

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

November 12, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 6:30pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Charles Donahue, Clerk, arrived at 6:41pm. 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. 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

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to go into Executive Session to conduct strategy with respect to collective bargaining, which would have a detrimental effect on the position of the School Committee if discussion was held in Open Session. Seconded by Mr. Mullin.

Roll call vote:

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

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

Mrs. Lewis announced that the Committee would return to Open Session at approximately 7:00pm. The Committee entered Executive Session at 6:31pm.

The Committee returned to Open Session at 7:04pm where Mrs. Lewis called the meeting to order in Open Session.

Superintendent's Report

Grades 2 and 3 Transition

Ms. Parks reported that, over the past month, the district developed and implemented a plan to return students in grades 2 and 3 to in-person instruction four days per week using a model similar to that of students in kindergarten and grade 1. This required using space within school buildings differently and reprioritizing how certified staff is deployed.

Grade 2 transitioned on Monday. This required some classes moving to larger, alternative spaces such as the cafeteria, gymnasium, or library. In some cases, grade 2 classrooms flipped with kindergarten classrooms as the kindergarten classrooms are physically larger, but have fewer students.

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

The 37 fully-remote students in grade 3 have been moved from their school-based classes into two fully remote classes as part of the Web School.

In January, fully remote families will have the option of returning to in-person instruction. The district will keep an eye on these figures as it would pose additional challenges, necessitating additional desks in classrooms.

The final step in the process takes place on Monday, November 16, where students in grade 3 will transition to in-person instruction four days per week. Similar to grade 2, some classrooms needed to be relocated. In instances where larger space was not available, each cohort of a given class will be located in different classrooms, but retain their teacher. Additional staff has been assigned to the grade-level in order to provide instruction and supervision.

Attempts to hire additional staff have not yielded candidates. This is not unique to Westwood, as multiple districts continue to report hiring challenges. Efforts to hire continue. However, content specialists have been deployed to the grade 3 teams to provide in-person instruction.

COVID-19 Updates and Current Data

Mrs. Hanscom provided an update on COVID-19 data for the district.

Student Data

- Since September 14, 320 students have been supported by the COVID-19 Team and been absent from in-person instruction.
- 271 have been cleared to return to in-person learning
- 49 students continue to learn remotely due to being quarantined due to travel, bring a close contact, or illness
- There have been 14 positive student cases identified

Staff Data

- Since August 31, 106 staff have been supported by the COVID-19 Team and been absent from in-person work.
- 96 have been cleared to return to in-person work
- 10 staff continue to work remotely due to being quarantined due to travel, being a close contact, or illness
- There have been 6 positive staff cases identified

Consultation

The three members of the COVID-19 Team have consulted with 221 parents and staff since August 31 to answer questions related to protocols, travel, symptoms, next steps, etc.

Ms. Parks then wished to address the decision to have high school students in full-remote instruction this week. By last Sunday, the high school experienced five positive COVID-19 cases in one week. Since that time, the district was notified of three additional high school students and one middle school student that tested positive. These cases were generally traceable to indoor gatherings. This information was provided to families in order to offer context and information so that parents and students did not speculate, become anxious, or worry.

The decision to go fully-remote at the high school was made last Sunday, in consultation with Westwood's Department of Health, the school physician, the district's COVID-19 nurse, and resident medical advisors to the district. Each recommended remote instruction at the high

school this week. In addition, Ms. Parks consulted with the COVID-19 Response Team at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and an epidemiologist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

The high school will return to hybrid instruction on Monday, November 16.

As of today, Westwood has hired a public health nurse. Ms. Parks stated that this will be helpful for the district and that she looks forward to the collaboration.

Budget Update

Dr. Lynch provided an update on the current operating budget.

- COVID-19-related expenses were incurred with having all students in grades 2 and 3 return for in-person instruction:
 - 110 desks — \$14k
 - Air purifiers for use in large spaces (i.e., gymnasiums and libraries) — \$9k
 - Room dividers — \$3k
 - Whiteboards — \$5k
- The district currently has a four month supply of PPE in-house
- The Town has been able to attribute over \$650k in CARES Act funds to the schools which has primarily been used for technology

SEL Update

Ms. Borchers reported that the pandemic has made students' social-emotional learning (SEL) needs more urgent.

At the elementary level, the focus has been on thinking about how to embed SEL into daily classroom routines. The district identified Responsive Classroom as an effective approach. The first cohort of teachers were trained last year.

At the middle school, the focus has been on curriculum. Grant funds from the Foundation for Westwood Education allowed for investment in Second Step. In addition, grant funding is being sought to support SEL through service learning, potentially through the new Civics project requirement in grade 8.

At the high school, the district is exploring curriculum options to be used with students during homeroom time.

Assessment Update

Ms. Borchers reported that the State has indicated that they will be moving ahead with MCAS testing in the spring, although the timeline has not yet been released.

- Students in the Classes of 2021 and 2022 will be required to pass the English language arts and math MCAS in order to receive the competency determination for a high school diploma. Testing will take place in January and in May.
 - All of the district's seniors have already passed.
- Juniors have not yet taken the exam as MCAS was cancelled last spring. The high school is planning for a January administration to ensure every junior is given every opportunity to pass the exam.

- Students in grade 9 that are enrolled in biology will take the science assessment in February.

ACCESS testing for English language learners is scheduled for January and February.

The MCAS-Alt assessment timeline will be similar to previous years. The portfolio submission is April 1, 2021.

