

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Westwood, Massachusetts

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**December 10, 2020**

**Attendance and Call to Order**

The meeting, held remotely<sup>1</sup>, was called to order at 7:01pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom, and Acting Director of Business and Finance Lincoln Lynch were present on behalf of the district. 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](http://www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live). Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on its platforms.

**Superintendent's Report**

**COVID-19 Updates and Current Data**

- There were 11 positive COVID-19 cases in the district last week
  - Many individuals of the 11 were already in quarantine, having already been identified as close contacts
  - There has been an increase in the time to receive test results; students and staff are out as asymptomatic
- The district's online COVID-19 dashboard is being updated at the end of the day on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; with a reminder link sent to all families on Fridays.
  - Ms. Parks addressed a discrepancy in the numbers reported publicly by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as they only report if the individual was in the building over the prior seven days.

Mrs. Hanscom provided an update on COVID-19 monitoring and response team data.

*Student Data*

- Since September 14, 486 students have been supported by the COVID Team and been absent from in-person instruction. This is approximately 16% of the student population.
  - 454 students have been cleared to return to in-person learning.
- 32 students currently continue to learn remotely due to being quarantined for travel, being a close contact, or illness.
- There have been 26 positive student cases identified.

*Staff Data*

- Since August 31, 166 staff members have been supported by the COVID Team and been absent from in-person work. This is approximately 26% of the district's staff.
  - 152 staff have been cleared to return to in-person work
- 14 staff members currently continue to work remotely due to being quarantined for travel, being a close contact, or illness
- There have been 17 positive staff member cases identified.

*Consultation*

The three members of the district's COVID Team have consulted with 300 parents and staff since August 31 to answer questions related to protocols, travel, symptoms, next steps, etc.

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

Mrs. Hanscom then provided some updates related to special education services.

#### *COVID Compensatory Meetings*

- The district is on track to meet its goal of having COVID compensatory meetings for all students designated as “high needs” by December 23, 2020
- Some have been at clinics and by telephone with parental consent
- COVID-compensatory services are on the agenda for all other students in TEAM meetings across the year

#### *Evaluations from Spring 2020*

- 54 students have been identified as having evaluations that were not completed during Spring 2020 through June 2020
  - 53 of those evaluations are now complete
  - 1 is partially complete and expected to be done next week
- Current evaluations are occurring on the typical initial / three-year schedule

#### *COVID Learning Plans*

All students with Individualized Education Plans have been issued a COVID Learning Plan, indicating how services are occurring during the hybrid learning model currently in place

- COVID Learning Plans will be updated as IEPs change and meetings occur during the year
- Report cards and progress notes are happening

#### *504 Plans and Accommodations*

- Office for Civil Rights issued an update on September 28
  - Indicated that 504 Plan accommodations are still in full effect and that the method of delivery may be different
  - Also encouraged 504 Teams to look at new or different accommodations which may be appropriate and previous ones that no longer apply, due to COVID response
  - Meetings are being held virtually and are ongoing all year

#### *What is Next/Now?*

- “Home” Services have started at Downey four days per week; nine students are participating currently
- Extended School Day for high school students with extended day services began on October 19 on individual schedules; middle school is next
- Extended School Year 2021 planning will begin in January and will be comprehensive
- District is making plans in the chance that the learning model pivots to fully remote for an extended period of time

Mr. Donahue asked whether any Boston resident students have been experiencing problems. Mrs. Hanscom responded that the district has done a lot of outreach to families to assess and address any challenges.

Ms. Parks reported that the district reviewed first quarter grades at the high school and that the percentage of students that failed classes is similar to last year (0.9% this year versus 0.86% last year).

The district is tracking requests from families that wish to learn remotely given the uptick in COVID metrics. This is being handled on a case-by-case basis. There were 8% of students in

fully remote at the start of the school year, that has now increased to 10%, with the largest uptick at the secondary level.

Requests for a temporary switch to remote is difficult to manage and support operationally. Elementary principals will be working on addressing how to support students in kindergarten through grade 3 when they are absent from in-person instruction due to being in quarantine.

