Open Session at the conclusion.

Roll call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

The Committee entered Executive Session at 6:49pm.

Call to Order

The Committee returned from Executive Session and reopened the meeting in Open Session at 7:06pm with a call to order.

Roll call attendance:

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

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

Superintendent's Report

Ms. Parks introduced Lincoln Lynch who will be serving as Acting Director of Business and Finance while Lemma Jn-baptiste is on maternity leave. Dr. Lynch is an experienced administrator, having served as the Superintendent of the Walpole Public Schools for twelve years. Prior to that, he was a School Business Manager for twenty years. Ms. Parks stated that Dr. Lynch brings a great deal of expertise and valued perspective to the role.

FY'21 Budget Update

The financial picture for FY'21 is stronger than discussed last month. Last month, the district had been projecting what were thought to be potential risks and liabilities for FY'21. A significant shortfall was anticipated and a great deal of uncertainty surrounded Circuit Breaker.

In conversations with Pam Dukeman, the Town's Finance Director, the district confirmed that the town is able to apply CARES funding to pay for some of the district's technology purchases necessary in order to be ready to open school this year. Over the summer, the district purchased iPads for students in preschool, kindergarten, and grade 1; and Apple Pencils and iPads for teachers, amounting to approximately \$220k. The Town was able to cover this expense through CARES funding. Ms. Parks expressed appreciation for the support.

Ms. Parks wished to thank partners on the Town side. They were enormously helpful in closing out the FY'20 budget with all unanticipated COVID-related expenses and paying Food Services and Extended Day employees. They were also helpful in applying some of the funds that the Town had related to the CARES Act. The result is that the district was able to closeout the FY'20 budget and retain some of the Circuit Breaker funds in the account. The district did not have to apply as large an offset. Therefore, funding remains available to apply to this year's offset.

In addition, the Town is able to work with the district to secure additional FEMA funds.

Other notes related to the FY'21 budget include:

- This is year four of the four-year phaseout of full-day kindergarten tuition. In closing FY'20, the full budget offset from the kindergarten account was not required. That account has additional funds above and beyond the \$85k necessary for this year's offset
- \$425k is held in the school-held Special Education transfer account
 - It is anticipated that these funds may be needed to pay for contracted services and potential compensatory services. The funds have already been tentatively earmarked for this.

Ms. Parks stated that no significant additional COVID-related expenses are expected in the coming weeks. She will update the Committee again on this next month.

COVID-19 Updates and Current Data

- Operationally
 - Assessing bus ridership: The community heeded the call to refrain from registering for the bus if families were able to find an alternative. Now that bus routes and assignments have been finalized, the district has determined that there is capacity on almost all school buses. The amount of space varies depending upon the route. The business office is reopening bus registration.
 - The federal government, through the USDA, has provided grant funding to school districts to provide free lunch to all students through the end of

December, or when funds are depleted. The district will send information to families informing them of this.

Ms. Borchers presented on teaching and learning.

- The technology department is working hard to support the hybrid model and making it as robust as possible. Teachers are approaching challenges with energy and creativity.
- Different challenges present differently in different classrooms.
 - One-size does not fit all
 - The district is taking steps to try and offer more support in grades 2 and 3
 - Robust online curriculum support
 - Additional staffing support

Mrs. Plotkin expressed concerns related to Zoom and students losing their connection. The technology department is working on a remedy for this.

Mr. Mullin would like the district to explore creative options for counselors to work with students. Ms. Borchers stated that the middle school team is placing a great deal of thought into what has been lost and how to return to the middle school's programming. The performing arts department is doing outreach on returning groups; including band, chorus, and strings. The district's social-emotional learning coordinator is also focused on getting things up and running at the middle school.

Mrs. Lewis stated that it is difficult for students at the high school to remain online for 70-minute classes. She asked for feedback on how that is working.

Mrs. Hanscom met with the Special Education Parent Advisory Council this week to problem-solve. At this point, their concerns are related to logistical scheduling questions.

