

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

May 14, 2026

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Maya Plotkin. Also present were JoAnna French, Anthony Mullin, Nick Vidnovic and Katie Willette. Superintendent Timothy Piwowar, Assistant Superintendent Caitlin Ahern and Director of Equity, Integration and Community Partnerships Lateefah Franck were present on behalf of the district.

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Ms. Plotkin introduced the new director of Westwood Media Center, Sean Corcoran. Mr. Corcoran spoke about his background, his experience so far as part of WMC and the importance of the work WMC does for the community.

Superintendent's Report

Supt. Piwowar introduced Katherine Clifford, the new Dean of Students at Westwood High School. Ms. Clifford thanked the central office and the Committee and shared excitement about starting the new role.

Westwood High School Principal Search Update

Supt. Piwowar explained that two strong candidates have been visiting the district as part of the WHS principal search. Next, district leaders will visit the candidates' own schools to view them in action. Ms. Plotkin asked whether the virtual parent forums were recorded. Supt. Piwowar said the district has historically not recorded them but it could be considered for the future.

Buffer Zones Update

Supt. Piwowar reminded the Committee of the guidelines for the buffer zone policy. Supt. Piwowar updated the Committee about the registration numbers as of May 1 and what the distribution would be across building sections. Supt. Piwowar explained that given historical enrollment, the district can expect about 20-30 more registrations throughout the summer. Supt. Piwowar explained which zones the district considered and how the Sheehan/Pine Hill buffer zone was chosen to enact buffer zone assignments. Supt. Piwowar added that any new registrations that come in after this point will likely be assigned to this same buffer area.

Supt. Piwowar explained that no students with Downey as their default school were considered because only one student was registered for Kindergarten before May 1 who lived in the Downey/Pine Hill buffer zone, and therefore it did not make sense to enact the buffer policy in that zone.

Ms. Plotkin asked whether families were notified of the number of other students who were also assigned to Pine Hill in the email notification. Supt. Piwowar shared that families were notified that others in their neighborhood were also being assigned to Pine Hill.

Ms. French asked what would happen if more families moved into the Sheehan zone. Supt. Piwowar stated that he would prefer not to undo decisions that have already been made, but that any scenarios that affect school enrollment numbers would be assessed as they arise.

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Mr. Mullin asked if the district had data on whether summer registrations were typically new move-ins or were existing WPS families. Supt. Piwowar stated that this is something the district could look into.

K-5 Literacy Pilot for 2026-2027

Assistant Superintendent Ahern explained how the K-5 literacy curriculum review committee was formed and what the goals are. Ms. Ahern explained how the steering committee evaluated curriculum evaluations programs and that the committee felt all of the options were strong.

The committee chose to pilot EL Education and ARC Core, which are both knowledge-building curricula, meaning that the strategy involves reading comprehension. Both programs allow the option for the district to continue using the current tools, Foundations and Heggerty, in coordination with the new program, if one is selected. The pilots would involve 12-14 teachers with a focus on K-1. Teachers would receive support from literacy coaches, visit schools that already use these tools, and engage in summer professional development.

Ms. Ahern explained that one tool is more expensive than the other, but that the committee would aim to make a student-centered decision as to the best tool. If the more expensive option rises to the top, Ms. Ahern would approach the School Committee with a detailed implementation plan. The next steps involve selecting the tool in the winter of 2026-2027, beginning teacher professional development in the spring, and then implementing the program in fall of 2027. Ms. Ahern thanked the steering committee for their hard work throughout the process.

Ms. French asked if the fall is enough time to assess and choose the program. Ms. Ahern stated that there are several student assessments as part of the new tools that will help the steering committee gather data about the pilots quickly.

Mr. Mullin asked where the two tools stand as far as phonics. Ms. Ahern stated that both tools align with the science of reading philosophy. Ms. Willette asked at what point the district would decide whether to continue using Foundations and Heggerty alongside a potential new program. Ms. Ahern responded that the decision would likely come after the teachers in the pilot program see the tools in action. Ms. Willette asked how the pilot would be divided across the different schools. Ms. Ahern stated that all students would continue to receive the same knowledge and skills needed for their learning goals, so there would be a seamless transition on the students' end. Mr. Vidnovic commented that it would be ideal to not weigh the cost aspect too much when making this decision.

Allocation of Math and Literacy Specialists for 2026-2027

Ms. Ahern explained that the assessment of specialist allocations is an effort to create educational equity across the district and respond to student needs. The process considered school enrollment, percentage of EL students and students with IEPs, and students not yet meeting expectations on MCAS and universal screening assessments. The district used this information to make a data-driven determination about how staff would be allocated for 2026-2027 and how to make scheduling workable for staff and students.

