

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
November 20, 2025

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:31pm by Maya Plotkin. Also present were Dori Parmelee, JoAnna French, Anthony Mullin and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Timothy Piwowar, Assistant Superintendent Caitlin Ahern and Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district.

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Superintendent's Report

Director of Student Services Search Process

Supt. Piwowar described the search process for a new Director of Student Services and thanked interim director Lori Cimeno for her work during the transitional period. The district will follow the same process used for previous high-level searches. A screening committee including administrators, professional and support staff, families, and a School Committee representative will review résumés, conduct first-round interviews and recommend finalists. Finalists will participate in site visits and meet with staff, families, and students.

The School Committee will vote on the Superintendent's recommendation, as required by state law for this position. The goal is to complete the search prior to February vacation, with a final vote at the February 5, 2026 School Committee meeting.

Special Education Review Update

Supt. Piwowar provided an update on the district's special education review conducted by consultants at Ribas Associates. Two developments since the initial contract in July prompted the district to broaden the review's scope: the August departure of the former Director of Student Services and staff turnover among ABA tutors, particularly in the WABA program at Pine Hill.

The review will now include interviews with general education teachers, IAs and ABA tutors, as well as additional family interviews and a survey of staff and families across the district. With the expanded scope, the final report will now be scheduled for the January School Committee meeting. Supt. Piwowar clarified that preliminary recommendations will be available internally in time to inform the FY27 budget process.

Supt. Piwowar stated that families interested in participating in interviews can reach out directly to him or the district office.

Chair's Update

Ms. Plotkin shared that the Select Board extended an offer to Connor Read for the Westwood Town Administrator role. She thanked Ms. Parmelee for her service on the screening committee.

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Ms. Plotkin shared that the district has completed all three facilities forums. The next steps include creating an FAQ based on forum questions and a short survey. Because the issue affects the wider community, community members are encouraged to help amplify it.

Liaison Reports

Ms. Parmelee reported that SEPAC leadership has collaborated actively with the School Engagement Committee, and a community dinner at Sheehan will be held on December 3. SEPAC is also seeking new board members for next year.

Ms. French asked families to look out for forthcoming surveys to provide input on the Performing Arts program as part of the curriculum review.

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

Discussion Items

FY27 Budget Priorities and Timeline

Supt. Piwowar updated the Committee on budget planning for fiscal year 2027. The December 10 School Committee meeting will include a discussion on expenses and revenue. The budget book will be delivered to the School Committee in early January, and the Committee will vote on the budget at the February 5, 2026 meeting.

Budget drivers that are specific to FY27 include: personnel considerations related to upcoming contract negotiations with instructional assistants and ABA tutors; transportation cost increases; out-of-district special education tuition; utilities costs given that the town's electricity contract expires in January 2027.

Supt. Piwowar explained that there are currently two grades in which some class sizes exceed School Committee guidelines, but the district will aim to align with the guidelines in FY27 where possible. Supt. Piwowar asked the Committee for feedback about the idea of revisiting the use of buffer zones to help distribute incoming students more evenly across schools. Committee members broadly agreed buffer zones would be worth exploring and discussed some ideal parameters.

Supt. Piwowar highlighted other budget priorities, including the second phase of the High School Wellness program expansion and continued efforts to better align resource allocation with student needs. Ms. Plotkin and Supt. Piwowar clarified that the Middle School World Language expansion may not be in the budget for FY27 while the district does ongoing curriculum reviews in that area.

The Committee discussed the idea of opening Kindergarten registration earlier than past years. Ms. French added that tools and resources for data gathering should be a priority to assess student and staff needs. Ms. French added that the Preschool should also be a priority, and Supt. Piwowar agreed that the physical space is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Deerfield Re-Use Advisory Committee Recommendation

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Mr. Mullin updated the Committee that the Deerfield Re-Use Sub-Committee met several times, gathered feedback, and evaluated three potential uses for the former Deerfield School building. The Sub-Committee concluded none of the options were viable, and therefore recommended returning the property to the Town of Westwood effective July 1, 2026. The School Committee will request that the Select Board place such an article on the May 2026 Annual Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Mullin thanked the district staff and community members who participated in the Sub-Committee.

Superintendent's Goals

Supt. Piwowar presented professional practice, student learning, and district improvement goals aligned with the district's strategic plan. The goals include: establishing more consistent communication with families; increasing student agency and amplifying student voice through the implementation of Universal Design for Learning; and increasing the district's use of data to inform instruction, staffing decisions, resource allocation, and evaluation of program effectiveness. Lastly, a main goal will be to engage the community in the process of future facilities planning.

Committee members asked for measurable, time-bound targets, as well as improved staff recruitment and retention data and better exit and entrance surveys.

Proposed New Policy IKFE: Competency Determination, Second Reading

No changes were made since the first reading. Supt. Piwowar recommended waiving the third reading.

DESE Middle School Pathway Exploration Policy, First Reading

Supt. Piwowar explained that recent state regulations require districts that are part of regional vocational agreements to adopt policies ensuring equitable access for middle-school students to explore vocational options. Supt. Piwowar clarified that Westwood already follows the practices outlined and that the policy simply codifies them.

Action Items

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to recommend that the Westwood Select Board include in the May 2026 Annual Town Meeting warrant an article providing that the school district shall transfer the care, custody, and control of the Deerfield School, located at 72 Deerfield Ave, to the Town of Westwood, such transfer to be effective as of July 1, 2026, and further that the School Committee take any steps necessary to accomplish a transfer. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to vote for the 2026-2027 school year to start on September 2, 2026 and end as presented in the calendar. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the October 14 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

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MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the open meeting minutes of the October 17, 2025 meeting. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the open meeting minutes of the October 24, 2025 meeting. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve meeting minutes of the October 29, 2025 meeting, the facilities forum. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the November 6 Deerfield Re-Use Advisory Committee minutes. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Maya Plotkin: Abstain

Dori Parmelee: Abstain

JoAnna French: Abstain

Anthony Mullin: Yes

Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 2-0-3 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the open meeting minutes for the November 7, 2025 meeting. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to waive the third reading of policy IKFE: Competency Determination. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve policy IKFE: Competency Determination. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

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MOTION made by JoAnna French to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned at 7:34pm.