

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
January 28, 2026

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01pm by Maya Plotkin. Also present were Dori Parmelee, JoAnna French, Anthony Mullin and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Timothy Piwowar was present on behalf of the district.

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Roll-call:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

Dorothy Parmelee: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Anthony Mullin: **Yes**

Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Discussion Items

Ms. Plotkin gave an update regarding the status of the coordination between the Town of Westwood and Westwood Public Schools around the budget. Ms. Plotkin explained that the Town's proposed budget conflicted with some of the information that was provided to the schools before the District presented its budget to the School Committee. Ms. Plotkin shared that the reductions the Committee was expecting to see in the Town budget did not appear in the Select Board's presentation, while the schools' budget included several reductions to address the financial deficit.

Ms. Plotkin explained that the schools made difficult decisions within its proposed budget, based on expectations from estimates shared by the Town. Committee members shared their frustration with the presentation from the Town, particularly noting a lack of transparency and reversion on the agreed-upon budget parameters.

Mr. Mullin shared slides that showed a comparison between Town and school budget over the past few years and voiced concern over the trend in the difference between increases in recent years. Ms. Plotkin echoed the feeling that the budget process is flawed and that the schools made decisions based on incorrect and withheld information.

Ms. Plotkin suggested that the District return to the budget discussions and determine areas where additional funds can be added back. Mr. Mullin and Ms. French added that it would be ideal to revisit what "level services" entail. Ms. Plotkin expressed again that the Committee felt it was misled and did not result in an equitable budget for the schools.

Supt. Piwowar echoed the frustration of the Committee, and stated that the District would revisit the budget through the lens of both providing level services and a hard-number increase.

Ms. Plotkin explained that audience members should put their questions, names and addresses in the Q&A section of the webinar. Ms. Plotkin added that there were currently 156 people on the call.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Katie Willette of 91 Pheasant Hill Street about why the schools would eliminate staff or teaching positions based on current enrollment projections, as well as a question

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

about adjusting the schools' proposed budget. Ms. Plotkin responded that the Committee had to make those reductions for financial reasons but would be reviewing those decisions in a potential revised budget. Supt. Piwowar stated that the District has not yet seen the growth that was expected.

Supt. Piwowar explained the District's budget planning timeline. Committee members discussed the challenge of planning the budget when the Town and state timelines are not well aligned with the schools'. Ms. Phillips clarified that the Town charter is outside of the Committee's purview, and Committee members discussed the value of the Town potentially changing the charter to better align budget timelines.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Steph Finegold of 5 Whippoorwill Drive about what positions were cut to Town personnel compared to school personnel. Ms. Plotkin responded that the District and the Committee do not have that information.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Srirup Kumar of 40 Westland Avenue about the increase in electricity costs and a proposal for savings, as well as a question about who pays the trash collection bill and how much Waste Management is paid for collection. Ms. Plotkin responded that these questions were more appropriate for the Town. Ms. Parmelee pointed out that capital savings would be in a different part of the budget than teacher salaries.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Sarah Herlihy of 67 Morgan Farm Road about who in Town government is responsible for sharing budget information with the School Committee. Ms. Plotkin explained who was involved in the steering committees.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Scott Stenstrom of 14 Birch Street about whether the Town has done an audit or would be willing to do one, given the additional money found in the budget. Ms. Plotkin stated that those types of questions should be directed to the Select Board.

Carlos Garmendia of 125 Partridge Drive about what percentage the added amount would represent of the total budget and what cuts would be avoided, as well as who has the final say in the budget proposal. Supt. explained that the \$300,000 increase is about a half a percent and that what cuts would be avoided is a conversation he would be having with his team and the Committee in the near future.

Ms. Plotkin explained that the school presents its budget proposal and approves it, then the Select Board presents the Town budget and approves it, then it is presented to FinCom and then FinCom votes to recommend or not recommend the budget. Ms. Plotkin stated that town residents have the final say, as the budget must be approved by a vote at the annual Town Meeting in May. If approved, the budget goes into effect July 1; if not, the budget from the prior year would carry over.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Eileen Siegel of 257 Alder Road about what a resident can do to advocate for more budget to be allocated from the Town to the schools. Ms. Plotkin responded that residents can dig into the budget and advocate to the Select Board for what they feel is important in the budget. Ms. French added that residents can review the schools' and Town's budget presentations and use those to engage with both the Committee and Select Board.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Sarah Chipman of 81 Cobleigh Street asked about the policy for IAs in kindergarten classes and how committed the District is to kindergarten teachers and students, as well as a question about the projected large second-grade classes. Supt. Piwowar explained that there are the same amount of general education IAs in a given building as there are kindergarten classrooms. Supt. Piwowar added that how IAs are deployed in a building is up to the school's discretion so there is not a strict one-to-one assignment, aside from specific guidelines based on class size. Supt. Piwowar explained that the revised budget proposal may include changes to class sizes.

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Jenna Redlener of 10 Orchard Circle about whether the District has done an audit of administrator positions at the district level. Supt. Piwowar pointed to the recent special education review that identified a need for department heads and the recent reduction of a director-level position. Ms. Phillips explained that a conversation about administrative needs was included in the budget planning discussions this year.

