

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
February 11, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:00pm 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 Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste; and Director of Student Services Abigail Hanscom were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis also 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. Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on its platforms.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Parks updated the Committee on a situation at the Hanlon School. This morning at 7:00am, a portion of the ceiling in one classroom collapsed (not the roof). This occurred when nobody was in the classroom at the time. Hanlon pivoted to remote instruction today and will be remote on Friday, too. The Westwood Fire Department and the Building Inspector have assessed the situation. Whenever the ceiling grid was installed -- which predates anyone currently in the Operations Department -- it likely met code. Changes need to be made to reinforce. Work will begin tomorrow and continue over vacation. Another inspection will be done prior to welcoming students after vacation ends.

COVID-19 Updates

Current Data

The presentation began with a chart showing the COVID-19 case count, the average daily incidence rate, and the percent positivity over time.

Student data was shared:

- Since September 14, 1,367 students have been supported by the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team and have been absent from in-person instruction.
- 1,314 students have been cleared to return to in-person learning.
- 36 students are currently learning remotely due to being quarantined as a result of travel, being a close contact, or illness.
- There have been 171 positive student cases identified to date, with 17 active cases currently.

Student positive cases by month:

- September 14-October 8: 0.6%
- October 9-November 12: 7.6%
- November 12-December 10: 7%
- December 10-January 14: 36.8%
- January 14-February 11: 48%

Positive student cases to date by grade-level were shared.

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

Staff data was presented:

- Since August 31, 320 staff members have been supported by the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team and have been absent from in-person work.
- 312 staff members have been cleared to return to in-person work.
- 6 staff members are currently absent or working remotely due to being quarantined as a result of being a close contact or illness.
- There have been 36 positive staff cases identified to date, with two active cases currently.

The four members of the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team have consulted with 487 parents and staff since August 31 to answer questions related to protocols, travel, symptoms, next steps, etc.

Charles Donahue asked for an assessment on contact-tracing. A fourth person was added to the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team a few weeks ago to accommodate the increase, which has been valuable. The Westwood Health Department continues to conduct community-based tracing.

Student Testing Program

Information about the program for weekly pool testing for students was presented:

- Increases safety; Primary benefit is to identify cases, including asymptomatic cases
- Builds confidence and trust in safety of school buildings, staff, and students
- Understand COVID-19 incidence in schools/ town on an ongoing basis
- Prepare for, and perhaps accelerate, return to in-person schooling, enhancing the education of students

An update on the status of the program was presented:

- Approved today for the Abbott BinaxNow rapid test
- Accepted into the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education program and match with Project Beacon
- Conducted interviews for a program coordinator (20 hours/ week position)
- School nurses have completed a training webinar
- Determining specific logistics and obtaining necessary materials and equipment

The district will host information webinars for parents on March 1 at 9:15am and at 7pm. More information will be provided following winter vacation.

To participate in the voluntary program, parents will need to create an account and provide consent through an online portal. The testing works by inserting a nasal swab 1-2 centimeters into each nostril. Students in grades 2 through 12 can self-administer with supervision. The process is not invasive or uncomfortable. The samples are placed into pools of ten. If the pool tests negative, everyone is cleared. If a pool tests positive, the district is notified and conducts outreach to the ten people and are asked to come to school for rapid testing. It is anticipated that the program will begin during the week of March 8.

Superintendent Parks also reported that Ken Aries, Director of Operations, has announced his retirement effective December 2021.

Public Comment

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

Carol Lewis reminded the public that the district is sending a survey to families. Additionally, members of the Committee have received and reviewed the petition from “Bring Kids Back” and the letter from the pediatrician.

Iris Montijo of Carroll Avenue expressed concern for children’s health and education.

Kathryn Travers of Alder Road advocated for children’s social and emotional well-being and a return to in-person instruction.

Jemma Wilk of Bayley Street expressed support for the thoughtful and cautious approach of the district. She is concerned about the pressure to fully reopen.

Stephanie Ramales of Washington Street expressed support for a return to in-person instruction.

Shannon Hardiman of Westdale Road said her children are overwhelmed and stressed.

Ana Riley expressed thanks for the communication from the district and expressed concern about a return to in-person instruction before teachers have been vaccinated.

Karin Albers of Edgewood Road expressed thanks for the remote-only option and the work of the district’s administrators, faculty, and staff.

