

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
October 20, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held in the Josepha Jowdy Theater at Westwood High School, was called to order at 7:02pm by Chair Maya Plotkin. Also present were: Vice Chair Charles Donahue, Clerk Anthony Mullin, Carol Lewis, Amanda Phillips; and student representative Ruby Fyffe. 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. Carol Lewis arrived at 7:10pm. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

The meeting began with the pledge of allegiance.

Maya Plotkin 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 available online at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. It was also recorded for later broadcast on Westwood Media Center's platforms.

The meeting was also presented via Zoom, permitting the public to both view the meeting and to participate during public comment.

Superintendent's Report

COVID-19 Updates

Superintendent Parks reported that the third COVID-19 vaccine clinic was held over the weekend. The district has received inquiries about holding additional clinics once children younger than eleven-years-old are eligible for the vaccine. The district is inquiring about this possibility.

COVID-19 metrics have remained the same for the past several weeks. So far this month, there have been nine student cases at Sheehan which have been clustered in a couple of classrooms. A robust "Test and Stay" program is being run. There are four staff cases: one at Sheehan and three at the high school.

Policy Review

Superintendent Parks reported that it has been a while since the School Committee conducted a review of its policy manual, and recommends it undergo a full review. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees has a policy services division which can assist with the process. A Field Director will assist the School Committee in conducting this review.

The Committee agreed to this proposal. Chair Maya Plotkin will setup a subcommittee.

Q1 Financial Report

Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste highlighted aspects of the Q1 financial report:

- 22.7% of the overall budget has been expended at Q1, compared to 18.5% in the benchmark year. This is due to a timing issue. Three paychecks were issued to teachers and school year employees in the month of September (September 2, 16, and 30). The last time this took place was in FY'16 and FY'17 when salaries were 13.0-13.4% expended by the end of Q1.
- Over 55 professional positions have been filled by new incumbents. Five instructors and one principal are on full-year leaves of absence and have been filled with interim hires. A K/1 Teacher and Instructional Assistant were added to Downey due to increased enrollment. Nurses were added to support the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team, oversee testing programs, and to support Extended Day. For FY'22 a net savings ranging from \$400-500k is seen.
- Overall, non-salary expenses are spending more slowly than in previous years.
- Contract Services are more fully encumbered than in FY'20, reflecting supports for students after the pandemic

- Circuit Breaker reimbursement for FY'22 will be \$705k, which is \$74k lower than budgeted. The Special Education IDEA entitlement grant was funded at \$897k, which was budgeted for \$819k, balancing both out.

Superintendent Parks concluded her report by sharing photos of a grade 7 coding class she took while visiting the middle school. The students used coding skills to code and fabricate hinges using a 3-D printer.

Public Participation

Members of the public were invited to attend the meeting or to participate via Zoom.

Prior to opening public participation, Chair Maya Plotkin wished to address feedback received from parents on the mask mandate. The feedback was distributed to all of the members. She apologized for not mentioning this at the previous meeting.

The School Committee will be holding office hours. This will be an opportunity for the public to have a dialogue with one or two members of the Committee and a district administrator. The sessions will be scheduled soon.

Tina Collins of Bonney Street shared her frustration on implementing critical race theory and diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum. She does not feel that the district has been transparent.

Suddha Surma of Phillips Brooks Road spoke in support for the district's work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Joanna French of Cranston Avenue spoke in support of diversity in the district's curriculum.

Patrick Nee of Briar Lane decided to withdraw his children from the district due to changes made to the elementary curriculum. He does not support the district's work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Debbie Shamon of Oak Street spoke in support of teachers, staff, and administrators' work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Megan Brenk of Briar Lane spoke in support of the district's work on inclusion.

Stacey Theofilou of Longmeadow Drive spoke in support of the district's diversity, equity, and inclusion work. She expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents that have occurred at the middle and high school.

Michelle Mackin of Fox Hill Street stated she has seen a decline in the educational curriculum; and expressed concern about discussing politics and teachers' ideological values.

Sandra Castaldini of Birch Street spoke about the mask mandate.

Doris Forteith of Oak Street spoke in support of the district's work on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Public participation reached thirty minutes.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to extend public participation for the three people that wish to speak. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Stephanie Bhatti of Sunrise Road spoke in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Ken Mackin of Fox Hill Street spoke about MCAS scores.

Justin Obey of Briarwood Drive stated that the mask mandate has caused a problem for his family, leading him to withdraw his children from the district. He also does not believe that the town has an issue with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

School Building Project Update

Maya Plotkin reported that the project was passed at the Special Town Meeting on Monday. The Special Town Election will be held on October 26.

COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group Update

Anthony Mullin reported that the Advisory Group met to discuss face masks. He requested that the School Committee vote on metrics at its next meeting.

