

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
February 5, 2026

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

Superintendent Piwowar showed photos of students and staff from across the district. Supt. Piwowar stated that the Director of Student Services search moved forward with two finalists visiting the District, and that the recent snow caused a slight delay in making the final appointment. Supt. Piwowar shared his appreciation for the new Town Administrator, Connor Read, who he has met with several times in Mr. Read's first days in Westwood.

Chair's Update

Ms. Plotkin gave an update on how the budget process has moved forward since the last meeting and shared that it is a priority to improve the budget process for future years. Ms. Plotkin expressed a desire to come to a united decision and confidence in the District and Town's ability to do so. Ms. Plotkin thanked Rob Gotti for his service to Westwood and acknowledged the time and commitment he gave to the Town.

Liaison reports

There were no liaison reports.

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

Discussion Items

FY27 Budget

Supt. Piwowar stated that he was optimistic the District would be able to come to an agreeable budget, after productive collaboration with the Town in recent days. Supt. Piwowar shared that the District would be proposing three new budget scenarios: the two the Committee asked for (a budget that addressed level services and a budget that added \$300,000 back), plus one additional, new scenario. Supt. Piwowar thanked the public for giving their feedback since the prior meeting.

Supt. Piwowar explained that one of the main priorities with the new proposals was to address the large class sizes at several grade levels across the schools.

Scenario 1 (\$300,000 restored) would restore several elementary classroom teachers and add one elementary teacher, as well as raise several fees. It would also reduce one IA position. This scenario would require some logistical challenges, particularly with an added Grade 2 classroom at Pine Hill.

Scenario 2 (\$352,400 restored) involves restoring the same elementary classroom teachers, maintaining the original fee increases and not reducing the IA FTE.

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Scenario 3 (\$517,850 restored; providing level services) would restore the elementary classroom teachers as well as other roles, such as the special education teacher at the middle school and math teacher at the high school, that were reduced in the original proposal.

Ms. Plotkin asked for more context around the math teacher reduction at the high school. Supt. Piowar explained that enrollment for these courses is not yet determined, but that using the current year's data, the school would be able to stay within class size guidelines while reducing one classroom.

Ms. Plotkin asked for more context around the special education position. Supt. Piowar explained that based on ongoing work to address special education programming, as well as the recent review report, the District would be able to meet the needs of students on IEPs without this position.

Mr. Mullin asked clarifying questions about the total number of elementary classrooms and how the classrooms are being used at Pine Hill for grade configurations.

Ms. French asked whether the new budget proposals would change any of the proposed special education program changes. Supt. Piowar explained that they would not. Ms. French asked for more information about how the program changes might affect the Downey school specifically. Supt. Piowar explained that the decision to move programs to Downey and Martha Jones were based on factors such as Downey's history and building design and a desire to maintain a diversity of the student body.

Ms. Phillips asked how common it is to add IAs during the school year. Ms. Jn-baptiste stated that it happens every year.

Ms. Jn-baptiste stated that this is a solid budget and that the proposals address the class size pressure points. Ms. Jn-baptiste added that another risk factor is changes in tuitions. Supt. Piowar added that the position around tuition fluctuations is better in this budget than in past years.

Ms. Plotkin raised the sustainability of the budget year over year and shared that Scenario 1 does not get the District to where it wants to be. Ms. French acknowledged that educators had been on a rollercoaster with changes throughout the budget process and thanked staff for their patience, as well as thanked families for their engagement.

Supt. Piowar shared a timeline of next steps, including the School Committee public budget hearing on February 23.

Ms. Plotkin stated that Scenario 2 seemed like a viable option, while Scenario 3 may be more of a challenge.

Buffer Zones

Supt. Piowar explained that buffer zones are areas between elementary districts where students newly registering for elementary school might be assigned to one of two elementary schools. Supt. Piowar stated that this strategy helps with class size guidelines and staffing. Supt. Piowar explained several guiding principles behind buffer zones, including: keeping siblings together, identifying buffer zones near preexisting boundaries or along main roads to avoid bus detours and long rides, addressing walker zones, and opening kindergarten registration sooner in future years.

Ms. Jn-baptiste showed slides with potential areas where buffer zones could exist between elementary school districts. Ms. Parmelee asked how bus routes would work. Ms. Jn-baptiste explained that buses would only carry students to one elementary school per bus, meaning that buses would not travel to multiple schools on the same route. Ms. Jn-baptiste explained that in areas where there are walkers in buffer zones, there may be students who walk to a school that is different from the one they would have been originally assigned to. Ms. Plotkin clarified that these zones would only apply to newly registering

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kindergarten students and families moving into Westwood with no prior students in the schools. Supt. Piwowar stated that the goal would be to move as few students as possible and focus only on addressing class size guidelines.

Mr. Mullin and Ms. Plotkin expressed that there should be a clear policy around when the use of a buffer zone is triggered in a given area. Supt. Piwowar stated that buffer zones would be a short-term strategy with the goal of potentially redistricting the Town several years down the road.

Ms. Parmelee commented that it would be ideal for the staff and community to support students who end up attending a school different from the one they expected to or that is further from their neighborhood.

Action Items

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve high school out-of-state field trips. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to appoint Lemma Jn-baptiste as a representative of the School Committee to be a temporary voting member of the Permanent Building Committee in connection with the Westwood High School roofing project for a period of one year. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

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

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned at 7:40pm.