Ed Pollak of Spellman Road expressed concern regarding the learning model

Mandy Taft-Pearman of Gay Street expressed support for the current hybrid learning model.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive expressed support for an increase to in-person instruction for secondary students.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street expressed thanks for keeping the school community safe. She asked about anything financially needed to put toward testing students from the community-at-large, rather than from the school’s operating budget. She asked whether the staff returning from leaves had been factored into the proposed operating budget.

Christina Martin of Brookfield Road is concerned about the new strains of the virus and its effect on children. She acknowledged the struggles that children are experiencing.

Carol Lewis informed the Committee that the time allotted for public comment has expired and stated that she would entertain a motion to extend.

MOTION by Maya Plotkin to extend public comment to those in the queue for one minute and thirty seconds each. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes

Maya Plotkin: Yes

Charles Donahue: Yes

Anthony Mullin: Yes

Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 -- Approved

Kerry Capodilupo of Gay Street thanked the district for grade 4 in-person instruction.

Tina Collins of Bonney Street expressed support for in-person instruction.

Keri DeAngelis of Warwick Drive spoke about the school calendar. She hopes that the Committee considers a minimum of three consecutive days to start the school year.

Wendy Thurmond of Far Reach Road expressed thanks for the options families have for fully-remote and hybrid instruction.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Projects Update

Maya Plotkin provided an update. The School Building Committee met last Friday and will meet again Friday morning. The team is preparing for the schematic design submission to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Once that happens, the project will be placed on the Board's April agenda. It is anticipated that a determination from the MSBA on the project will be known by mid-April.

The School Committee will be hosting a community forum in March where designs and the budget will be shared with the community for feedback.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Anthony Mullin deferred on the update, indicating that it will be included as part of the Committee's discussion on planning for the expansion of in-person learning.

Other Liaison Reports

There were no other liaison reports.

Discussion Items

FY'22 Budget Hearing

Since the presentation at School Committee last week, the FY'22 budget has been presented to the Finance and Warrant Commission. Superintendent Parks indicated that they had a good discussion. She wished to highlight some key points and bring back information requested by the Committee about the Director of Safety and Security position.

Budget Assumptions

- Students have returned to full, in-person instruction.
- Federal entitlement grants will be level-funded.
- Chapter 70 will be level-funded.
- Circuit Breaker will be funded at 70%.
- Fee-based offsets will return to FY'20 levels.

In FY'22, budget requests focus on recovery and stabilization from the disruption:

- Academic support and intervention
- Mental health support
- Return to strategic priorities that have had to take a backseat

The proposed FY'22 operating budget, as presented last week, was:

FY'21 Final Budget...\$48,347,500
Proposed FY'22 Budget...\$50,003,345
Increase of \$1,655,845 (3.4%)

The staffing changes were reviewed:

- Add: 3.0 FTE Elementary General Education Teachers...\$225,000
- Add: 1.9 FTE Elementary General Education Instructional Assistants...\$53,800
- Add: 1.2 FTE Elementary Math Specialist...\$95,000
- Add: 1.0 FTE Middle School Math Specialist/Interventionist...\$75,000
- Add: 1.0 FTE Middle School Special Education (Social Emotional Program)...\$75,000
- Add: 0.4 FTE Middle School Department Head...\$48,000
- Add: 2.0 FTE High School Academic Support...\$52,700
- Add: 1.0 FTE Psychologist (District-wide)...\$75,000
- Add: 0.3 FTE Psychologist (Hanlon)...\$35,000
- Add: 1.0 FTE Custodian (Middle School and District)..\$40,000

This results in 12.8 FTE additions, totaling \$774,500. There will be 9.0 FTE reductions, netting (\$754,500). Therefore, a net addition of 3.0 FTEs totals an increase of \$20,000.

Budget scenarios were presented for the Committee's consideration.

Scenario A

- Increase: None
- Decrease: None
- Town Funds: \$50,003,345 (3.4%)

Scenario B

- Increase: \$20k for Director of Safety and Security (January 2022 start)
- Decrease: \$9.5k in conferences and meetings; \$1.2k in seasonal clerical assistance
- Town Funds: \$50,012,588 (3.4%)

Scenario C

- Increase: \$20k for Director of Safety and Security (January 2022 start)
- Decrease: None
- Town Funds: \$50,023,345 (3.5%)

The Committee discussed each option. Amanda Phillips expressed concern about the Director of Safety and Security position. She would like for someone with a mental health background to fill the role and believes it should be a contract/consulting position.

The Committee reached consensus on Scenario B and will vote accordingly later in the meeting.