School Start Times Subcommittee

Anthony Mullin reported that the Subcommittee will kickoff in November and continue its work into the winter. It is anticipated that an updates will be presented to the School Committee in March, with a community forum to be held in the spring. This would lead to a recommendation at the conclusion of the current school year.

Other Liaison Reports

Amanda Phillips reported that the Special Education Parent Advisory Council will hold an Autism Parent Group on October 26 and a coffee meet and greet on November 4.

Discussion Items

Report on Budget Offsets and Revenue-Based Activities

Lemma Jn-baptiste reported.

Offsets

Offsets are situations in which the district depends upon revenue from external funds to support the operating budget. She reviewed a list of the accounts:

- Circuit Breaker—State reimbursement for Special Education costs that exceed a threshold
- Transportation Revolving—Bus fees charged to families for yellow bus transportation
- Preschool Revolving—Tuition from students attending the Westwood Integrated Preschool
- Athletic Revolving—Athletic fees charged to families for student participation in team sports
- Special Education Transfer—Medicaid reimbursement for expenses driven by medical necessity
- Tuition Revolving—Tuition charged to one or two students from other districts enrolled in our programs
- Solar Revolving (FY'23)—Woburn solar power array constructed by ECA Solar

Guidelines for Use

Revolving accounts have guidelines regarding their use:

- Budget for a predictable level of revenue based upon prior collections
- Balances carry from year-to-year
- Open the fiscal year with a balance that is equal to the sum of total budgeted offsets that are required per the approved operating budget for that year

- May use without appropriation for additional expenses so long as it is to support the same activity, program, or service that generated the revenue (e.g., bus fees for yellow bus contract invoices)

Use of Offsets

A chart showing a five year lookback at FY'15 through FY'20 suggests rising pressures in operating budget led to reduction of offset balances:

- FY'15 (beginning): \$2,690,828
- FY'15: (\$485,218)
- FY'16: \$366,544
- FY'17: (\$286,138)
- FY'18: (\$198,184)
- FY'19: (\$727,530)
- FY'19 (end): \$1,360,302

Strong Start in FY'22

- At the start of FY'22, the net balance in offset accounts has recovered almost fully at \$2.5M, in large part due to federal, state, and local support during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Town support for the district included absorption of COVID-related deficits in Food Service and Extended Day, and support with technology, PPE, and other COVID-19 costs
- FY'21 budget was the last year of a four-year phased process to eliminate the Kindergarten tuition fee offset
- FY'22 budget included a structured \$85k adjustment to contracted services in Special Education, which was intended to address a historical underfunding of this line that put pressure on the Operating Budget

Revenue-based Activities

These programs operated and have historically been expected to be financially self-sustaining.

- Food Service
 - Revenue source: Meal sales, vending and snack bar sales, catering, and federal and state reimbursements
 - Relationship to schools: National School Lunch Program, core to the district
- Extended Day
 - Revenue source: Before School and After-School tuition and other fees
 - Relationship to schools: Affiliated program
- Summer Enrichment
 - Revenue source: Tuition
 - Relationship to schools: Affiliated program
- Prodigy
 - Revenue source: Music lesson fees
 - Relationship to schools: Affiliated program
- Building Use
 - Revenue source: Event fees, rental fees, and custodial fees
 - Relationship to schools: Rental of school facilities to unaffiliated non-profit and for-profit external groups

Extended Day

The budget model is a challenge due to changing market conditions.

- Staffing challenges due to a competitive hiring climate, leading to internal hires, overtime pay, and a corresponding increase in payroll expense
- Greater need for specialized aides and nurses
- Tuition needs to be modified to incorporate field trip and enrichment experiences, for simplicity in billing

- Need to consider and formalize district supports, including professional development

Extended Day Market Conditions

A chart showing published pay ranges for group leaders and monthly tuition, among other communities, was shown. Westwood is on the lower end for both.

Prodigy

The program is no longer in line with the market for private music lessons.

- During the pandemic and since, operated largely virtually with strong results
- Historically, the program has not been charged any building user fee for operating on-site
- Instructors have expressed concerns that Westwood’s pay rates are not competitive; seven instructors have left the program
- Program Director is not budgeted to work during summer months, which causes strain on Town and school business offices, and prevents a strong ramp-up to the school year

Market Conditions

A chart showing a thirty minute instructor rate and lesson rate for other programs was shown. Westwood is on the low end of both.

Building Use

Changes to the rates for select groups is being proposed.

- Priority on making schools available for the community, including school-affiliated nonprofits and Town users, will continue
- Need to re-evaluate impact on building custodial staff for events, as well as utility impact and wear and tear
- Rate schedule needs to be simpler, to allow for more efficient billing
- Goal is to address operating deficits
 - Net loss of nearly \$18k in FY’19
 - Loss does not account for weekday custodial impact, nor utilities and maintenance

Building Use Market Conditions

A chart showing typical gym and cafeteria rental rates was shown. Westwood is on the low end.