DESE announced last week that the January MCAS has been postponed for high school juniors.

The district continues to partner with Westwood Youth and Family Services on the INTERFACE Referral Program. All residents will be receiving a refrigerator magnet by mail which has their contact information. INTERFACE provides referrals for mental health services and is free for Westwood residents.

#### Cell Tower: Decommissioning Logistics and Timeline

The School Committee previously decided not to renew AT&T's lease for the cell tower at the middle school. Notice of approximately 18-24 months was provided. At last June's School Committee meeting Ms. Parks reported that AT&T advised that the pandemic created delays in locating a new place for the tower and requested an extension until the end of December. The School Committee granted that request.

AT&T has since identified a location and is in the process of procuring zoning approvals. They have asked for an additional extension through February.

Ms. Parks stated that she spoke with Chief Deckers to understand public safety implications. From his perspective, it would be important to have uninterrupted service. In order to support them, the district recommends an additional extension.

The district's attorney has reviewed the amendment and has added language about there being no additional extension beyond February 28. The attorney spoke with AT&T's counsel to ensure that this is clearly understood.

Mr. Mullin expressed his frustration over this issue.

Mrs. Plotkin would like to review the revised amendment. Ms. Parks stated that she would provide a copy.

Mr. Donahue recommended contacting other communities to see whether this is AT&T's standard practice.

#### News from the Schools

Ms. Parks provided updates from schools on classroom work, fine and performing arts, and athletics.

#### **School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports**

##### Building Projects Update

Mrs. Plotkin reported that the School Building committee will be meeting tomorrow. The project remains in the schematic design phase. An update on the project design and cost estimates will be presented at tomorrow's meeting.

### *December 15 Community Forum*

The School Committee is hosting a community forum on Tuesday, December 15 at 7pm where the current proposed design and project costs will be presented.

A May Town Meeting vote and June ballot question on the project remain on schedule.

### *Sheehan Study Update*

In February, the School Committee voted to allocate \$30k to study the remainder school if there was a consolidation. Since that time, the School Committee has moved forward with the consolidation of Hanlon and Deerfield.

Work is now taking place on studying Sheehan, the remaining school. Dore and Whittier began work on that study in July and has some initial designs which are being reviewed currently.

Mrs. Plotkin anticipates that this will be a similar level of design as that of the 15-17 options reviewed early in the Hanlon project. Designs will likely include a renovation, addition/renovation, and new construction. The designs will be for a maximum enrollment of 310 students.

The educational visioning which occurred earlier in the Hanlon project will be carried over to the Sheehan project. A presentation to the School Committee is anticipated in March 2021.

The Sheehan project would be approximately eighteen months behind the Hanlon project. The anticipated timeline is:

- Spring 2023: Funding to move into schematic design
- Fall 2023: Funding for design and construction
- Fall 2026: Building opens

### COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Mr. Mullin reported.

### *Testing Update*

- Gingko COVID-19 one-time testing for district staff was conducted this week
- DESE rapid diagnostic testing for students or staff experiencing some symptoms will be rolled out in January
- The district is working to identify partners to guarantee 24-48 hour PCR testing for symptomatic patients
- Regular assurance testing for teachers/ staff; and potentially students
  - PCR pooled testing (likely weekly for staff)
  - Leveraging collaborative to look at a few vendors already vetted by other school districts in the public school collaborative
  - Cost per tests for pooled testing is lower

The breakdown of district staff participating in COVID-19 testing was reviewed:

- All staff: 65%
- Administrative Assistants: 71%
- ABAs: 50%
- Custodians: 29%
- Food Service: 89%
- Individual Contracts: 75%
- Instructional Assistants: 60%

- Non-bargaining: 74%
- Teachers: 72%

#### *Public Health Metrics*

Positive COVID-19 cases continue to rise throughout the Commonwealth. The Advisory Group is working on developing criteria for determining which learning model should be implemented at a given time.

