

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
November 9, 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, Amanda Phillips; and student representative Ruby Fyffe. 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 a live stream of the meeting available online at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. It was also recorded for later broadcast on Westwood Media Center's platforms.

Chair Plotkin reported that the meeting is fully remote due to a technical issue with equipment at the high school. It is hoped that December's meeting will return to being hybrid.

Superintendent's Report

COVID-19 Updates

Superintendent Parks reviewed COVID-19 data.

- Eleven cases since the last School Committee meeting (consistent with previous month; averaging 4 cases per week)
- 140 students have participated in the "Test and Stay" protocol
- 58% of students have registered for pool testing
 - 37% have consistently participated from week to week
 - Registration is higher at the elementary level than at secondary

Children ages 5-11 are now eligible for the vaccine. Westwood has been matched with Brewster Ambulance to host a series of clinics. More information will be shared with families once finalized.

Working Group Recommendation – Revenue-based Activities

Superintendent Parks recommended that the School Committee form a working group to discuss rate adjustments for Extended Day, the Prodigy Program, building use, and the Preschool. The group will meet with Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste and present a proposal to the full School Committee in December. Anthony Mullin and Amanda Phillips agreed to serve on the working group.

Superintendent Parks stated that a survey has gone to families regarding ESSER III grant funds. Nearly 900 responses have been received to-date.

Special Education Parent Advisory Council Presentation

Kerry Aglugub and Stephanie Finegold, Co-Chairs of the Westwood Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), presented.

SEPAC

Westwood SEPAC is a state-mandated, parent-run group working to promote a network of parents, guardians, and caregivers of children with special needs.

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

SEPAC partners with the Director of Student Services and the School Committee on policies. It receives input from parents, teachers, and others to encourage understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of all special education students.

Advocacy, Education, and Support

- Advise the School Committee on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities.
- Meet regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the district's special education programs.
 - Liaise with and supported by the Director of Student Services and other district leaders
- Provide a forum to share information and discuss matters of common concern and interest among parents and caregivers.
 - Through regular meetings, workshops, district presentations, and network meet-and-greets that connect parents and caregivers of special needs children.
- Executive Board
- SEPAC Representatives/Liaisons at Each School and a Community Liaison
 - Spread the word about SEPAC events with the PTO and parents, the school principal, and special education teachers.
 - Fosters inclusion in the school community.
 - Provide insight on special education issues to the PTO Board and event chairs on accommodations to consider for events (e.g., some schools have implemented sensory-friendly PTO events).
 - Representatives work directly with special education teachers and PTO Boards regarding the needs for equipment and supplies.
- Subcommittees
 - SEPAC forms subcommittees as needed to take on special projects or whenever a need is identified.

Recent Highlights

- Shifted to Zoom and monthly meetings, providing open communication between parents/caregivers and administrators on remote and hybrid learning challenges and school reopening
- Community meetings throughout the year
- Parent networking meetings and trainings
- Middle and High School transition workshops with district administrators
- Popsicle socials
- District event on an accessibility overview of the proposed new Deerfield-Hanlon School project
- SEPAC community meeting with the district on the update to the new dyslexia guidelines
- Diagnosis-specific networking groups:
 - Autism parent group
 - Language-based learning differences parent group
 - Aspergers/Autism (or similar social profile) parent group
 - Coffee meet-and-greet

Upcoming Events

- Parent group for language-based learning differences on November 18 at 7pm via Zoom
- Parent group for Aspergers/Autism (or similar social profile) on December 5 at 8am at Café Nero
- SEPAC community meeting on December 7 at 7:30pm via Zoom
- Basic Rights: Evaluation and Eligibility on January 11 at 7pm via Zoom
- Monthly parent groups:
 - Autism/WABA families
 - Aspergers/Autism (or similar social profile)
 - Language-based learning differences
 - Coffee meet-and-greet

Connect with SEPAC

- Join private Facebook group (Westwood SEPAC)
- Visit www.westwoodsepac.org
 - Subscribe to newsletter
- Attend SEPAC events
- Volunteer time

Public Participation

Members of the public were invited to participate via Zoom

Stacey Theofilou stated that there is a hate crime problem in the schools and outlined ways for the School Committee to respond.

Carlos Garmendia of Partridge Drive spoke in support of teaching students about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Shannon Mastropalo of Briar Lane spoke in support of the district's ongoing work surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Sandra Castaldini of Birch Street spoke about an acceptable level of risk associated with the School Committee's mask policy.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street spoke about her support for the Special Education Parent Advisory Council.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive requested an update on the mask policy and lunch protocols.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's Update

Maya Plotkin reported that the School Committee will be hosting office hours on Wednesday, November 17 from 9am to 10:30am. Additional sessions will be scheduled soon.