Public Comment on FY'22 Proposed Budget

Members of the public were able to comment via Zoom.

No members of the public provided a comment.

Planning for Expansion of In-Person Learning

A letter to community was sent on Wednesday outlining where things stand at this moment.

Accomplishments to-date include:

- A hybrid model that prioritizes live, synchronous instruction
- From the first day of school, Preschool, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 students have attended school four days per week
- In November, able to expand in-person learning to four days for grades 2 and 3
- Fourth grade students will return for in-person learning four days per week on February 22
- Remote model taught by own district teachers
- Successful implementation of health and safety measures

They key factors for Full In-Person Learning:

- See continued improvement in public health metrics in Westwood and Massachusetts from January peak
- Continue safety protocols
 - Continue existing safety protocols, including mask-wearing, handwashing, etc.
 - Continue existing cleaning and disinfecting protocols and HVAC protocols
 - Weather that allows for open windows in classrooms
 - Continue contact tracing and quarantine protocols
- Provide weekly COVID-19 testing for faculty, staff, and students
- Vaccinations for staff
- Physical distancing (would require a shift from six feet to three feet between students)
- Continued ability to provide fully remote model

In striving for an April return, there are steps that need to be taken:

- Establish weekly COVID testing for students
- Engage in collective bargaining with WTA
- Continued advocacy for educator vaccination and planning on local level to assist in the process
- Operational preparations, such as:
 - Return necessary furniture to buildings
 - Ensure bus routes are ready for ridership that includes both cohorts
 - Lunch logistics; need to maintain six feet
 - Changes in a student management system related to schedules, attendance, etc.
- Input from parents; survey link to be sent tomorrow

The system has worked largely because people have honored safety protocols of masking, maintaining physical distance, not coming to school if symptomatic, and adhering to state guidelines around gatherings and travel. If to move forward with a return to full, in-person instruction, must continue to look out for each other and adhere to these behaviors.

Carol Lewis asked if there would be a need to increase the COVID Team in anticipation of an increase in contact tracing. Superintendent Parks responded that there may be a need to prepare for that.

Amanda Phillips asked whether entire classrooms would be placed on quarantine if students are within three feet of each other. Superintendent Parks responded that it would not necessarily be the case. While the number of close contacts would increase, more would be within the six foot zone.

There may be a need to continue student testing in the year ahead. The School Committee may wish to consider using University Avenue mitigation funds. Further thought on funding will need to be considered. Charles Donahue suggested asking for families to voluntarily donate.

Anthony Mullin and Maya Plotkin both suggested that there be opportunities for student to participate in enrichment activities. Assistant Superintendent Borchers is already working on this.

Action Items

Approval of FY'22 Budget

Approval of FY'22 Operating Budget

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the FY'22 Operating Budget of \$50,012,588. Seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of FY'22 Capital Budget

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to approve the FY'22 Capital Budget of \$1,017,000. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of 2021-2022 School Calendar

The School Committee has heard feedback from parents regarding the calendar and the impact of Labor Day and Rosh Hashanah on the reopening. Unfortunately, the scheduling and collective bargaining prohibit a change.

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the 2021-2022 school calendar as presented at the last regular School Committee meeting. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Adoption of Policy Revisions Related to Title IX

ACA – Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy

The Committee discussed the policy last month and had suggested revisions which have been incorporated.

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to waive the third reading of policy ACA. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to approve policy ACA – Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

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

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to waive the third reading of policy ACA-R. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to approve policy ACA-R – Grievance Procedure for Complaints of Sexual Harassment Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of Minutes

January 14, 2021

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of January 14, 2021. Seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

February 4, 2021

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to approve the meeting minutes of February 4, 2021. Seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes

Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business, however, Carol Lewis wished to acknowledge the work of John Cianciarulo for the district and the School Committee.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:25pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team Data slideshow, dated February 11, 2021
- Draft 2021-2022 school calendar for the Committee's approval
- Draft meeting minutes of January 14, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of February 4, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft Policy ACA – Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy for the Committee's adoption
- Draft Policy ACA-R – Grievance Procedure for Complaints of Sexual Harassment Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 for the Committee's adoption
- FY'22 Proposed Budget Scenarios slide
- Pooled Testing Program Frequently Asked Questions, updated on January 22, 2021 and January 29, 2021, by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services
- Preparing for Return to In-Person Learning slideshow, dated February 11, 2021
- Proposed FY'22 Operating and Capital Budgets
- Proposed FY'22 Operating and Capital Budget slideshow as presented on February 4, 2021