At the elementary level, teachers are administering assessments to students. While it was anticipated that there would be an increase in the total number of students requiring intervention due to the closure last spring., Ms. Borchers reported that literacy assessment results do not look different from previous years.

The middle school is expanding the use of the Renaissance Star assessment tool which will allow teachers to monitor progress, provide additional support, and identify students that may require additional intervention support.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Project Update

Mrs. Plotkin reported that the project is moving forward and will be in the schematic design phase until the Town vote in the spring.

The current design was presented to during the community forum last month. Feedback was taken from that meeting and utilized by the design team for subsequent revisions.

At last week's School Building Committee meeting, the updated design was presented for feedback. Members were happy with the revisions.

Cost estimates from the architects will be presented at the next School Building Committee meeting on December 11.

December 15 Community Forum

A community forum will be held on December 15. This is another opportunity for the community to provide feedback and to learn more about what's taking place in regards to the project.

The School Building Committee will then meet the following week to vote on the schematic design submission to the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Mr. Mullin advised that the group met to discuss the increasing trend in positive cases recently and then to discuss testing options.

Other Liaison Reports

Mrs. Phillips reported that the Council on Aging will be holding a holiday gift drive. Donation boxes will be located at the schools.

Discussion Items

Criteria for Transitioning Phases and the DESE Memorandum of November 6, 2020

The School Committee previously discussed drafting criteria and benchmarks for transitioning between learning models.

The district opened – and remains – in the hybrid model. Over the summer, the district surveyed families and hosted parent forums on the reopening plan. The district negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the teachers’ union. The reopening plan was submitted and approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. MOAs were ratified with bargaining units.

The overall goal remains to return to in-person instruction as it is in everyone’s best interest.

The reopening criteria relies on Department of Public Health and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education metrics.

Mr. Donahue has been attending Wellesley collaborative meetings related to testing teachers and students.

COVID-19 Testing Program

Mr. Donahue recommended that the district proceed with a process for testing. Mr. Mullin reported that the Advisory Group advised beginning to test staff.

Ms. Parks reported that a Request for Proposals (RFP) would have to be put out by the district. Mr. Donahue suggested a saliva-based test with a 24-hour turnaround at a cost of \$15 per test be the goal. He would also like have both students and teachers tested.

The Committee then talked-through the process.

The district will be issuing a survey to families. As part of that survey, the degree to which families would be willing to have their children participate in a testing program needs to be ascertained. In addition, Ms. Parks would like to ask families about their level of comfort in a variety of learning model scenarios.

Mr. Mullin suggested taking a look at the remote Wednesday schedule as part of an incremental change. Ms. Parks responded that this review is in-process.

Mrs. Phillips recommended a target date of February 1 for returning students to a fully in-person model.

Mr. Mullin made a motion to authorize the Westwood Public Schools’ Superintendent and her team to pursue an RFP process for [testing] staff and to explore it for the student body, subject to input of the Advisory Board and expert views. Seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

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

Mrs. Phillips	Yes
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Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)

Mr. Donahue stated that he would like the district to offer a public forum where community members can ask questions related to the pandemic. Ms. Borchers stated that she would work with Mr. Donahue on this initiative.

Public Participation

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

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive spoke in support of full-time, in-person instruction.

Michelle Micone of Hawthorne Street had questions regarding the impact of positive COVID-19 cases at the high school and athletics.

Tara Themistocles of Clapboardtree Street spoke in support of full-time, in-person instruction.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street spoke in support of the hybrid model.

Kerry Ciejek of Sycamore Drive expressed thanks for prioritizing in-person instruction in grades 2 and 3 and would like to see it expand to additional grade-levels.

Tina Collins of Bonney Street expressed concern about the length of class periods at the middle school.

Antigone Grasso reiterated support for in-person instruction and spoke of a petition signed by over 200 Westwood residents who wish for all students to return to full-time, in-person instruction.

Jackie of Redwood Road had questions related to the teachers' bargaining agreement.

Donna Morrison expressed concern about the size of classroom windows proposed for the new Hanlon building.

Sandra Castaldini of Birch Street is in favor of students returning to full-time, in-person instruction.

Action Items

Approval of October 8, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Donahue made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 8, 2020. 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)

Approval of October 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of October 13, 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 Gift of \$750 for Friends of the Westwood Library Scholarship Award in Honor of Carol Blumenthal

The Friends of the Westwood Library would like to fund a new scholarship to honor the memory of Carol Blumenthal. The criteria for selecting winners will be “a love of reading, a dedication to literacy, and a commitment to public service.” It will be awarded annually.

Mr. Donahue made a motion to accept a gift of \$750 from the Friends of the Westwood Library. 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 approval)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

Mr. Donahue made a motion to adjourn the meeting. 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)

The meeting adjourned at 9:33pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID Monitoring and Response Team Data slideshow, dated November 12, 2020
- Draft criteria for transitioning learning models, dated November 5, 2020
- Draft meeting minutes of October 8, 2020 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of October 13, 2020 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Memo dated November 5, 2020 from A. Borchers to E. Parks regarding SEL Update
- Memo dated November 5, 2020 from E. Parks to School Committee regarding Grades 2 and 3 Transition
- Memo dated November 6, 2020 from A. Borchers to E. Parks regarding Student Assessment Updates
- Memo dated November 6, 2020 from A. Davenport to E. Parks regarding Friends of the Westwood Library Scholarship Award
- Memo dated November 6, 2020 from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding Updates to Guidance on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Health Metrics