Mrs. Phillips feels that the partnership with Westwood Youth and Family Services is beneficial, but they are at capacity. She asked whether the district could help.

Ms. Parks stated that there is a series of meetings scheduled with teachers in grades 2 and 3 next week to gather more information. The district is taking the time to understand the situation and then decide what supports to put into place and where.

Mrs. Hanscom then presented on the COVID-19 monitoring and response team.

- Student data
 - Since September 14, when students started, 133 students have been supported by the COVID-19 Team and been absent from in-person instruction for some period of time
 - 103 have already been cleared to return to in-person learning
 - 30 students continue to learn remotely
 - One single, positive student case reported
- Staff data
 - Since August 31, 59 staff have been supported by the COVID-19 Team and been absent from in-person work
 - 39 have been cleared to return to in-person work
 - 20 staff continue to work remotely
 - There have been two positive staff cases reported
- Consultation

- Three members of the COVID-19 Team have consulted with 89 parents or staff since August 31 to answer questions related to protocols, travel, symptoms, next steps, etc.

Mrs. Hanscom thanked the COVID-19 Team: Karen Poreda, Matt Gillis, and Paul Lilla, for their excellent work.

Ms. Parks addressed the COVID-19 case involving the middle school. For the first time, the COVID-19 Team engaged in the contact tracing process in partnership with the Westwood Health Department. As a result, there are nine staff members at Thurston designated as close contacts and will quarantine for two weeks. The teachers are healthy and continue to teach remotely. However, the school needs to backfill and provide substitutes for students in those classrooms. The middle school team has determined how to make that work. The incident does have the administrative team wondering, if this happened at more than one school, or with more than one person, how that would impact. The operational challenges become a little more daunting. For now, however, the district is in good shape.

Mr. Donahue thanked Mrs. Hanscom and the COVID-19 Team. He stated that there has been an issue with people having access to fast testing and wondered whether that had been resolved. Mr. Mullin responded that the COVID-19 Advisory Group met yesterday and the experts believe that access to testing has greatly improved.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Project Update

Mrs. Plotkin provided an update. The project continues to move along and is currently in the schematic design phase. At the School Building Committee meeting, the first round of designs for the exterior were presented. There have been changes made based upon feedback.

October 13 Community Forum

The School Committee will be holding a community forum on Tuesday, October 13. This will be an opportunity to learn more about the project, to provide feedback on designs, and to participate in a question and answer session.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Mr. Mullin stated that the group met yesterday and has another meeting scheduled later this month. The group includes three community members with expertise in the medical field and epidemiology. Draft metrics were broadly thought of as good.

Other Liaison Reports

There were none.

Public Participation

Members of the public were able to comment during public participation via Zoom.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street is upset about elementary school lunches. She is also concerned about the new school and its impact on Lowell Woods.

Peter Schuler of Gay Street resides across from the Hanlon School. He wanted to introduce himself to the School Committee. He would like to find a compromise and cooperation among the School Committee, Select Board, and residents to protect the Shuttleworth land.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive is disappointed by the lack of urgency to have students back in school.

Discussion Items

Q1 Financial Report

Dr. Lynch presented on the operating budget for the period ending September 30. He and Mrs. Jn-baptiste met to discuss.

- FY'21 spending is at or below FY'20 levels.
- Salary spending is in line with last year
- Spending in non-salary accounts is slower than in prior years
- COVID-19 costs total approximately \$1.02M. There is more certainty since the budget update at September's meeting.
 - Reduction in Circuit Breaker reimbursement will not impact FY'21 budget as sufficient funds were set aside in closing out FY'20

Mr. Mullin stated that investments in grades 2 and 3 are important. Mrs. Plotkin agreed, stating that resources there should be the primary focus.

Superintendent's Goals

Ms. Parks presented her goals for the school year. She stated that the Administrative Council has not yet had time to complete the process of articulating the district's improvement strategy priorities. They need the time to retreat. She hopes to have that happen soon.

