

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

January 14, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:02pm 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; Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste; and Director of Student Services Abigail Hanscom were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis also 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. Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on its platforms.

Mrs. Lewis began the meeting by thanking district faculty and staff, public health officials, and the community for their efforts to ensure the health and safety of the school community.

Superintendent's Report

Upcoming Martin Luther King Day Event

Ms. Parks highlighted the upcoming Martin Luther King Day event which will be held on Monday, January 18. Michael Curry, a member of the NAACP National Board of Directors, will provide a talk reflecting on Dr. King's legacy and issues of race/racism. Following the talk, participants will move into breakout groups for small discussion and reflection. All are welcome to attend and participate. Information about the event is posted on the district website. Ms. Parks thanked METCO Director Lateefah Franck and Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers for their work on making the event possible.

COVID-19 Updates

Ms. Parks presented updates on the district's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current Data and Phase Metrics

The presentation began with a chart showing the COVID case count, the average daily incidence rate, and the percent positivity over time.

Student data was shared:

- Since September 14, 913 students have been supported by the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team and have been absent from in-person instruction.
- 810 students have been cleared to return to in-person learning
- 103 students are currently learning remotely due to being quarantined as a result of travel, being a close contact, or illness.
- There have been 89 positive student cases identified today, with 26 active cases currently.

Student positive cases by month:

- September 14-October 8: 1.1%
- October 9-November 12: 14.6%

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

- November 12-December 10: 13.5%
- December 10-January 14: 70.8%

Positive student cases to date by grade-level were shared.

Staff data was shared:

- Since August 31, 237 staff members have been supported by the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team and have been absent from in-person work.
- 219 staff members have been cleared to return to in-person work
- 16 staff members are currently absent or working remotely due to being quarantined as a result of being a close contact or illness
- There have been 27 positive staff cases identified to date, with two active cases currently.

The three members of the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team have consulted with 388 parents and staff since August 31 to answer questions related to protocols, travel, symptoms, next steps, etc.

It was announced that an additional nurse, Dawnmarie Shu, has been added to the team.

Ms. Parks stated that the district is carefully looking at student attendance rates. She shared information on in-person students that attended virtually.

Ms. Parks shared that some parents are choosing to keep their children at home and Zoom into classes even when they are scheduled to be in-person. This has presented some instructional challenges for teachers. She also shared that there have been some instances where teachers, due to being quarantined, have Zoomed into classrooms to teach remotely. This has created a challenge for principals trying to cover the classrooms as someone needs to supervise the students in the classroom. This method is proving more effective with older students than it is with younger.

Mrs. Phillips asked how things were working for students in quarantine in kindergarten through grade 3. Ms. Borchers responded that the district is working on ways of creating touchpoints that do not undermine the in-person model. This involves having students join morning meeting, participate through portions of the day, and are provided work and assignment links for home. The district is in the process of interviewing for a remote learning coach, whose role would be to work with this group of students and be a connector between school and home. She stated that she hopes to have someone in place in the next ten days, as the candidate pool is very good.

Ms. Parks then discussed the learning model metrics. The Town and State metrics have worsened since the previous meeting. Ms. Parks asked the Committee if, based upon the articulation of the metrics, she should not be planning for a March 1 change. The Committee agreed.

Metrics for moving to fully remote were also established earlier in the school year. Ms. Parks stated that she has been receiving correspondence from families asking when this would take place. She has provided the School Committee's metrics document and also notes that it is expected that, to the maximum extent possible, the district continue with in-person instruction and employ strategies like those that have recently been implemented (i.e., one team remote at the middle school, one cohort remote at the high school). The intent is to keep employing these strategies as long as it seems to be working.

The district's leadership team has given great consideration to remote Wednesdays. The desire for more in-person learning is clearly understood. At some point, a change on Wednesdays for some grade-levels will be an important step. The conclusion on this is the need for the Committee's support to remain with the current schedule at this time. The COVID Monitoring and Response Team has repeatedly stated how important Wednesday is with regards to contact-tracing. Additionally, teachers report having the ability to have their entire class together once a week is helpful instructionally. Remote Wednesdays are also when professional development and team meetings are scheduled. The Committee will revisit this at a future meeting.

Ms. Parks then reported that she has received correspondence from parents on making up hours of learning time. She stated that, when the reopening plan was submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the standard was met and approved. Additionally, the district exceeds these standards at all grade levels.

