

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

October 14, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 9:00am by Chair Maya Plotkin. Also present were: Vice Chair Charles Donahue, Clerk Anthony Mullin, and Amanda Phillips. Carol Lewis was absent. Superintendent Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste, and Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom 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 it online at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. It was also recorded for later broadcast on Westwood Media Center's platforms.

Public Participation on Agenda Item

Members of the public were invited to participate on the agenda item via Zoom.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive requested that the Committee support the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) guidance on facemasks.

Carlo Rosen of Partridge Drive stated that he is a physician. He recommended continuing with the current mask guidelines.

Antigone Grasso of Oak Street stated that it is important to follow DESE Guidance, particularly as the Department of Public Health has endorsed it.

Discussion Item

Policy EBCFA: Face Masks

Superintendent Parks shared COVID-19 vaccination information that was requested by the Committee.

High School Vaccination Rates

- Students: 82.4%
- Staff (including employees, contractors, and coaches): 94%
- Total students and staff: 86.3%

High School Weekly Pool Testing

51% are registered (491/960 students)

- 213 of the 491 registrants are seniors (high participation related to the Senior Boat Cruise)
- In grades 9-11, 39% of students are registered

Three weeks of participation (percentage is of student population):

- September 30: 256 (27%)
- October 5: 253 (26%)
- October 12: 102 (11%)

Charles Donahue asked about any available comparative data of other school districts. Superintendent Parks responded that she has no sense of this, but Westwood has been ahead of districts in getting its testing program launched with the State's new vendor.

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with an Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the State of Emergency.

COVID Cases

Current cases:

- 7 student cases, all at Sheehan
- 2 staff cases (1 at Sheehan, 1 at High School)
- 47 students currently in “test and stay” protocol

Cases this school year to-date:

- 27 student cases (3 High School, 2 Middle School, 22 elementary; all but 1 unvaccinated)
- 5 staff cases (all vaccinated)

The percentage of high school students with a younger sibling in the district is 32.7%.

The School Committee received a letter from the Board of Health, recommending that the district’s mask mandate remain in place, particularly while Norfolk county is in the “substantial” or “high” transmission category.

October 15 is the date by which DESE has permitted districts to invoke the mask exception for high schools. There are some communities whose boards of health have issued mask mandates for public buildings through November 1, taking the possibility off the table. Superintendent Parks is not aware of any district that has invoked the exception.

Anthony Mullin stated that the Board of Health’s guidance is helpful. He would like to develop objective metrics related to the mask policy that are based on science and data, agreeing that the Norfolk county transmission rate would be a good indicator, suggesting a low or moderate transmission rate.

Mr. Mullin proposed a second criterion: Six weeks following the Food and Drug Administration’s authorization of a vaccine for children five and older.

The Committee agreed that this criteria is worth using in the mask policy.

The Committee asked Superintendent Parks to apply for the exception at the high school so that it will be on-file.

The Committee then discussed how vaccinations would be handled for children once approved. Town Health Director Jared Orsini stated that there is no plan that has been solidified regarding distribution. The State has advised that they will not be opening mass vaccination clinics likes those previously setup at Gillette Stadium or the Hynes Convention Center, instead relying more upon pediatricians’ offices and possibly community public health clinics.

New Business

Anthony Mullin asked about the use of outdoor tents in January. Superintendent Parks stated that the tents are not winter-rated, so it will not be an option. The ability to have younger students vaccinated will be an important step toward resuming more typical elementary and middle school lunches.

Adjournment

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

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 4-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:51am.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID-19 vaccine data
- Letter from J. Orsini, Health Director, Westwood Board of Health to School Committee and E. Parks dated October 13, 2021 regarding DESE Waiver for Face Covering Exemption
- Policy EBCFA: Face Masks