

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
March 10, 2022

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:02pm by Chair Maya Khuri Plotkin. Also present were: Vice Chair Charles Donahue, Clerk Anthony Mullin, Carol Lewis, Amanda Phillips, and student member 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. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

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

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Parks acknowledged a concerning incident at the middle school where students renamed phones with aliases and Airdropped unsolicited messages to other recipients. She stated that other school districts have been responding to similar issues.

Equity Audit Update

The Requests for Proposals have been evaluated and the district is poised to award the contract soon. A subgroup consisting of Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships Lateefah Franck, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste, teachers Christine Blair and Chelsea Santos-Friberg, parent representative Monique Damon-Johnson, School Committee member Amanda Phillips, and Superintendent Parks all reviewed the proposals. Town Procurement Manager Michelle Miller has steered and guided the group through the process and will assist in negotiating the contract.

The Audit will provide qualitative data from student, families, and staff.

Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Response to Statement of Interest for Sheehan School

The Town was notified by the MSBA last month that they have declined to move forward on the statement of interest for Sheehan School. The timeline for the past round was different due to the pandemic. As a result, the deadline for the next round is in April. The Statement may be resubmitted for Sheehan to be considered again, with notification expected in December.

Upcoming Parent Programming

In April, the district will hold a parent forum in conjunction with the School Start Times Subcommittee around research on adolescents' sleep. More information will be shared with families soon.

On May 4 at 7pm, the district will host a virtual forum with Elizabeth Englander, Director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University, focusing on children's social relationships with social media use and how parents can help their children navigate these challenges.

FY'23 Budget Process Update

Since last month's School Committee meeting, the district has presented the proposed budget to the Finance and Warrant Commission (FinCom) and, subsequently, held discussions with the FinCom Education Subcommittee. The Subcommittee will make its presentation to the full FinCom at its meeting on Tuesday night. The FinCom's final public hearing on the budget will take place on March 29.

Other Updates

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with an Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the State of Emergency.

COVID-19

The district transitioned to mask-optional on February 28. Over the past two weeks, there has not been a significant difference in positive cases from before February vacation and now. In the past couple of days there has been a cluster at Sheehan School which is being closely observed.

The rates of participation for the district's routine testing program have significantly declined. The routine and at-home programs will both continue through the end of April, at which time they will be reassessed to determine whether or not it makes sense to continue.

The transition to mask-optional has been going well. School principals have all reported no reports or observations of a violation in individuals' choice to mask or not and be treated respectfully. It is estimated that 25% of students continue to wear face masks, with the percentage of staff slightly higher.

Superintendent Parks then shared examples by grade-level of how schools are communicating expectations around respecting an individual's choice to mask or not.

Director of Safety and Security

The first round of interviews for the Director of Safety and Security position will begin next week. Anthony Mullin stated that hiring for this position is his top priority.

Public Comments

Members of the public were invited to comment via Zoom.

Meredith Schaefer a resident of Alexandria, Va., representing SMART, the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers, spoke about her relief about the decision to remove Kingspan Kooltherm K15 from the proprietary materials list of the Deerfield-Hanlon School building project. She expressed additional concern about a new plan for insulation of the building, which would involve a different type of insulation, which Kingspan is also a manufacturers (though not exclusively). She does not believe that any material produced by Kingspan should be used in the project.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's Update

The School Committee will be hosting office hours on March 23 from 9am to 10:30am in the Professional Development Room in the District Administration Office.

Technology issues in the Little Theater continue, which necessitated this month's meeting to be remote only. Additional equipment is on order. In the meantime, the April and May School Committee meetings will take place at the public library. There will no longer be a Zoom component, and all public comments will need to be made in-person.

School Building Project Update

The construction documents at 90% completion have been submitted to the cost estimators. It is anticipated that their report will be delivered in time for the April School Building Committee meeting, where it will be reviewed.

In connection with products used in the project, the design team will specify a product as proprietary, precluding it from the public bidding process, which is not preferred. It is sometimes necessary as no other product meets the specification. The design team previously designated an insulation product manufactured by Kingspan as proprietary. Upon further review, the insulation system was revised and the product is not needed. The School Building Committee voted to remove the specification.

In the meantime, the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers union contacted the Committee. There appears to be a conflict between the union and Kingspan, as they have reached out to any project that uses their products.

Today, neighbors of the Hanlon received fliers advocating against Kingspan products.

The School Building Committee cannot exclude any manufacturers from the project's public bidding process, which is bound by statute. However, the School Building Committee, the Town's Permanent Building Committee, and the design and project management teams will ensure that any and all products used in the Hanlon-Deerfield project will meet all federal, state, and municipal safety requirements, regulations, and standards.

School Start Times Subcommittee

A website related to school start times will launch soon, including information on research and the work of the Subcommittee.

A parent forum will be held the week of April 4. Following that, a survey will be issued to students, families, and staff. Based upon the resulting data, the Subcommittee will formulate options and recommendations.