Budget Update

FY'21 Stimulus Funding Update

In Massachusetts, officials are taking 90% of the stimulus money for schools and allocating funds according to the Title I formula (proportion of students meeting the low-income threshold). Westwood is not a Title I district. The same formula was used to distribute CARES Act funding, where Westwood received \$30k. The size of the stimulus is larger, with an estimated \$90k-\$120k expected.

FY'22 Budget Development

Multiple meetings will be held next week to sift through priorities and begin making choices. A level-services number has been calculated and is estimated at \$1.4M, which is a 3% increase over FY'21's voted budget.

Given the pandemic, there are some new priorities, particularly around intervention, compensatory services, mental health supports, and social-emotional learning. The strategy is to examine the staffing cuts that took place over the summer and determine which are sustainable so that the FTEs could be reallocated within level-services.

The Committee agreed to push the January 28 meeting out one week to February 4, allowing district administration more time to prepare the budget. The proposed FY'22 budget will be presented on February 4. It will then go before the Finance and Warrant Commission on February 9. The February 11 School Committee meeting will be the public budget hearing.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Projects Update

The School Building Committee is in the process of reviewing value engineering to bring the project within budget. The Committee will be reviewing these at its next meeting.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

The COVID-19 Advisory Group spent time reviewing historic data and has been impressed by the fact that there are no clusters or large outbreaks. The district's school nurses have been included as first responders in the vaccination distribution phase.

The work of the Collaborative Testing Group was presented by Mr. Donahue. He highlighted the State's student and teacher testing program. The topic segued directly into the Committee's discussion items.

Other Liaison Reports

There were no other liaison reports.

Discussion Items

Mrs. Lewis, as Chair, moved the COVID-19 discussion to earlier on the agenda.

COVID-19 Testing: Update on Staff Testing and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Testing Initiative

The first round of COVID-19 staff testing began today. The district contracted with Mirimus, the same company that the Wellesley Public Schools is using, to provide pool testing. This is an efficient and affordable method to have a large number of tests done quickly. Results will be received by the district over the weekend.

The cost is \$15 per test. If a pool tests positive, the process of narrowing samples involves further testing at additional costs.

In the pilot completed in December, about 64% of all staff participated. A higher percentage of participation is anticipated for this round.

The district has worked out the logistics and is prepared to establish a program with Mirimus. Ms. Parks suggested a plan to test until April Vacation and to reassess the situation at that time. Funds need to be reallocated in order to cover the cost of the testing program.

Mrs. Jn-baptiste stated that the estimated cost would be \$92k. The funds can be reallocated from conference and meeting budget lines across all cost centers, and teacher institutes, as courses have been cancelled.

Ms. Parks then discussed the possibility of a student testing program. The State has rolled out a program and asked interested districts to indicate interest by tomorrow. This would be for six weeks of free testing. The district would need to provide personnel to gather samples. This would just be for families that are interested in participating, and would require consent. Testing beyond the first six weeks would need to be covered by the district.

The Committee instructed the Superintendent to submit interest to the State in participating in the student testing program.

Strategic Priorities Update – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Work Leadership Training in Anti-Racist Decision-Making

Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers presented.

The current text of the strategic priority outlines the goal to "Implement programs and instructional practices that recognize and support the needs of students and families in an increasingly diverse community." The district's leadership team is working to update this.

Diversity, Equity, and Integration efforts include:

- Curriculum and Instruction
 - School/classroom library updates
 - Core text updates
 - Professional development on culturally responsive practices and classroom discussion with dignity
- School and District Culture
 - LTARCE (Let's Talk About Race, Culture, and Ethnicity) group at high school
 - Welcome Club at middle school
 - Parent series on talking with children about race
 - Guest speakers and events, including Anthony Valentine, Michael Curry, and Dr. Olivia Moorhead Slaughter
 - Anti-racist educator groups
 - Book talk with Jennifer DeLeon
 - Book groups
- Recruiting, Hiring, and Retention
 - Greater Boston School Human Resources Network
 - Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education
 - Diversity Network
 - Job fairs
 - Affinity group

The work ahead includes a shift from intentional work to strategic.

- Leadership team training
- Data-driven efforts
 - DESE Diversity Network: Data-informed planning for diversifying staff
 - Beloved Equity Audit: Online tool for assessing growth areas
 - Harvard RIDES: Strategic, cyclic approach to improvement

Work includes the use of self-assessment tools and analyzing data to set clear goals.

Mr. Mulin requested a breakdown from different employee units and would like retention data among these categories. Ms. Borchers stated that this is something her office is putting together.

Mr. Donahue would like to expand the METCO program to the elementary level. He also would like to explore a METCO-type program for teachers, which would consist of a two-year residency where a Westwood teacher and a Boston teacher would swap.