Ms. Ahern shared the determined FTE numbers for each building. An additional 0.5 math specialist FTE would be allocated to Pine Hill in 2026-2027 based on needs there in comparison to 2025-2026. Pine Hill would also have an increase for literacy specialists, as a 0.6 FTE. Literacy paraprofessional allocations

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would be increased at Downey and Martha Jones, while decreasing at Sheehan and remaining the same at Pine Hill.

Ms. Plotkin asked whether the district would do this analysis every year, and Ms. Ahern responded affirmatively. Ms. Ahern added that any changes in subsequent years would likely not be by large increments.

Chair's Update

Ms. Plotkin introduced new School Committee members Katie Willette and Nick Vidnovic. Mr. Vidnovic thanked the committee and administration and explained that his experience with the schools is as an elementary school parent. Ms. Willette shared that she is the parent of two elementary students and one younger child and that she is thankful for the opportunity and looks forward to being a sounding board for the community.

Ms. Plotkin shared that Committee and district leaders discussed buffer zones, AP exams and fire alarms, elementary homework and more at the recent Office Hours session.

Liaison reports

Mr. Mullin asked about next year's School Committee meeting calendar and Supt. Piwowar stated that the district could provide that at the June meeting.

Public Participation

Melinda Garfield of 54 Pond Plain Road asked that the district not pursue Option 6 of the facilities master plan which includes the possibility of closing Sheehan when opening a potential new middle school. Ms. Garfield expressed concern that this option is being discussed in other municipal meetings, and stated that other families are concerned about the possibility of a 5-8 grade middle school as opposed to 6-8. Ms. Garfield asked that the Committee consider not pursuing option 6 as it moves through the MSBA process.

Eileen Seigel of 257 Alder Road spoke about the updates from the recent SEPAC meeting about the special education audit and expressed appreciation for the progress. Ms. Seigel added that a 5-8 elementary school is challenging to consider but that data and research and experience has shown how successful it can be in practice.

Kathryn Holthaus of 252 Burgess Avenue spoke about seconding Ms. Garfield's comments as a Sheehan parent. Ms. Holthaus spoke about the value of neighborhood schools and community relationships, as well as preferring the 6-8 middle school model over the 5-8 option.

Discussion Items

Coalition to Combat Hate Speech

Supt. Piwowar stated that he is optimistic about the district's ability to respond to past incidents in a successful way.

Ms. Franck shared that the group's first meeting was energizing and that its goal is not just to fix a problem but to create a more unifying community for the entire town. Ms. Franck presented the Problem Statement developed by the coalition, which encompasses three characteristics allowing for a culture that perpetuates hate speech and actions. The three characteristics are dehumanizing expression, amplification via social media, and normalization/minimization.

Ms. Franck spoke about the coalition's first meeting and the goal of aligning the coalition's work with the Portrait of a Graduate and District Strategic Plan. Ms. Franck explained the natural tensions that can arise when groups form to address these topics. There is a need for balancing quick responses with sustainable

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solutions; preserving individuals' privacy while being transparent; bridging the divide between the schools and the town; and allowing for academics to be excellent while also preserving values.

Ms. Franck explained that the next meeting will involve moving into a Theory of Action, looking at vocabulary terms, drafting a plan, implementing protocols to combat hate as it happens and bridging policies with practices. An education framework will also be developed to understand how bias results in actions. Sub-committees focused on curriculum, policies and practices, and community outreach will form over the summer, with the goal of publishing a roadmap in the fall. Ms. Franck added that around 60 respondents expressed interest in joining the coalition and expressed appreciation for the community's desire to commit to this topic.

Ms. Franck shared that community members can still join the coalition and the idea is to hear from as many voices as possible. Ms. Plotkin expressed appreciation for all of the work Ms. Franck is doing to plan this process and execute on it.

School Committee Member Handbook

Ms. Plotkin explained that the Committee developed a handbook for new members together. Ms. Plotkin pointed to an item in Appendix B that states a majority of members can vote to add agenda items, which would need to be voted on as it's a change from the original handbook. The second item of conflict is that the new edits add that the reorganization would take place in June, rather than immediately after Town Meeting. Committee members discussed whether the first change is necessary and agreed to amend the policy. Ms. Plotkin explained that reorganizing in June rather than May may make sense in order to provide consistency throughout the full school year. The Committee agreed to make this change.

Action Items

MOTION made by JoAnna French to adopt the School Committee New Member Handbook. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to accept the gift from Mass Council on Gaming and Health. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the Tim Chant Memorial Scholarship. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the April 14, 2026 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 3-0-2 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the September 11, 2025 revised meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 3-0-2 (Approved)

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New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to move to executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the Committee regarding the roof restoration project at Westwood High School and Arbitration Case 01-20-0015-6283; and not to reconvene in open session. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Anthony Mullin: **Yes**

Nick Vidnovic: **Yes**

Katie Willette: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting moved into executive session at 8:13pm.