Questions

Two questions were posed to the Committee.

1. Show we continue to assume that revenue-based activities should be self-sustaining and not supplemented by the Operating Budget?
2. Are there parameters that we should consider when proposing rate increases?

The Committee agreed that a multi-year proposal of activity and rental rates would be ideal. Lemma Jn-baptiste will share a proposal with the Committee at a future meeting.

Review of Summer Extended School Year and Intervention Programming

There were a lot of educators who worked all summer for specialized and intervention programs, which was particularly difficult coming off of a hybrid year. While a presentation of the programming did not take place, the Committee was encouraged to review the slideshow.

2021 MCAS Results Overview

Changes to the Assessment

- 2020 Test Cancelled
- 2021 Changes
 - Shorter format
 - Longer, later testing window
 - Remote testing option
 - Changes to Competency Determination (CD) standard
 - Waiver for accountability ratings

Competency Determination Changes

Competency determination is a requirement to issue a high school diploma.

- Class of 2022
 - English Language Arts (ELA)/Math
 - Passing MCAS score; or successful completion of a relevant high school course
 - Science, Technology, and Engineering (STE)
 - Passing MCAS score; or successful completion of a relevant high school course
- Class of 2023
 - ELA/Math
 - Passing MCAS score; or threshold score and meeting the requirements of the educational proficiency plan
 - STE
 - Passing MCAS score; or successful completion of a relevant high school course

2021 Data Review

- A review of students meeting or exceeding (M&E) standards in 2021 versus 2019 has been conducted
- A review of M&E performance versus comparison districts has been conducted
- A standards-based analysis to improve curriculum and instruction will be completed
- A sub group analysis to improve equity will be completed
- A review of student results and other data will be completed to provide support and direct intervention

2021 Comparison Districts

There are three categories of comparison districts which are used to see how similar districts perform and to ensure we are roughly on track.

- DART Districts (2019)
 - Duxbury
 - Groton-Dunstable
 - Hamilton-Wenham
 - Hanover
 - Longmeadow
 - Masconomet
 - North Reading
 - Norwell
 - Reading
 - Wayland
 - Wilmington
- High-Performing Districts
 - Concord/Concord-Carlisle
 - Dover/Dover-Sherborn*
 - Lexington
 - Lincoln/Lincoln-Sudbury
 - Medfield*
 - Needham*
 - Wellesley

- Weston
- Winchester
*also in TEC
- TEC Districts
 - Canton
 - Dedham
 - Holliston
 - Hopkinton
 - Medway
 - Millis
 - Natick
 - Norwood
 - Walpole

Highlights

- Minimal change in ELA between 2019 and 2021, improvement in some grades
 - Grade 4 +1%
 - Grade 10 +5%
 - Grade 7 +9%
- Grades 3-8 aggregate scores are among the top in the state
 - 7th in ELA
 - 15th in Math
- Grades 3, 4, and 5 ELA scores are #1 among all comparison districts
- Grades 3, 4, and 7 Math scores are top six among comparison districts
- Grade 5 STE scores are third among comparison districts and sixth in the State

Charts showing data for the following were presented:

- Grade 10 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 10 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 8 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 8 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 8 STE: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 7 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 7 ELA M&E
- Grade 7 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 6 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 6 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 5 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 5 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 5 STE: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 4 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 4 Math: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 3 ELA: Comparison Districts M&E
- Grade 3 Math: Comparison Districts M&E

What's Next

- Continue analysis at district/school/curriculum level
 - Small team review of subgroup performance
 - Coordinators/department heads leading standards-based data review
 - Teachers, building leaders, specialists review individual student performance, along with other data (e.g., STAR, classroom assessments)
- Provide student support
- Make adjustments as needed to curriculum and instruction

The largest area of concern is in the grade 6 results (current students in grade 7). These gaps will be examined more closely. This group of students experienced the fully remote model at the end of elementary and then transitioned to the middle school during the hybrid model.

Policy JJIF – Concussion Management in Extracurricular Athletics

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to waive the third reading of the revised Concussion Management in Extracurricular Athletics policy. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to adopt the revised Concussion Management in Extracurricular Athletics policy. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Action Items

Approval of September 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of September 9, 2021. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business

Adjournment

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:07pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of September 9, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- MCAS 202 Results slideshow presentation, dated October 20, 2021
- Memo from A. Borchers to E. Parks regarding 2021 MCAS Results – Overview, dated October 15, 2021
- Memo from L. Jn-baptiste to E. Parks regarding Operating Budget Report for period ending September 30, 2021, dated October 20, 2021
- Memo from L. Jn-bapstiste to School Committee regarding Report on Offsets and Revenue-Based Activities, dated October 20, 2021
- Policy JJIF – Concussion Management in Extracurricular Athletics
- Report on Offsets and Revenue-based Activities slideshow presentation
- Summer Programming 2021 slideshow presentation