In order to support full, in-person instruction, the following criteria must be met:

- Three consecutive weeks of Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) data reporting in the gray or green category for Westwood; and
- No more than two positive cases in the district for at least two consecutive weeks, including both students and staff; and
- A MDPH positive percent rate of less than 1% in Westwood for at least two consecutive weeks; and
- Statewide percent positive rate of less than 1%

When considering a pivot to fully remote, the following criteria will be considered:

- Four consecutive weeks of MDPH data reporting in the red category. One week not in the red category would still be considered if there were special circumstances.
- A rising trend in school community cases, school spread, or clusters.
- Evidence of significant in-school transmission or operational considerations, such as capacity to contact trace or staff a building, could trigger a temporary building-specific closure, even if other criteria are not met.

When considering the criteria for the learning model, the criteria is subject to change as vaccinations become more widely available.

The Committee discussed the phase metrics. Ms. Parks advised that the plan needs to be solidified soon for a potential February 1 return. Otherwise, it can be reviewed by January 15 for a March 1 return.

In the meantime, the Committee and the district agreed to make reviewing the Wednesday schedule a priority.

#### Other Liaison Reports

Mrs. Phillips reported that the Council on Aging holiday gift drive ends tomorrow. She thanked the schools for participating, and the community for donating gifts and cards for homebound seniors.

#### **Discussion Items**

##### Preliminary FY'22 Budget Discussion

Ms. Parks reported.

##### *Budget Assumptions*

- District will be back to fully in-person instruction in the fall.
- Return to approved FY'21 budget. Assess the impact of staffing cuts.
- Analyze the level-services budget.

- Project costs associated with impact of pandemic (“new normal?;” compensatory services?)
- Return to district improvement strategy priorities

The Budget Steering Committee is moving forward with a similar approach. Pam Dukeman, the Town Finance Director, stated that 3% is sustainable year over year. There is concern that there may be cuts in Chapter 70 funding and in Circuit Breaker. It was agreed that work should be done to stabilize the budget, rather than sustain cuts.

### Initial Review of Family Questionnaire Results

Ms. Parks presented the results of the Fall 2020 Family Questionnaire.

- 1,591 responses
  - 502 High School
  - 338 Middle School
  - 735 Elementary
  - 16 Preschool
  - 59.3% Hybrid
  - 31.6% In-person 4 days (i.e., PreKindergarten through Grade 3 or “high needs students” in grades 4-12+)
  - 9.1% Remote
- A majority reported that their child’s weekly school schedule is very consistent / predictable.
- When asked how parents would categorize their child’s workload on remote days between full class video conference sessions, group work, help sessions, and independent work time, the majority responded that it is sufficient / right amount of work.
- When asked if their child has adequate break time for things like movement / stretch breaks, lunch, and play time on remote days, a majority responded that it was enough.
- When asked how independently their child is able to navigate technology in order to participate in remote instruction and complete assignments, the majority responded that they are totally independent.
- When asked about balancing considerations of what is best for their child’s learning and growth while maintaining their child’s health and safety, satisfaction with their child’s current educational model (hybrid, remote, in-person four days) is categorized as:
  - 34.2% Agree
  - 23.9% Strongly agree
  - 15.1% Disagree
  - 13.9% Neither agree nor disagree
  - 12.9% Strongly disagree
- When asked if they believe their child is making progress in their learning and growth this year, parents responded:
  - 42.7% Agree
  - 22.3% Neutral
  - 14.3% Strongly agree
  - 13.2% Disagree
  - 7.5% Strongly disagree

Satisfaction on their child’s current educational model does vary across levels.

- Strongly agree or agree
  - District: 58%
  - High School: 48%
  - Middle School: 48%
  - Elementary: 69%
- Neither agree or disagree
  - District: 14%
  - High School: 19%
  - Middle School: 16%
  - Elementary: 12%
- Disagree or Strongly disagree
  - District: 28%
  - High School: 33%
  - Middle School: 36%
  - Elementary: 20%

When asked if parents feel that their child is making progress in their learning and growth, responses vary across levels.

