

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Westwood, Massachusetts

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**January 21, 2026**

**Attendance and Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm 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**

Superintendent Piwowar showed photos of students and staff from across the district.

**Chair's Update**

Ms. Plotkin shared that the Committee has a new centralized email address, allowing questions and concerns to be tracked and answered more efficiently.

Ms. Plotkin explained that the Committee will hold two meetings to allow for public questions about the FY27 budget: an Office Hours session and a joint meeting between WPS and SEPAC to address special education budget-related questions.

**Liaison reports**

Supt. Piwowar confirmed that the search for a Director of Student Services is on schedule.

**Public Participation**

Kristin Dempsey of 565 Everett Street offered comments about the size, use, design and safety of Pine Hill. Ms. Dempsey highlighted safety concerns for students in specialized programs and emphasized the need for appropriate facilities if a new middle school is built. Ms. Dempsey also emphasized the need for long-term planning that prioritizes safety, functionality, and room for enrollment growth.

**Discussion Items**

**Special Education Review Report**

Bill Lupini and Karen Shmukler of Ribas Associates presented their findings from the special education program review.

The consultants described their methodology, which included data analysis, interviews with leadership and staff, focus groups, surveys of parents and faculty, and school visits. Key focus areas included organizational structure, staffing, service delivery, preschool programming, resource allocation, general education supports, and staff turnover. Mr. Lupini and Ms. Shmukler also emphasized district strengths, including experienced staff, engaged families, robust programming, and low out-of-district placements.

Mr. Lupini explained their recommendation to shift from the current department head model to a team chair model. Under this model, designated team chairs would consistently lead IEP meetings, freeing up department heads to focus more on staff supervision, evaluations, and program development.

The consultants reported that special education identification rates in Westwood are higher than most comparable districts. The review suggested that general education practices may be causing students to move too quickly into special education when general interventions or accommodations might be more

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appropriate. The review identified early literacy and middle-school executive functioning as areas to examine. The consultants also reported that ADHD emerged as an unusually high eligibility category.

Ms. Shmukler explained concerns about service delivery models, for instance the rate of students on IEPs being pulled out of general education and missing core instruction. The consultants also noted a high volume of consultation services embedded in IEPs, which they stated can reduce instructional time for both teachers and students if not carefully managed.

Ms. Shmukler explained the need for clarity and consistency of programming, particularly at transition points between elementary, middle, and high school. The consultants recommended clearer articulation of the continuum of services from preschool through age 22, including clear entrance and exit criteria. Committee members asked clarifying questions around the data on 504 accommodations and IEPs.

The consultants reported staffing challenges, particularly the retention of ABA tutors and instructional assistants. While compensation was identified as a factor, the consultants stated that working conditions, career pathways, and role clarity also influenced retention. They recommended reviewing compensation against comparable districts, exploring career ladders or licensure pathways, and addressing potential culture issues in certain buildings. The consultants also recommended workload analysis across buildings, noting variability in student complexity and staffing ratios that do not always align with need.

Specific recommendations were made for program reviews, including a full PreK–22 review of the WABA program. Other suggested changes included addressing preschool space constraints and creating a dedicated intake team to avoid pulling teachers out of classrooms for evaluations. The consultants stressed the importance of a district-wide MTSS framework, consistent “non-negotiables” across buildings, and a multi-year professional development plan. Mr. Lupini emphasized that DESE’s development programs around MTSS and educator evaluations are worthwhile.

Supt. Piwovar stated that the report will guide administrative planning, inform future budget decisions, and serve as a roadmap for the incoming Director of Student Services.

Proposed FY27 Budget

Ms. Plotkin outlined the broader fiscal context facing the Town of Westwood, including constraints from Massachusetts Proposition 2 1/2. For FY27, the district faces increases in healthcare, energy, transportation, and special education costs, along with contractual salary increases. These pressures meant the budget process began with a structural deficit, requiring difficult decisions and close coordination with town leadership.

Supt. Piwovar explained that maintaining “level services” – keeping existing staffing, salaries, and programs intact – would require a 5.18% budget increase. Following budget steering discussions with town officials, the proposed FY27 school budget increase is 4.31%, creating a gap of just over \$500,000 below level services.

Supt. Piwovar stated that the proposed FY27 school budget totals just under \$61.3 million, up from \$58.7 million in FY26. Supt. Piwovar explained that while the budget includes required staffing additions to ensure legal compliance in special education and English Learner services, those additions are offset by reductions elsewhere.

Supt. Piwovar shared that non-salary cost increases are driven mainly by special education tuition and transportation. Supt. Piwovar shared that transportation costs are increasing due to inflation, additional routes required for out-of-district placements, and limited vendor competition in Massachusetts. Other increases include costs for yellow bus transportation and athletic facility rentals. The district proposed a 5% reduction in conferences, dues, and similar expenses.

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Supt. Piwowar explained changes to how the district budgets state special education “circuit breaker” reimbursements. The FY27 budget proposes a modest increase to help flatten year-over-year fluctuations. Supt. Piwowar reported that the federal IDEA special education grant declined significantly in FY26, affecting funding for instructional aides. Smaller changes occurred in other grants, with some increases offsetting prior reductions.

Supt. Piwowar shared proposed increases to bus fees, athletics fees, and preschool tuition as part of a strategy to make predictable, incremental adjustments and generate additional revenue.

Supt. Piwowar emphasized the continued unpredictability in kindergarten enrollment and uneven distribution across elementary schools. To address this, the district proposed introducing elementary buffer zones for new students to help balance class sizes. Supt. Piwowar stated that draft maps are expected to be reviewed in February, with a vote planned before kindergarten registration opens.

Supt. Piwowar outlined proposed changes to several of the special education and preschool programs, including: an additional integrated preschool classroom at Downey; the relocation of the WABA preschool classroom from Pine Hill to Downey; consolidation of the PEER program from Downey to Martha Jones; and the addition of a second FOCUS teacher at Pine Hill.

Supt. Piwowar outlined proposed staffing changes and emphasized that the district approached reductions with the goal of preserving students’ access to educational needs. To meet legal requirements and evolving student needs, the budget adds positions in special education, English Learner services, preschool, and student support. Staffing reductions include classroom teachers, instructional technology coaching, science support, custodial staffing, and a district-level director.

Supt. Piwowar noted that several grade levels at the elementary schools are projected to exceed class size guidelines. Supt. Piwowar emphasized that this decision was driven by financial necessity and would be supported through targeted use of specialists and aides.

Committee members expressed concern about reductions in STEM staffing and acknowledged the difficulty of the decisions. Mr. Mullin posed a question about the middle school team model and how that affects decisions around potential reductions. Ms. French commended the negotiating team for identifying the early retirement incentives as a way to save. Supt. Piwowar explained the challenge of the town budget cycle which prevents the district from making meaningful responses to the governor’s budget.

Supt. Piwowar gave an overview of capital priorities, including technology refresh cycles, building maintenance, safety systems, and long-term sustainability investments. Supt. Piwowar outlined future priorities including restoring elementary class sizes within guidelines, expanding middle school language and health programs, and implementing recommendations from ongoing curriculum reviews.

**Action Items**

**MOTION** made by Dori Parmelee to accept the donation from Meditech. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

**Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)**

**MOTION** made by Anthony Mullin to approve the December 10, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

**New Business**

There was no new business.

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**Adjournment**

**MOTION** made by Anthony Mullin to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

**Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)**

The meeting adjourned at 9:20pm.