Supt. Piwowar read a comment from Lisa Maguire of 169 Strasser Ave about revisiting the large class sizes and what level services would cost. Supt. Piwowar responded that certain classes were identified as outside the School Committee's official guidelines and that the comment is appreciated.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Christine Amara of 211 School Street requesting that the schools maintain the level of IAs in first grade Pine Hill classrooms due to the class sizes, and whether additional money can be prioritized to go toward IAs. Supt. Piwowar responded that this question had been addressed previously in the webinar and that the District would go back to the Committee with revisions.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Ryan Mooney of 95 Lakeshore about whether there has been an explanation from the Town about the discrepancy. Ms. Plotkin stated that she had a short conversation with the chair of the Select Board before the budget was presented but did not know about the additional personnel at that time, and that the Committee is in information-gathering mode. Ms. Plotkin added that she is hopeful the parties can work together to get through the bump in the road.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Christina Martin of 23 Brookfield Road about whether the Committee has touched base with the Select Board. Ms. Plotkin stated that this question was answered.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Jennifer Kelly of 25 Juniper Ridge Road about what residents could do to advocate for a better process in years to come. Ms. Plotkin suggested that residents decide what their priorities are and communicate that to the schools and to the Town.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Pauline Chaloff of 180 Burgess Ave about what budget money comes out of for lawsuits/arbitration. Ms. Plotkin explained that legal fees come from a line item in the budget and settlement or judgment claims depend on whether the claim is running through the schools' insurance or needs to come from free cash. Ms. Plotkin explained that the Town would have to vote on the appropriation of free cash at Town Meeting.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Kathy Wallace of 283 Farm Lane about whether the Select Board and Committee have talked more directly, as well as a question about how the Town's added FTEs would be funded. Ms. Mullin directed people to the Select Board's presentation slides for this information. Ms. Plotkin clarified that money earmarked for a certain purpose can be used for any purpose, given that the total comes out of one budget.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Aaron Wyatt of 83 Pond Street about how to engage with Select Board members outside of Select Board meetings. Ms. Plotkin responded that people can contact the Select Board to request meeting with them or email them questions, similar to how people can engage with the School Committee.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Samantha Dillon of 39 Whitney about what alternatives were evaluated before making staff reductions and why families were not engaged earlier about the budget situation. Supt. Piwowar responded that the guiding principle was to avoid making cuts to areas that provide direct educational services to students. Ms. Plotkin added that the period of time after the public presentation of the budget to the School Committee provides the opportunity for the public to voice questions. Ms. Plotkin explained that the District cannot engage with community members before this period because the proposed budget is not yet finalized during that time.

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Liana Brodsky of 77 Deerfield Ave about considering the use of additional funds to hire more IAs in a potential new version of the budget. Supt. Piwowar acknowledged the request and stated that there would be future conversations around this topic.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Srirup Kumar of 40 Westland Ave about whether income from capital projects can be earmarked for teachers and curriculum use. Supt. Piwowar explained that savings would likely not happen soon enough to have an impact on this budget.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Fran Fusco of 20 Pine Lane about whether school HR could be shared with Town HR. Supt. Piwowar explained the need for a dedicated HR person at the district level to avoid diverting resources away from the Assistant Superintendent in charge of curriculum and instruction.

Supt. Piwowar read a comment from Suzanne Insler of 7 Youngs Road about including community engagement earlier in the budget process. Ms. Plotkin responded that it would be impractical to include community members in conversations before ideas are fully formed and that the Committee has taken steps to include the community where possible. Committee members explained that the Committee takes feedback from community members throughout the year and shares input about budget priorities on a rolling basis.

Supt. Piwowar read a comment from Suzanne Insler of 7 Youngs Road about the District stating in previous conversations that project enrollment is going to increase. Supt. Piwowar explained that the overall enrollment numbers are not the only driving factor, but that the spread across the different schools is what affects class sizes.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Elizabeth Kelly of 28 Lynn Terrace about understanding the economic context and why operations are so strained. Ms. Plotkin responded that the Town can best explain the free cash amount. Ms. Plotkin gave some examples of where the District is seeing increases in costs and pointed to funding trends at the state and national levels. Supt. Piwowar provided more details on the increases in certain cost areas such as transportation.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Beth O'Malley of 43 Greenacre Road about what long-term options or strategies are being considered to maintain support for schools in the years ahead and how the community can support those efforts. Ms. Plotkin responded that there is a possibility that the District would need to look for an override in order to sustain the level of education if the economic situation continues on this trend.

Supt. Piwowar read a question from Katie Willette of 91 Pheasant Hill Street about whether the schools can take back the Deerfield school gift to the Town and sell it. Supt. Piwowar responded that the School Committee does not have authority to sell a property.

Supt. Piwowar explained how superintendents are working together to increase "Circuit Breaker" reimbursements. Ms. Parmelee and Ms. French commented that it might be valuable to have a grass-roots effort for the community to advocate for an improved budget process and timeline. Mr. Mullin echoed that community members should get involved, vote and attend Town Meetings. Supt. Piwowar and the Committee shared the list of upcoming meetings that community members can observe and participate in.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MOTION made by **Anthony Mullin** to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by **JoAnna French**.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

Roll-call:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

Dorothy Parmelee: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Anthony Mullin: **Yes**

Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

The meeting adjourned at **8:37pm**.