Any changes would take effect in Fall 2023.

Policy Review Subcommittee

Amanda Phillips is now on the Subcommittee, replacing Carol Lewis.

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees will assist the School Committee in conducting a review of its policies. The first meeting of the Subcommittee will take place on March 23.

Other Liaison Reports

The Human Rights Task Force is launching a podcast series to discuss their work.

Discussion Items

Student Opportunity Act Plan Amendment

Superintendent Parks distributed a copy of the proposed amendment to the Committee. This is a relatively new requirement tied to the Student Opportunity Act that significantly increased funding to public schools. Westwood received some additional funding when the Act took effect three years ago, but it was not a transformational increase. It is now time for an update and amendment to the Plan which documents how the increase in funding will narrow some type of academic performance gap. In the district's proposal, the group identified is students with disabilities, particularly middle school math.

The Plan is due in April, but reflects work already in progress. Funding encompasses Chapter 70 and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds.

Bullying Prevention Update

Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom, High School Principal Amy Davenport, Middle School Principal Mike Redmon, Hanlon School Principal Matt Kuklentz, and Martha Jones School Principal Donna Tobin presented. Dr. Tobin will be the district's Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator in the fall.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Focus on Prevention

- Defines bullying and cyberbullying
- Expands school responsibility for intervention
- Outlines procedures for responding to reports

- Creates requirement for a district prevention plan
 - Restorative practices
 - Community partnerships and learning opportunities

Connectedness

- Technical response
 - Letters
 - Investigation
 - Documentation
- Healthy and supported school community
- Curriculum
 - Formal
 - PreK-12 Content/context
 - Informal
 - School climate and culture building
- Goal
 - More prevention means less reactive response

Current Curriculum and Programs, Kindergarten through Grade 5

- Curriculum
 - Anti-bullying lessons in morning meeting
 - Social-emotional learning (SEL) across the curriculum
 - Same and Different
- Programs
 - Body Safety Theatre
 - CLEAR and Acceptable Use Policy

Current Curriculum and Programs, Grades 6 through 8

- Advisory
 - Developmental Design/Responsive Classroom
 - 20 minutes daily
- Bullying Prevention Theater
 - Westwood Youth and Families partnership
- Anti-Defamation League
 - Peer leaders
- Recess
- CLEAR and Acceptable Use Policy

Current Curriculum and Programs, Grades 9 through 12

- Curriculum
 - Ninth and Tenth grade seminar
 - Ninth and Tenth grade Wellness
 - "Signs of Suicide" suicide prevention (Grades 9 and 12)
 - Content-area instruction
- Programs
 - Westwood Ambassadors and Freshman Orientation
 - S-block programs
 - Class meetings
 - WHS StressLess
 - School-wide assemblies
 - One School, One Book

Developmental Work

- Developing Social and Emotional Skills
 - Understanding yourself
 - Interacting with others

- Relationship building
- Responsible decision-making
- Pandemic Impacts
 - Social isolation, limited time to develop critical skills
 - Long-term stress/fatigue
 - Parental anxiety
- Social Media
 - More dominant mode of interaction
 - Not a good tool for navigating conflict

Work Ahead

- Importance of SEL
- Connection to diversity, equity, and inclusion work
- Professional development for teachers
- Support for parents

Action Items

Vote to Submit Student Opportunity Act Plan Amendment to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to submit the Student Opportunity Act Plan amendment to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Vote to Authorize Submission of Statement of Interest for Sheehan School to the Massachusetts School Building Authority

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin:

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on March 10, 2022, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the School Committee of Westwood, Massachusetts, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 29, 2022 for the Sheehan Elementary School, located at 549 Pond Street, Westwood, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority categories for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future:

Priority 5: Replacement, renovation, or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility; and

Priority 7: Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide a full range of programs consistent with State and approved local requirements;

and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the

Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of February 10, 2022 meeting minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of February 10, 2022. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Acceptance of School Start Times Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept the School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of January 26, 2022. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business.

Executive Session

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to move into Executive Session to conduct strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Westwood Teachers' Association, and pending litigation, which would have a detrimental effect on the position of the School Committee if discussion was held in Open Session. The Committee will not return to Open Session. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The Committee adjourned from Open Session at 8:50pm and convened in Executive Session at 8:50pm.
Executive Session concluded at 9:27pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Bullying Prevention Update presentation, dated March 10, 2022
- Draft FY'22 Student Opportunity Act Plan Amendment
- Draft meeting minutes of February 10, 2022 for the Committee's review and approval
- Letter from J. MacDonald, Chief Executive Officer and J. McCarthy, Executive Director/Deputy Chief Executive Officer to M. Walsh, Chair, Westwood Select Board, regarding Town of Westwood 2021 Statement of Interest, dated February 3, 2022
- School Start Time Subcommittee meeting minutes of January 26, 2022