- Strongly agree or agree
  - District: 57%
  - High School: 48%
  - Middle School: 50%
  - Elementary: 66%
- Neutral
  - District: 22%
  - High School: 28%
  - Middle School: 22%
  - Elementary: 19%
- Disagree or Strongly disagree
  - District: 21%
  - High School: 24%
  - Middle School: 28%
  - Elementary: 15%

Overall, parents have rated communication from the district, their child’s school, and their child’s teacher, as excellent or close to excellent. When analyzed across levels, however, that does vary between elementary and secondary. This can likely be attributed to the fact that elementary students have one classroom teacher; while secondary has multiple.

When asked about parents’ comfort sending children to school for in-person learning with six feet of physical distance, 62.52% reported that they are very comfortable. If that standard was decreased to three feet, the percentage of those very comfortable drops to 39.12%.

When asked if parents would make use of free, rapid COVID-19 testing for symptomatic students, 72.39% reported that they would be comfortable doing so.

Parents were also asked to characterize the district’s focus on social emotional learning. A majority responded that it was sufficient.

When asked how parents feel their child is connected to their teachers and peers, responses varied. With “5” being well-connected and “1” being not at all connected, responses were:

- 4 or 5
  - District: 51%
  - High School: 34%
  - Middle School: 37%
  - Elementary: 67%
- 3
  - District: 24%
  - High School: 29%
  - Middle School: 28%
  - Elementary: 20%
- 1 or 2
  - District: 25%
  - High School: 37%
  - Middle School: 34%
  - Elementary: 12%

The Committee discussed the results and thanked Ms. Parks for compiling the information.

#### Policy Revisions to Title IX

The Committee held a first reading of two policies related to Title IX.

- ACA -- Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy
- ACA-R -- Grievance Procedure for Complaints of Sexual Harassment Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Ms. Borchers reported that a final rule was issued on Title IX which went into effect in August and has policy implications. There are differences between that and State guidance.

#### Public Participation

Members of the public were able to comment during public participation via Zoom.

Antigone Grasso of 44 Oak Street spoke in support of students returning to fully in-person instruction.

Heather Morrison of 74 Magnolia Drive spoke in support of students returning to fully in-person instruction.

Donna Morrison of 303 Oak Street spoke in support of the current hybrid model.

Jacquelyne Garcia of 206 Alder Road cautioned about the mental health effects of the pandemic on students.

Donna Morrison spoke in support of families taking responsibility for the welfare of their children.

Jackie Keavenney of 22 Redwood Road asked for clarification on the plan for Wednesdays.

Tara Themistocles of 294 Clapboardtree Street spoke in support of students returning to fully in-person instruction and also advocated for mental health supports.

Kela Klosi of 31 Beacon Street spoke in support of students returning to fully in-person instruction.

Jacquelyne Garcia hoped that people would be kind and supportive of one another.

Sandra Castaldini of 54 Birch Street expressed concerns about the building projects and the community's ability to financially support them.

**Action Items**

Approval of November 12, 2020 Meeting Minutes

**Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to approve the November 12, 2020 meeting minutes. 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 approval)**

Approval of December 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes

**Mrs. Phillips made a motion to approve the December 2, 2020 meeting minutes. Mr. Mullin seconded.**

Roll-call vote:

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

**Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous approval)**

**New Business**

There was no new business.

**Adjournment**

**Mr. Donahue made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mullin seconded.**

Roll call vote:

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

**Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)**

The meeting adjourned at 9:35pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID Monitoring and Response Team Data slideshow, dated December 10, 2020
- Draft learning model criteria, revised December 9, 2020
- Draft meeting minutes of November 12, 2020 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of December 2, 2020 for the Committee's review and approval
- Family Questionnaire Results of Fall 2020 slideshow, dated December 10, 2020
- Memo dated December 4, 2020 from A. Borchers to E. Parks, regarding Title IX Policy
- Memo dated December 4, 2020 from E. Parks to School Committee, regarding Initial Budget Discussion
- Synopsis of Family Questionnaire results as of December 4, 2020