

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
June 10, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

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

Maya Plotkin 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 their platforms.

Superintendent's Report

WPS COVID-19 Data

The presentation began with charts showing the COVID-19 case count, the average daily incidence rate, the percent positivity over time, and the positive student case count by month.

Recent quarantines for the period of June 10 are six students and zero staff.

The district's COVID-19 Monitor and Response Team data was presented:

- 272 positive cases (students and staff)
- 2,551 students and staff tracked by the team (positive cases, close contact, travel, symptomatic)
- 715 consultations

The last positive, in-person student case was on May 7. The last positive staff case was on May 14.

Fall Planning – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Guidance

Superintendent Parks highlighted some of the recent guidance from DESE:

Health and safety requirements issued by DESE will be lifted. With the State of Emergency ending on June 15, 2021, and as COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to fall as vaccination rates increase, for the fall, all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week and all DESE health and safety requirements will be lifted. This includes all physical distancing requirements.

DESE will collaborate with the Department of Public Health to issue any additional health and safety recommendations (e.g., masks for elementary school students) over the summer, and will provide any update to districts and schools

Districts will no longer be able to offer remote learning as a standard learning model.

About 8% of the district's students are in the remote model right now. The district has surveyed these families to understand if they need to have a conversation about an accommodation (e.g., home/hospital tutoring program due to a documented medical condition, enrolling in a virtual school, etc.)

The district is working to ensure that fully remote students have a successful transition to in-person learning in the fall.

Tony Mullin asked whether any guidance has been provided on snow days and the option of pivoting to remote learning. Superintendent Parks will inquire.

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

Spring Events

Photos of events taking place throughout the district were shared. They included a culminating team-building event for grade 5 students held at each neighborhood school and conducted by Hale. Additionally, Web School students participated in the event on-site at Hale.

Public Comment

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

Melissa Morabito of Canton Street thanked the school community for helping to get through a hard year. She also expressed gratitude for the district's work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street urged families to keep their face masks and to wear them when not feeling well.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

School Building Project Update

Maya Plotkin provided an update. The Deerfield-Hanlon project is in Design Development. Dore and Whittier has begun meeting with user groups to understand their needs and to refine the design to meet those needs. This work will continue over the summer.

Additionally, construction costs are escalating and this is impacting the commercial market as well. In order to get ahead of this, Dore and Whittier and Compass are completing cost estimation exercises to see what it looks like right now. If costs have risen, more work on value engineering will need to take place.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Anthony Mullin provided an update from the Medical Advisory Group. Assuming that metrics remain strong, it may not make sense financially to continue COVID testing. The group is awaiting additional guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group members, Town Health office, and the district's COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team were thanked for their work.

State of Emergency Expiration

Maya Plotkin advised the Committee that the State of Emergency expires on June 15. The Governor has filed legislation on public meetings and the use of Zoom. This will be monitored.

Other Liaison Reports

There were no other liaison reports.

Chair Maya Plotkin extended her thanks to the Westwood Teachers' Association, the Student Services Team, Instructional Assistants, Operations Department staff, Food Service Department staff, Bus transportation staff, school PTOs and PTAs, the Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Town partners (School Resource Officer, Police Department, and Town staff and officials), parents, Superintendent Parks, the district leadership team, District Administration staff, John Cianciarulo, and Westwood Media Center.

The Committee echoed her sentiments. Charles Donahue also wished to thank the COVID-19 Testing Collaborative as well.

Discussion Items

Sheehan School Conceptual Study

The Sheehan School is the third of the elementary schools that has significant capital needs. The School Committee previously approved \$30k for a high-level study of the Sheehan. Dore and Whittier is performing that study and has prepared a presentation for the Committee.

Rani Philip of Dore and Whittier presented.

Overview

1. Confirmed program specific to Sheehan Elementary School Needs
 - a. Reviewed student enrollment (McKibben and NESDEC) and established a design capacity of 307 students:
 - i. 3 sections of Kindergarten
 - ii. 2 sections of each grades 1-5
 - iii. 1 additional classroom as-needed, based upon enrollment
 - b. Building Size
 - i. Existing Building: 52,550 GSF
 - ii. Proposed Program: 67,152 GSF
2. Developed conceptual options
 - a. Code upgrade/Base repair only
 - b. Renovation/addition
 - c. New construction

Conceptual Options

A conceptual drawing of a renovated Sheehan School building of code upgrades and base repair only, with no educational or site improvements, was shown. The existing total is 52,550 GSF with a project cost of \$27.1M, which assumes that students are temporarily relocated offsite between Deerfield and Hanlon schools during the construction.

A conceptual drawing of a renovation and addition to the Sheehan School building of 74,000± GSF was shown. This would involve phasing:

1. Relocate students to Deerfield and Hanlon schools.
2. Demolish, renovate, and construct.
3. Complete sitework.
4. Move students back into the school.

Conceptual drawings of a newly constructed Sheehan were shown:

- Option 1 - "T Plan" with 67,152± GSF
 - a. Students would remain in the existing building during construction
 - b. New construction would take place
 - c. Students would move into the new building
 - d. Demolition of the existing building would take place
 - e. Completion of site work.
- Option 2 - "Compact Plan" with 67,152± GSF
 - a. Students would remain in the existing building during construction
 - b. New construction would take place
 - c. Students would move into the new building
 - d. Demolition of the existing building would take place
 - e. Completion of site work.

Anthony Mullin expressed concern over fewer general education classrooms and would like to review this holistically with a district-wide view.

The district is finishing the statement of interest to the MSBA for Sheehan. Maya Plotkin advised that the MSBA will provide some assistance, even if we do not participate in their program.