The Superintendent's goals have been shaped with the unique parameters of this year in mind. Within that, themes from the District Improvement Strategy come through.

Professional Practice Goal: Provide the necessary leadership support to successfully navigate the challenges of providing a high-quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for FY'22

Student Learning Goal: Students will learn core English language arts and math skills by engaging in just-in-time review of prerequisites as well as other strategies to help them access grade-level content and standards

District Improvement Goal: Engage residents in a transparent community process regarding the status of the elementary building project and anticipated financial impact.

District Improvement Goal: Continue to meet the Massachusetts School Building Authority requirements, milestones, and deliverables to complete the Schematic Design Phase.

Action Items

Approval of September 17, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Mullin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 17, 2020. Mr. Donahue seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Vote to Accept Grant of \$30,000 from Foundation for Westwood Education

The district is fortunate to have received a targeted grant from the Foundation which supports teaching and learning in the hybrid model. It includes a subscription to Nearpod and investing in resources related to social-emotional learning (SEL). The grant, in combination with district resources, helped to purchase materials for elementary teachers to support Responsive Classroom learning and an entire SEL curriculum resource for the middle school.

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to accept a grant of \$30,000 from the Foundation for Westwood Education. Mr. Donahue seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Vote to Accept Gift of \$20,000 for Donna M. Saul Annual Spirit Scholarship Fund

The high school was approached by an anonymous donor to establish a scholarship in honor of Donna Saul. This gift will create an endowment for the scholarship which will be awarded yearly to a senior class cheerleader.

Mr. Mullin made a motion to accept a gift of \$20,000 for the Donna Saul Annual Spirit Scholarship Fund. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Vote to Update School Building Committee Membership

Kate Scales resigned as a member of the School Building Committee. The School Committee needs to appoint a community member as her replacement. Mrs. Plotkin recommends replacing with two people: Mary Kate Ferreira and Jen Flanders

Mr. Donahue made a motion to appoint Mary Kate Ferreira and Jen Flanders to the School Building Committee. Mr. Mullin seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Vote to Ratify Westwood Cafeteria Employees' Memorandum of Agreement

The district laid off slightly more than half of the Food Services Department staff. The memo provides an extension of recall rights, stipulates payout of accrued time, and outlines an agreement for staff to perform additional cleaning duties.

Mr. Donahue made a motion to ratify the Westwood Cafeteria Employee's Memorandum of Agreement. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Vote to Ratify SEIU Local #888 (Custodians and Maintenance Personnel) Memorandum of Agreement

The memo outlines the union's agreement to allow Food Services Department staff to perform duties (additional cleaning) traditionally part of the custodians' job responsibilities. It also, retrospectively, allowed the district to allow the Recreation Department to use the Martha Jones School for summer programming without a district custodian on-site, which is required under the contract. The memo codifies this exception for the summer.

Mr. Donahue made a motion to ratify the custodians and maintenance personnel Memorandum of Agreement. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll-call vote:

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. Mrs. Phillips seconded.

Roll call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 8:47pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID Monitoring and Response Team Data slideshow presentation, dated October 8, 2020
- Draft meeting minutes of September 17, 2020 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Memo dated October 2, 2020 from J. Cianciarulo to the School Committee regarding approval of FWE grant
- Memo dated October 2, 2020 from A. Davenport to E. Parks regarding Donna M. Saul Annual Spirit Scholarship
- Memo dated October 2, 2020 from L. Jn-baptiste to E. Parks regarding operating budget report for period ending September 30, 2020
- Memo dated October 2, 2020 from L. Jn-baptiste to School Committee regarding Circuit Breaker and offsets
- Memo dated October 2, 2020 from M. Plotkin to School Committee regarding School Building Committee membership update
- SEIU Local #888 (Custodians and Maintenance Personnel) Memorandum of Agreement, dated October 2, 2020
- Superintendent’s 2020-2021 Goals
- Westwood Cafeteria Employees’ Memorandum of Agreement, dated October 2, 2020