School Building Project Update

The project was approved at both the Special Town Meeting and the Special Town Election.

COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group Update

Maya Plotkin tabled this topic until the Face Masks policy discussion later in the meeting.

School Start Times Subcommittee

A kickoff meeting will be scheduled soon. It is hoped that the Subcommittee will present a recommendation to the School Committee by the end of the school year for implementation in Fall 2023.

Policy Subcommittee

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees will facilitate the review. Carol Lewis and Charles Donahue will serve on the subcommittee.

Other Liaison Reports

There were no liaison reports.

Discussion Items

2021-2022 Goals

Superintendent Parks shared a draft of the 2021-2022 goals. They fall into three themes:

1. Pandemic recovery
2. Curriculum review
3. Support students' social-emotional learning

The strategy document was outlined for the Committee.

Vision

Graduates of the Westwood Public Schools are skilled, curious, and kind: excited for their futures and ready to contribute to their communities.

Mission

To prepare students for college, career, and civic life by providing rich and challenging curriculum, high-quality instruction, and authentic educational experiences.

Core Values

- Academic excellence and a commitment to improvement
- Curiosity and tenacity
- Respectful relationships in a caring, collaborative community

There are four strategic objectives and accompanying priorities:

1. Meaningful learning experiences
 - a. Provide students frequent opportunities for input, choice, leadership, and engagement with real-world challenges.
 - b. Expand the use of ongoing assessment data and looking at student work to target instruction to what each student needs.
 - c. Provide opportunities to develop social emotional skills throughout instruction in content with a greater focus on cultural competency and perspective-taking.
2. Coherent, connected curriculum
 - a. Map curriculum and provide professional development to support the alignment of social studies curriculum to state and national learning standards.
 - b. Initiate the math curriculum review process, with a focus on National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) guidance on secondary course sequence and opportunities for enrichment and acceleration.
 - c. Complete the wellness curriculum review by articulating recommendations that support the social and emotional development and physical well-being of students.
3. Healthy and supported school community
 - a. Utilize research-based time and schedule structure to support student learning and wellness (e.g., longer blocks, advisory time, later secondary start times).
 - b. Create a school environment where all students feel academically challenged, supported, and experience a sense of belonging.
 - c. Provide resources, programming, and structures to restore and support the well-being of students and staff as the community recovers from the pandemic.
4. Infrastructure for the future
 - a. Continue to engage the community in long-term capital planning for other school buildings, including the Hanlon-Deerfield project milestones.
 - b. In collaboration with municipal police and fire, continue to improve school security infrastructure, training, and protocols.
 - c. Develop processes and resources to hire, recruit, and retain a talented and diverse workforce.
 - d. Engage in NEASC accreditation and DESE civil rights and special education program audits in order to ensure that district policies and practices align with state and federal laws and promote equitable outcomes for all students.

Superintendent Parks highlighted some of the strategies. She mentioned that, at the last two School Committee meetings, she heard from members of the public with concerns about curriculum. She stated that the district does not teach critical race theory, which is an analytical framework used in higher education to examine structures in society. It is not taught in Massachusetts public schools. In Westwood, students are taught the State's required curriculum frameworks, which includes concepts such as racism and discrimination.

Assistant Superintendent Borchers reviewed how curriculum reviews are conducted in the district.

Curriculum Reviews

- Self-study of curriculum and instruction, examining what we teach and how we teach it, in order to make recommendations for improvement.
- Review teams include K-12 educators as well as parent, student, and School Committee representatives.
- In process
 - Social Studies (completed before February)
 - Wellness (completed before June)
- Next
 - Math (spring)
 - Music (fall)

Curriculum

- Not just a textbook series, but a web-based resource or binder of materials
- Common experiences designed to help students gain new knowledge and skills
- State Frameworks: List of specific standards (skills and knowledge) that students in public schools are expected to learn each year
- Some content areas informed by national standards or other frameworks (e.g., AASL (American Association of School Librarians) standards for library media; or CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework for Social-Emotional Learning)
- Helpful metaphor: Standards are the destination, curriculum is the book of maps

Frameworks

- Content Standards: Specific knowledge/skills that are focus areas for this year
- Practice Standards: Habits we are working to instill over time

Good Curriculum Includes

- Units of Study – Big topic areas
 - Persuasive writing
 - Comparing, ordering, adding, and subtracting fractions
 - Development of US government
 - Atomic structure
- Essential/guiding questions
 - Designed to frame learning around themes that are open to exploration/discussion/debate
- Specific learning goals
 - Rooted in standards
- Common resources
 - Mentor/full class texts
 - Textbooks
 - Primary sources
 - Online materials designed to support learning
- Common assessments
 - Tests
 - Quizzes
 - Essays
 - Labs

- Speeches
- Research projects or papers
- Other hands-on or performance-based measures

Teacher Discretion

Teacher have some discretion.