Charles Donahue believes that some consideration should be made regarding how and when to ask for public input while simultaneously working on the Deerfield-Hanlon project. Carol Lewis agreed, stating that the timing will need to be strategic.

SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) Update

Erin Kuehn, the district's K-8 SEL Coordinator presented on the SEL and Panorama SEL Survey

SEL was defined as an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Develop healthy identities
- Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain supportive relationships
- Make responsible and caring decisions

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's "wheel" was shown. It includes five core competencies:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Responsible decision-making
4. Relationship skills
5. Social awareness

Social-emotional well-being falls under two categories:

- Mental Health (Psychological symptoms that can interfere with learning and success.)
 - Symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression)
 - Treatment Planning and Skill Building
- Social-Emotional Learning (Competencies that we want students to develop to be successful as individuals and community members.)
 - Skills (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, decision-making)
 - Teaching (e.g., SEL curricula, SEL instructional strategies)

There is a connection between SEL and mental health: When we create a schoolwide culture that provides a sense of belonging and safety for all students and we teach SEL skills while creating opportunities for all students to practice them, then students are better able to learn the skills that they need in order to help themselves manage their mental health challenges or ask for support.

The district's results of the Panorama survey of students in grades 3 through 12 was presented.

The survey collected students' beliefs and attitudes about their social and emotional skills in the following areas:

- Growth mindset
- Self-efficacy
- Social awareness
- Self-management
- Emotional regulation

The Panorama survey has been taken by over 10M students in over 600 school districts. Westwood's completion rate was 86%. Out of 2,285 students, 1,965 participated.

Grades 3-5

- Self-management
 - 81% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Social awareness
 - 79% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Self-efficacy
 - 67% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Growth mindset
 - 66% favorable (99th percentile when compared to others nationally)

- Emotion regulation
 - 55% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)

Grades 6-12

- Self-management
 - 82% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Social awareness
 - 75% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Self-efficacy
 - 57% favorable (79th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Growth mindset
 - 57% favorable (50th percentile when compared to others nationally)
- Emotion regulation
 - 56% favorable (90th percentile when compared to others nationally)

Data from sub-groups was then analyzed.

Continuation of SEL Implementation

- Panorama survey will be administered next school year.
- Continuation of Responsive Classroom implementation and training.
- Elementary SEL curriculum pilot.
- Middle School Advisory program.
- District SEL leadership team and school-based SEL representatives.
- Adult professional learning opportunities.
- SEL parent advisory

Anthony Mullin would like to review a breakdown of results at the secondary level between high school and middle school. Erin Kuehn will provide this information to him.

Charles Donahue was interested in any difference between general education and special education students.

Amanda Phillips observed that the lowest scores were of African-American students. She is interested in options for intervention.

2021-2022 Strategic Priorities – Initial Discussion

The district’s leadership team held a retreat on Monday. An hour was dedicated to reflecting upon the past year. As part of the process, the team returned to the strategy for district improvement document. Time was spent seeing what progress took place, even during the shutdown and the current school year. Even in the midst of everything this year, collaborative, strategic work was achieved.

In reflecting upon the past twelve months, culture and relationships were vital along with the capacity for change. Scheduling work at the middle and high school was compressed. This efficiency and focus, however, was effective.

In the year ahead, work on school start time, curriculum reviews, math recovery and intervention, an equity audit, and the elementary school building project will take place. These will also be part of the discussion at the School Committee’s summer retreat.

Superintendent’s Evaluation

Carol Lewis, as previous Chair, presented an evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools.

The Superintendent’s goals were:

1. Provide the necessary leadership support to successfully navigate the challenges of providing a high quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare for FY’22.

2. 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.
3. Engage residents in a transparent community process regarding the status of the elementary building project and anticipated financial impact.
4. Continue to meet the MSBA requirements, milestones, and deliverables to complete the Schematic Design Phase.

As part of the evaluation rubric, goals are rated on four standards:

1. Instructional leadership
2. Management and operations
3. Family and community engagement
4. Professional culture

Mrs. Lewis stated that Superintendent Parks met and exceeded these goals, rating her as “exemplary” for each.

Action Items

Approval of FY’22 Non-Bargaining Salaries/Pay Rates

The School Committee sets the salary increases/pay rates for non-bargaining employees. The district is recommending 2% increases for literacy paraprofessionals, occupational/physical therapists, and technology support specialists. There will be no increase for lunchroom aides, office assistants, or substitutes.

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the FY’22 non-bargaining salaries/pay rates. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of 2021-22 Meeting Calendar

There were scheduling conflicts for the proposed October and November meeting dates. The vote was tabled.

Approval of May 13, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Charles Donahue requested that one of the comments made during public participation include a direct quote by the resident when he referred to the district’s curriculum as “marxist” be included in the minutes.

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the May 13, 2021 meeting minutes, as amended. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of May 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the May 20, 2021 meeting minutes. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Acceptance of Gifts

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept a gift from the Foundation for Westwood Education. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to accept a donation from the Deerfield School PTO. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of May 13, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of May 20, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft School Committee meeting calendar for the Committee's review and approval
- Memo dated June 2, 2021 from A. Borchers to E. Parks, regarding SEL Update
- Memo dated June 4, 2021 from J. Cianciarulo to School Committee, regarding Approval of FEW grant
- Memo dated June 4, 2021 from J. Cianciarulo to School Committee, regarding Approval of gift from Deerfield School PTO
- Recommended FY'22 Salary increases for non-bargaining unit employees
- Sheehan School Conceptual Study slideshow, dated May 25, 2021 by Dore and Whittier
- Superintendent's Self-Assessment 2020-2021
- Updates to DESE COVID-19 Guidance, issued May 27, 2021 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education