2021-2022 School Calendar

The proposed 2021-2022 school calendar was presented for review. The Committee discussed potentially removing the Friday before Labor Day "holiday." The draft calendar has been posted on the district website for families to review. The Committee will discuss and vote upon the calendar at a future meeting.

Policy Revisions Related to Title IX

The Committee held their second reading of the policy revisions related to Title IX. Ms. Parks stated that further changes may be needed with a change in administration at the federal level.

However, the district has been advised to have two separate policies as it will be simpler for any potential further revisions.

Mr. Mullin asked for information on the process for complaints against the Title IX Coordinator. The attorney will be consulted on this.

Second Reading: ACA – Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy

Mrs. Plotkin asked that contact information for the district's Title IX Coordinator be posted on the district website.

Second Reading: ACA-R – Grievance Procedure for Complaints of Sexual Harassment Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Mrs. Plotkin suggested that naming the Title IX Coordinator be removed from the policy, as this would be subject to change. She also suggested that language about filing a formal complaint read "complainant or complainant's parent/guardian." She also suggested that a timeframe on the Superintendent's appeal decision be defined.

Public Participation

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

Stephanie Ramales of Washington Street spoke in favor of in-person instruction and asked that the School Committee address its plans for Wednesdays.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street wished to thank those working to keep children learning, either remotely or in the hybrid model, and spoke in favor of the remote model. She hopes that the district would consider the State model to pay for staff testing. She would also like for the METCO program to be expanded to the lower grades.

Megan Brenk of Briar Lane spoke in support of keeping remote Wednesdays for the remainder of the school year.

Jackie Keavney of Redwood Road had a question about having students return to in-person instruction this year.

Amy Theaumont of Woodridge Road had a question about vaccine availability for teachers in phase two of the State's distribution plan and whether it would be a requirement.

Tina Collins of Bonney Street spoke in support of returning students to in-person instruction.

Anne Donahue of Parker Street asked about what is being done to support students' social and emotional development.

Laurie Boehl of Fensview Drive spoke in favor of in-person instruction.

Kerry Ciejek of Sycamore Drive spoke in favor of in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year.

Antigone Grasso of Oak Street expressed frustration with the hybrid learning model.

Matthew Travers asked about the work taking place to get students back to in-person instruction.

Mary Mulkeen of Washington Street shared comments she has heard from her children about their experience.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive spoke in favor of in-person instruction.

Kerry Capodilupo spoke in favor of returning students in grades 4 and 5 to in-person instruction.

Ed McGowan of Currier Farm Road offered suggestions on communication strategy, opportunities for children to socialize, and a willingness to ask the community for help.

Mary Kate Ferreira of Forest Road spoke in favor of in-person instruction for students on Individualized Education Plans.

Jackie Keavenney of Redwood Road cautioned that emotions are high and parents are very passionate about their children's education. She is in favor of social supports for students.

Amy Theaumont spoke in support of students in grades 4 and 5 returning to in-person instruction.

Action Items

Allocation of Funding for Periodic Staff COVID Testing

Ms. Parks stated that the district is contracting in smaller increments so that the district could pivot to the State's program if/when selected.

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to allow for the reallocation of funds for periodic staff COVID testing. 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 – Approved

Approval of Minutes

December 10, 2020

Mr. Mullin requested that additional language related to pivoting learning models and vaccine availability be included in the minutes.

Mrs. Phillips made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 10, 2020, as amended. 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 – Approved

December 14, 2020

Mrs. Phillips made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 14, 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 – Approved

December 15, 2020

Mr. Mullin requested that language that the building project dates are subject to change be included in the minutes.

Mrs. Phillips made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 15, 2020, as amended. 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 – Approved

Adjournment

Mrs. Phillips 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 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 10:02pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID-19 Data as of January 8, 2021
- COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team Data slideshow presentation, dated January 14, 2021
- Draft 2021-2022 school calendar for the Committee's review and discussion
- Draft meeting minutes of December 10, 2020 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of December 14, 2020 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of December 15, 2020 for the Committee's review and approval
- Memo from A. Borchers to E. Parks, dated January 5, 2021, regarding proposed leadership team training
- Memo from E. Parks to School Committee, dated January 8, 2021, regarding staff COVID testing
- Memo from J. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, to Superintendents, dated January 8, 2021, regarding pooled testing in K-12 schools
- Policy ACA – Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy for the Committee's second reading
- Policy ACA-R – Grievance Procedure for Complaints of Sexual Harassment Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 for the Committee's second reading
- Strategic Priority 3.2 Update slideshow presentation