- Lesson Plans
 - Series of activities designed to help students learn particular skills/concepts
 - Specific strategies and instructional methods (tasks, grouping, etc.)
 - Supplemental and choice-based resources (images, maps, videos, articles, texts)
 - Informal and formative assessments (checks for understanding)
 - Opportunities to practice (homework, classwork)

Additionally, in an effort to create an environment where all students feel academically challenged, supported, and experience a sense of belonging the district will undergo an equity audit:

- A process designed to assess an organization’s progress toward fair access and opportunity for all.
- An audit will typically examine policies, processes, and practices. The results of the audit can be used to prioritize improvement efforts.

Tony Mullin requested a refresh on the long-term capital needs of the schools. The Committee agreed with this request, as it will be beneficial in conveying information to the community.

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to approve the goals as provided and outlined. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

FY’23 School Committee Budget Priorities – Initial Discussion

Superintendent Parks provided an update on expanding the METCO Program. The State has set aside a portion of an FY’22 increase for communities interested in expanding their local programs (i.e., either expanding grades or increasing student participation). This would increase the current year’s allocation as if the expansion already took place, with funding used to plan for the year ahead. The FY’23 allocation would be based upon a similar, expanded number, removing the obstacle that existed due to the grant’s “look back” at previous enrollment.

The Committee agreed to invite METCO Director Lateefah Franck to December’s meeting to discuss expanding the program.

The Committee discussed other priorities for FY’23 budgeting, including additional administration at the middle school, addressing elementary class sizes, funding for extracurricular activities during S-Block at the High School, and thinking about staffing plans for the Deerfield-Hanlon consolidation.

FY’23 Budget Calendar

The budget calendar was shared with the Committee.

- November 9: Initial School Committee discussion about offset assumptions, as well as capital and budget priorities
- November 16: Initial Administrative Council discussion about budget priorities
- November 16-24: Superintendent and Director of Business and Finance meet with Principals and Central Office
- November 30-December 1: Central Office reviews budget submittals
- December 7: Administrative Council discussion about budget requests and priorities
- December 9: School Committee discussion about revenue-based activities, with follow-up on capital and budget priorities (as needed)
- December 21: Administrative Council decisions about budget requests and priorities
- January 13: Superintendent's recommended FY'23 budget presented to School Committee
- January 27: Superintendent's recommended FY'23 budget presented to School Committee (as needed)
- February 8: School Department budget presentation to Finance and Warrant Commission (FinCom)
- February 10: School Committee FY'23 budget hearing
- February 14-28: School Department meets with FinCom Education Subcommittee
- March 15: FinCom Subcommittee presentation
- May 2: Annual Town Meeting

Policy EBCFA – Face Masks

Anthony Mullin provided an update from the COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group.

Positive COVID-19 cases have flatlined. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's mask requirement is in place through January 15. The requirement has an exception for any school building that demonstrates a vaccination rate of at least 80% for all students and staff.

Superintendent Parks recommended that, upon returning from the December break, the district assess vaccination rates in each school building. This will allow for the district to quickly file the attestation and request approval.

The tents used for outdoor dining at some schools will be removed by December 1 as they are not winter-rated. At the middle school, students have started returning to the cafeteria. At elementary, students are going outside on nice weather days. Once students return from the December break, lunch will return to its pre-pandemic manner.

Metrics

The School Committee discussed options for using metrics related to the face mask policy, including the potential use of data from the Town of Westwood rather than the entire Norfolk County.

The Committee agreed that anyone that wants to continue to wear a face mask is welcome to do so.

The Committee will continue this discussion at the December meeting.

Action Items

Approval of October 14, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to approve the meeting minutes of October 14, 2021. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 4-0-1 – Approved

Approval of October 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the meeting minutes of October 20, 2021. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of Grant Funds from the Foundation for Westwood Education

The Foundation awarded the district a grant in the amount of \$963.69 for supplemental funding needed to complete the grant for an augmentative alternative communication board at the Preschool playground.

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to accept grant funds from the Foundation for Westwood Education. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:31pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of October 14, 2021 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of October 20, 2021 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Letter from R. Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner of Education, regarding Equity in Special Education Indicators and Initiatives Status, dated October 14, 2021
- MASC information regarding Contract Policy Service
- Memo from J. Cianciarulo to School Committee dated November 3, 2021, regarding Approval of FWE grant
- Policy EBCFA – Face Masks
- Slides related to Strategy for District Improvement
- Slideshow presentation by Special Education Parent Advisory Council, dated November 9, 2021
- Strategy for District Improvement 2021-2024, with 2021-2022 Priorities