

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

August 27, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 6:34pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste; and Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom were present on behalf of the district. Charles Donahue, Clerk, arrived at 6:45pm. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis recognized the live stream of the meeting, which was provided for real-time, public access to the activities of the School Committee. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the meeting via the Internet at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live and via Westwood Media Center's platforms.

Superintendent's Report

Fall Reopening

Ms. Parks reported on the work that has taken place throughout the district for the fall reopening. Since the School Committee last met, the district has published the comprehensive fall reopening plan. The district remains engaged in collective bargaining with the Westwood Teachers' Association (WTA). As of this afternoon, a tentative agreement has been reached, and is now subject to ratification.

The next step in the process is for the School Committee to review the contents of the WTA's Memorandum of Agreement, which will be done in executive session. A ratification vote will be required at a subsequent meeting which will be scheduled next week.

Ms. Parks then shared information on the start dates for school, which are tentative and subject to ratification.

Fall Reopening Phase-in

Week of September 14

- Hybrid schedule begins for:
 - Pre-kindergarten
 - Kindergarten
 - Grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and 12
 - All high-needs students
- Remote:
 - Grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11

Week of September 21

- Hybrid schedule begins for:
 - Grades 4, 7, and 11
- Remote:
 - Grades 5, 8, and 10

Week of September 28

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with Executive Order of Massachusetts Governor, March 12, 2020

- Hybrid schedule begins for:
 - Grades 5, 8, and 10

Mrs. Lewis then made a statement to parents, noting that the work towards getting students back to school has been a team effort. She expressed appreciation for families' patience and is optimistic that the district leadership team and the WTA will finalize an agreement shortly. She asked families to work with their children in setting an example, taking the necessary precautions for keeping everyone in the school community safe and healthy. Ms. Parks echoed Mrs. Lewis sentiments, stating that a community-mindedness approach is important.

Ms. Parks then thanked the Operations Department for their work preparing the buildings for reopening.

School principals have been working hard on scheduling. Cohort assignments and schedules for high school students will be sent to families on Monday.

Ms. Parks then reported that the district will be asking families to complete a daily attestation of students' symptoms using the School Dismissal Manager platform. This will be a quick way for parents to attest that their child has been screened as symptom-free each morning. A similar method is being used for faculty and staff.

Ms. Parks provided an update on the fully-remote cohort. There will be a separate class of fully remote students in a combined Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten; Grade 1; and Grade 2. Students from more than one elementary school – across the district – will form the remote cohort. At the middle school, the fully remote cohort will also be taught in a fully remote grouping. At the other grades, the setup will be similar to other grades, with students attending virtually, similar to hybrid.

Ms. Parks then asked Steve Ouellette, Director of Technology, Learning, and Innovation, to speak about the work being done related to technology in the district. iPads and Apple Pencils have been purchased for all teachers, providing the ability to mirror content both in the classroom and virtually. The portability of the devices allows movement within the classroom, mimicking teaching pre-pandemic.

Each classroom will be outfitted with speaker microphone units that will allow teachers to speak naturally and be heard via those remote. Similarly, students at home can ask a question and the speaker will amplify their voice in the classroom.

Software platforms have also been purchased. They include the premium edition of Zoom, Nearpod, an interactive presentation software, and a suite of productivity applications for iPads.

Devices have also been purchased for students. They include iPads for students in Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Grade 1. Students in grade 2 will be issued a touch-screen Chromebook. All students in grades 3 through 12 already have Chromebooks. Refreshed distributions took place earlier in the week.

In the opening days for teachers, there will be time dedicated to professional development that will be focused on technology. This will include how to manage the physical setup of technology in the classroom, time to practice using the devices, how to join all students, remote and in-person, and workshops on instructional strategies for leveraging technology.

Ms. Borchers noted that the Foundation for Westwood Education has committed to funding reopening efforts. They are providing financial assistance with the Nearpods subscription. The district is excited and appreciative of their support.

Ms. Parks provided an update on athletics. Recently, Athletic Directors and Principals in the Tri-Valley League have met to discuss guidance. The most recent guidance indicates that the fall season for practices will begin on September 26, with the exception of golf which will begin on September 18. Both football and volleyball will be moved to a new, floating season that was created by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, which will begin sometime in February. The regular fall sports season will end by November 20. Athletic Director Matt Gillis will communicate specifics to families.

Discussion Items

First Reading of Policy EBCFA – Face Masks

Mrs. Lewis asked Ms. Parks to provide a brief overview of the face mask policy.

