

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
September 11, 2025

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:32pm 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. Westwood High School student representative Ethan Lee was also present.

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Superintendent's Report

Supt. Piwowar shared pictures from the first days of school, including elementary students on the bus, staff enjoying lunch, and a classroom "book tasting" activity.

Supt. Piwowar introduced Lori Cimeno, Interim Student Services Director.

Portrait of a Graduate

Supt. Piwowar shared updates on the Portrait of a Graduate project. Students developed a visual representation of the Portrait, which aimed to be both visually appealing and informative. The final project describes the qualities of a successful Westwood Public Schools graduate.

Strategic plan

Supt. Piwowar informed the Committee that the 2025-2028 Westwood Public Schools strategic plan is completed. The plan is a roadmap for how district leadership will work with educators. The plan is organized into four focal areas, which include strategic priorities and action steps within each priority. During the 2025-2026 school year, the Superintendent and Administrative Council will prioritize the following: use classroom walkthroughs and peer observations to understand what a student-centered classroom looks like; and, communicate expectations to staff around the importance of student voice and student-centered instruction. District leaders will work with educators to prioritize student voice and agency, as well as Universal Design for Learning.

The Committee discussed a timeline for annually checking in on strategic plan progress. Supt. Piwowar explained that the plan would be a living document that evolves through 2028 and beyond. The district strategy represents broad priorities, which will coordinate with school improvement planning – a separate process that is updated annually. Action steps will be updated based on context.

Supt. Piwowar updated the deadline for recommending Deerfield's future disposition to December 2025, per Mr. Mullin's recommendation on Strategic Priority 4.4.

Committee members highlighted the importance of over-communicating these district priorities with the community and soliciting involvement from students on strategic plans.

Summer curriculum and professional learning

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Assistant Superintendent Ahern shared updates on summer curriculum work, which included 32 projects with more than 100 educators contributing, as well as several district professional development courses. Twenty-five new educators attended New Teacher Orientation.

Assistant Supt. Ahern described the 2025-2026 professional development program, which includes: early-release afternoons focused on district-wide, building-based and department-level learning; two district professional development days; and partnerships with training organizations. Leader professional development offers learning for administrators and department heads.

Assistant Supt. Ahern introduced mCLASS, a new data reporting and analysis tool for K-5. The mCLASS tool allows the district to assess students three times a year to glean benchmark data and make instructional decisions to support students as needed. The Committee discussed the need for communication to parents around how to interpret student assessment data. Educators in 6-12 will receive training on Universal Design for Learning principles.

Public Participation

Tom O'Leary of Salisbury Drive raised the issue of what communication is expected from the district in the event of national news such as the recent Charlie Kirk killing, as well as what is expected around student support. Ms. Plotkin directed Mr. O'Leary to the School Committee Office Hours being held this year. Ms. Plotkin closed public participation.

Ms. Plotkin highlighted that the next School Committee meeting is on a Tuesday and informed the community that the schedule for the year is published. The Committee has also finalized the Office Hours for this year, and those dates can be found on the district website.

Discussion Items

Facilities study communication and outreach plan

Supt. Piwowar indicated that the first decision is which school to prioritize for the SOI by December 2025. The following stage is a feasibility study determining the key features of the facility. Supt. Piwowar presented a timeline of key decision points for the facilities project.

For community outreach and feedback, district leaders will visit school PTO meetings, hold three public forums and send regular email communications to families. Mr. Mullin and Ms. Plotkin discussed whether the public forums should be full School Committee meetings and whether they would be recorded. Ms. French and Ms. Parmelee recommended gathering community questions to build an FAQ.

Sheehan playground project

Rebecca Ames shared updates from the Sheehan Playground Committee. The initiative aimed to revitalize the playground with structures that can be removed and reinstalled if needed. The Committee is seeking approval from the School Committee for a gift of \$35,000 to be spent toward a new climbing structure from Burke playground equipment vendor.

Security cameras on buses

Supt. Piwowar explained the proposed amendment to policy ECAF, which would allow for the installation of cameras on school buses in the district. The amendment provides for a cloud-based security camera system to be installed, by adding "school transportation vehicles" under the existing

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security camera policy (ECAF) which covers the school buildings. It is Supt. Piwowar's recommendation that this amendment be brought for a second reading and a vote at the next School Committee meeting in October.

Ms. Phillips and Ms. French raised questions about ensuring that students and families understand how the cameras will be used. Supt. Piwowar assured the Committee that there will be communication with families around the new policy.

Ms. Jn-Baptiste described how the cameras would be set up, in accordance with recommendations from Connelly bus company. Safety is the ultimate goal of the amendment.

FY27 capital requests

Ms. Jn-Baptiste is seeking commentary from the Committee as the district begins preparing capital requests for fiscal year 2027. The intent is to develop a plan for the annual capital budget and consider any articles that would be presented at the spring Town Meeting to fund any special projects for the schools. Ms. Jn-Baptiste pointed out that the HVAC equipment at the high school is under consideration for priority, in addition to potential equipment at Martha Jones and Downey.

The district is currently taking a repair approach to the Thurston and Sheehan roofs, as opposed to a replacement project. The district will request \$300,000 in budget for roofing in FY27.

The district has set aside \$500,000 under Technology for device replacement next year. In terms of building improvements, Ms. Jn-Baptiste highlighted the focus on replacing fire panels and electrical panels. Masonry, water sealing and other exterior improvements are also on the radar.

The district is planning to purchase a student activity bus with funds set aside for this year. A food service truck and a utility truck for maintenance staff are in the plan to be purchased in the coming year and year after, respectively.

Ms. Jn-Baptiste asked for feedback on the issue of additional funds needed for HVAC upgrades at the high school. Domestic hot water heater work is a priority for next year. Funds for the Thurston heating system are in the five-year capital requests, as they were last year. Phone controllers across the district were analyzed, and high school/central office phone equipment is a priority for replacement.

The district also has a placeholder in the FY27 capital requests to address the potential SOI for the facilities study.

The Committee discussed the idea of re-prioritizing the Thurston heating system in FY27, given the impact an outage would have on students. Ms. Jn-Baptiste stated she would revisit this issue to consider if there is a way to request funding for a small project to reduce at least some risk in FY27. The district will update the Committee on summer 2025 projects at the October meeting.

Action Items

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to approve the July 10 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

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Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to approve the August 8 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the August 22 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to accept the gift for the Sheehan playground in the amount of \$35,000. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to close inactive student activity accounts. Supt. Piwowar explained that these are student activities accounts that are inactive but have a financial balance. The balances would be distributed to other student activities. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to approve the Sean P. Kane Memorial scholarship. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

New Business

There was no new business.

Executive Session and Adjournment

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel and to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if it may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the Committee. The Committee will not be reconvening in open session. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned into executive session at 8:28pm.