

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

May 8, 2025

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Amanda Phillips. Also present was Maya Plotkin, Dori Parmelee, JoAnna French, and Anthony Mullin. Superintendent Piwowar, Assistant Superintendent Ahern and Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district.

Harley Pease recorded the minutes.

Superintendent's Report

Seen Around WPS

Superintendent Piwowar shared some recent events that happened around the WPS, including highlights from Sheehan, Martha Jones, Thurston Middle School, and Westwood High School.

Strategic Planning Process

Superintendent Piwowar provided an update to the Committee on the Strategic Planning Process. They began exploring the results of the Portrait of a Graduate, exploring district data, and identified a draft of focal areas.

Curriculum Review Update

Assistant Superintendent Caitlin Ahern provided an update to the Committee on the curriculum review process. Asst. Super. Ahern said that the goal is to maintain a high level of rigor in all programming and to provide a direction to the district on how to maintain certain standards and improve certain standards. The goal is to serve all students and examine outcomes to determine a theory of action, with a clear plan of how to do so. Foundational outcomes include: a shared PK-12+ department mission and vision for students that is aligned with the Portrait of a Graduate, a consistent, written curriculum reflective of best practices, and if achievement/opportunity gaps are uncovered, review and identify priorities and/or indicators of success that target those gaps.

Reviews are in one of three stages: audit + analyze, implement and assess, and beginning next school year.

Progress to date includes: revised performing arts mission statement, as well as aligning curriculum to current standards and working towards a written curriculum. For visual arts, we conceded a steering committee and a K-12 departmental launch, looking at vertical progression of skills. For Library and DLCS, we have implemented an expanded curriculum in grades 2-5, as well as a new coaching model at TMS and expanded CS course sequence at WHS. Additionally, there has been a focus on AI literacy and professional learning.

Quarter 3 Financial Report

Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-Baptiste provided an update to the Committee on the Q3 financial report. Contracted services are a bit in the red as well as substitute teachers. Both are not areas for concern.

Costs are up for our facilities.

Overall, not a very eventful 3rd quarter, which is good! Not many surprises and pressures where we need to use reserve funding.

We are hoping to get the roof ready by removing the solar panels in order to repair and improve the WHS roof. We are also hoping to upgrade the TMS roof and Sheehan electrical panel.

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Ms. Jn-baptiste said that we are hoping to install a dishwasher at WHS to lessen the carbon footprint of the building.

Public Participation

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to open the hearing on school choice. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to close the hearing on school choice. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

There was no public participation during the school choice hearing, as well as standard public participation.

Liaison Reports

Chair Phillips announced that herself, Tony Mullin, and members of the District Administration office met with Cropper, the contracted company in charge of the demographics section of the facilities study. Clarification was sought for some questions the Committee had, including the accuracy of their projections. The Committee felt good about Cropper's methodology after meeting with them.

Chair Phillips announced that the cell phone task force is wrapping up and that there will be an event at the end of the month.

Student Representative Kevin Bai updated the Committee on recent meetings. They focused on the breakfast program and lunch options. Rep. Bai indicated that he would share the results with the Committee electronically.

Discussion Items

Cell Phone Task Force Recommendations

Superintendent Piwowar provided the Committee with recommendations from the cell phone task force. Recommendations included: maintain and enforce existing device policies in school handbooks at elementary, middle, and high schools, gather more data about the impact of the device policies at all levels, monitor the progress of state legislation on electronic device policies, and communication to teams

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and student athletic groups should be disseminated through approved school channels, not social media. Recommendations for education included: assess current educational opportunities that emphasize face to face communication and create a multidisciplinary approach to ensure all students develop an understanding of how to appropriately use technology. Recommendations for the community include: in partnership with all stakeholders, provide opportunities for families about monitoring cell phone and social media use and the importance of positive adult role-modeling, and support the establishment of community norms regarding delaying the availability of smartphones and social media for adolescents, consistent with research that recommends waiting to use social media until 16.

There will be a panel discussion on May 27, 2025 at Thurston Middle School to discuss cell phone usage and social media use. Community members and experts will be on the panel.

Principal Redmon and Principal Davenport provided an update to the Committee on how cell phones are currently used and monitored at their respective schools.

Facility Study Forums

Superintendent Piwowar asked the Committee for feedback on how to roll out the facility study. Discussion included the best way to promote engagement and feedback from the community and share information.

Proposed Special Education Review

Supt. Piwowar introduced a proposed external review of special education in the district. Both preschool programming and as the substantially separate programming will be evaluated.

Action Items

MOTION made by Tony Mullin to approve the April 7 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes

Maya Plotkin: Yes

Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

JoAnna French: Yes

Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Tony Mullin: WHEREAS the Educational Reform Act of 1993 requires that the enrollment of non-resident students under the School Choice provision unless the Committee votes by June 1 not to participate, and

WHEREAS the School Choice provision reallocates funds from the sending district and awards such funds to the receiving district, and

WHEREAS the maximum reimbursement allowed by the School Choice provision is less than Westwood's per pupil expenditure, which means Westwood Public Schools would be required to subsidize each choice student, and

WHEREAS once Westwood accepts a choice student, Westwood must keep such student through graduation, regardless of whether Westwood's demographic situation has changed, and

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WHEREAS it is likely that a number of students will return to their sending districts or otherwise leave Westwood, thus creating a potential income loss, now hereby be it

RESOLVED that the Westwood School Committee respectfully declines to participate in the School Choice Program; provided, however, that if surrounding school districts subsequently, and prior to June 1, decide to accept the provisions of School Choice, the Westwood School Committee reserves the right to do likewise in order to protect its fiduciary interests in this matter.

Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to accept a donation in the amount of \$6,000 from an anonymous donor. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to approve the Lauren Hurley Graphic Art Memorial Scholarship. Motion seconded by Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

New Business

There was no new business.

Executive Session and Adjournment

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion

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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 Dori Parmelee.

Roll-call vote:

Amanda Phillips: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Dorothy Parmelee: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned into executive session at 8:10pm.