Ms. Parks noted that it is largely based on the Massachusetts Association of School Committee's model policy, with some slight changes that are important for the district. Ms. Parks highlighted things for families to know:

- All school community members are expected to wear a mask
- Medical exemptions will be allowed with documentation
- Neck gaiters, open-chin triangle bandanas, and face coverings containing valves, mesh holes, or holes of any kind will not be considered an appropriate mask
- Masks must be provided by families; staff will do the same. A supply of disposable masks available as needed.
- School community members are expected to comply with the policy. School principals will consult with families if there are issues. Any student that refuses, and does not fall within exemptions, will be subject to student handbook discipline.

Public Participation

Members of the public were invited to participate in writing via a form posted at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. Comments were accepted up until the time the Chair declared the submission period closed. Mr. Cianciarulo read the comments aloud.

Wendy Thurmond of Far Reach Road expressed frustration over the teachers union advising teachers to not teach from the classroom.

Susan Gaffney of Conant Road believes that it is imperative that children return to their physical classrooms in September.

Kathryn Travers of Alder Road does not believe that remote learning is safe for children's wellbeing.

Amanda Pezzuto of Pleasant Valley Road wishes for all children to return to school.

Helen Roberts of Fox Meadow Drive believes that there needs to be a way for children to return to school safely.

Megan Brenk of Briar Lane expressed thanks to Abby Hanscom and the district's special education administrators who have worked to keep the Special Education Parent Advisory Council informed, answering questions, and addressing concerns.

Eimear Maguire Chi of Fox Meadow Drive hopes that teachers will return to teach live.

Antigone Grasso of Oak Street stated that the hybrid model is a compromise as data supports a full, in-person return. She asked that educational leaders outline what milestones need to be achieved before a return to full, in-person instruction.

Amanda and Michael Minerva of Spellman Road; Jessica Imbernone of Blue Hill Drive; Hillary Mosca of Canton Street; Sheila Black of Forbes Road; Anne-Marie Farricy of Briar Lane; Jennifer Murphy of Forbes Road; and Rene and Elizabeth Gauthier of Downey Street thanked the School Committee for the work and effort put into planning the hybrid model for fall reopening. They asked they continue to consider Commissioner Reilly's recommendation that high-needs students should be prioritized for full, in-person instruction.

Harley Pease of High Street stated that neck gaiters should not be allowed.

Christina Martin of Brookfield Road asked what the criteria would be for determining when it is safe to return to school fully in-person; or when the risk has increased to the point that all students will be switched to remote learning.

Sarah Waterman of Pheasant Hill asked for the Committee's support in the safety of teachers and staff.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street asked when the last day of negotiations would be with teachers, nurses, and bus drivers. She then asked how confident the district would be in filling job vacancies.

Meg Moloney of Pond Plain Road recommended stepping back from the hybrid model and pursuing a phased-in approach that is grounded in health and safety benchmarks.

Christina Martin of Brookfield Road stated that issues around race, institutional racism, and violence against people of color continue to be prominent and have impacts on Westwood students. She asked about integrating more antiracist education in the curriculum. She then asked if the district would continue parent workshops as has been done in past years.

Ms. Martin then submitted a subsequent comment, expressing support for phased re-entry.

Karin Albers of Edgewood Road asked what the guideline would be if and when there is a change in the COVID-19 infection rate.

Mrs. Lewis wished to address this concern. While Westwood has been moved to yellow, which is indicative of a moderate risk, it does allow for the hybrid model. The district and the School Committee will continue to monitor data in partnership with the Westwood Department of Public Health to review trends weekly.

Marianne Miller asked if the content of the memorandum agreement would be made available to the public.

William Brooks of High Street believes that the district should use daily testing rather than attestation to screen students.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street stated that she submitted a Chromebook for refresh on August 12 and has yet to hear back on pickup.

Marianne Miller asked whether the district is considering allowing children of teachers to attend in-person classes four days per week, per the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recommendation; and whether that would be extended to children of essential workers as well.

Karin Albers of Edgewood Road asked if middle school students under the remote model will have the same schedule; and whether they will have teachers experienced in each subject or be shared across classes for coverage.

Nancy Hernandez of Summer Street asked whether students participating remotely would be online for a full 75-minute period at the high school.

William Brooks of High Street asked whether the School Committee would reconsider a fully-remote start.

Jen MacPherson of Willow Street asked how teachers will be supported in working with two groups of students at the same time: those at school and those in the classroom.

Sandra Castaldini is disappointed in the timeline.

Niraj Dalal asked whether the district had reviewed increased internet bandwidth requirements needed to support a hybrid and remote model.

Karin Albers of Edgewood Road expressed support for teachers and the jobs they are doing.

Allison Moran of Cobleigh Street expressed concern for younger elementary students with special needs.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive advocated for a full-time, in-person model.

William Brooks of High Street believes that the low infection rate in Westwood is due to parents working remotely and children not being in school.

Stephanie Ramales of Washington Street asked why the agenda item related to the DESE guidance pertaining to childcare for children had not yet been addressed.

Kate Wynne of Cedar Hill Drive stated that her family has benefitted from the Westwood Schools and is grateful for the work of everyone on the committee.

Meg Moloney of Pond Plain Road and the Cambridge Public Schools; Judy Sullivan of Hartford Street and Bridgewater State University; Amy and Kevin Lydon of Burgess Avenue and the Dedham Public Schools; Brian Grealley of Pond Plain Road and the Boston Public Schools; Jasmine Lellock of Chamberlain Avenue and the Newton Public Schools; Caitlin Adamakis of High Street and the Foxboro Public Schools; Sheila Hanley Longval of Willow Street and a retired employee of the Randolph Public Schools; and Melinda Garfield of Pond Plain Road and the Westwood Media Center commented that, as fellow educators and parents of Westwood students, they want to ensure safe working conditions for Westwood teachers. They advocated for prioritizing the expertise of scientists and educators.

Henryk Ciejek of Sycamore Drive asked that the Committee and the WTA provide specific and detailed metrics of student progress for the hybrid and remote models.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street thanked the administrators, teachers, School Committee, and the Superintendent for the hard work done to ensure a safe return to school.

Action Items

Response to DESE’s August 21, 2020 Guidance Regarding Children of Teachers

Superintendents received guidance last week, strongly recommending that districts allow children of Massachusetts educators to attend school fully in-person. Ms. Parks acknowledges that all parents are struggling in terms of the hybrid model. The staffing model in schools depends upon teachers’ physical presence in school buildings.

If the district is to follow this recommendation, it would only be able to extend the offer for students in kindergarten through grade 6. If the School Committee chooses to move forward, Ms. Parks will survey the parents to see how many would take the district up on the offer. She believes that the students can be accommodated and fit within established cohort sizes.

In explaining the impact on staffing, Ms. Parks stated that there are statutory, legal entitlements of up to twelve weeks of leave under federal legislation passed related to the pandemic if someone is unable to find childcare because school is in a different model.

Mrs. Phillips asked if this would be extended beyond teachers. Ms. Parks responded that, at this point, it would only be open to members of the teachers’ associations.

Mr. Donahue applauded the innovation and expressed a desire to assist all essential workers in town. Ms. Parks stated that the responsibility is for students and how to provide effective instruction with staff in place. This would need to be done in concert with other districts in order for schools to function and operate.

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to follow the recommendation of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to allow the children of teachers in Kindergarten through grade 6 to participate in a four-day cohort, based on the assumption that the numbers would work within the parameters of the hybrid model. Seconded by Mr. Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

Approval of August 5, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Donahue made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 5, 2020. Seconded by Mrs. Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

Approval of August 6, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Mullin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 6, 2020. Seconded by Mr. Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

Approval of Revised 2020-2021 School Calendar

Tabled.

Vote to Ratify Instructional Assistants' Memorandum of Agreement

The district engaged in impact bargaining with the Instructional Assistants and have come to an agreement. Mrs. Hanscom expressed appreciation for the union's professionalism, thoughtfulness, and commitment to students. Ms. Parks echoed Mrs. Hanscom's appreciation.

Mr. Mullin made a motion to ratify the Instructional Assistants' Memorandum of Agreement. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll-call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

New Business

Mrs. Plotkin asked for clarification on the school calendar, as September 28 is Yom Kippur and would be the first day of in-person instruction for the third group of the phased-in start of the

“Monday” cohort. Ms. Parks indicated that, yes, it will still be a holiday and Tuesday, September 29 would be the start date.

Executive Session

Mr. Donahue made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining, which would have a detrimental effect on the position of the School Committee if the discussions were held in open session. The Committee will not return to public session. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

Adjournment

Mr. Mullin made a motion to adjourn from open session. Mrs. Phillips seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

Open session adjourned at 7:53pm. Executive Session adjourned at 9:11pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of August 5, 2020
- Draft meeting minutes of August 6, 2020
- Memorandum of Agreement between the Westwood School Committee and the Massachusetts Laborer’s District Council, Local 272, representing Westwood Instructional Assistants
- “On the Desktop” notification to Superintendents from Commissioner Jeffrey Riley and the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education related to children of teachers, dated August 21, 2020
- Policy EBCFA – Face Masks