

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

January 13, 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, 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. Charles Donahue arrived at 7:10pm.

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

Recognition of Middle School Student Julia Drainville

Superintendent Parks introduced Julia Drainville, an eighth grade student at Thurston, who was recognized by the Committee. In October, Julia had the honor of being asked to interview Dr. Jane Goodall.

Q2 Financial Report

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

- Spending this year is in line with FY'20 at Quarter 2 (the best and most appropriate pre-COVID comparative period)
- Unbudgeted COVID expenses for year are anticipated to be \$300k by the end of the year, which can be absorbed within the budget
- External funding from one-time grants has also been received

COVID-19 Updates

Chair Plotkin stated that the updates will be included as part of the second reading of revised Policy EBCFA - Face Masks.

Public Comments

Members of the public were invited to comment via Zoom regarding the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan and/or other agenda items.

Carlo Rosen of Partridge Drive spoke about the face mask policy.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive spoke about the face mask policy.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's Update

Chair Plotkin asked Amanda Phillips and Carol Lewis to report on the School Committee office hours.

Feedback from School Committee Office Hours

Mrs. Phillips and Mrs. Lewis shared that the second session of in-person office hours was held last week. Topics discussed included teacher absenteeism and substitutes; equity work and age-appropriate curriculum; and expanding the METCO Program. Another session will be held in March.

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

School Building Project Update

Chair Plotkin reported that there will be a School Building Committee meeting next week where the Aesthetics and Design Subcommittee will provide a recommendation for interior finishes.

School Start Times Subcommittee

The Subcommittee will be meeting at the end of the month.

Policy Review Subcommittee

The Massachusetts Association of School Committees continues to review the district's documents. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the Subcommittee will be held in late February /early March.

Other Liaison Reports

Amanda Phillips shared that The Special Education Parent Advisory Council has some parent support groups which will begin soon.

Mrs. Phillips also reported that the Town's Human Rights Task Force collaborated with the Select Board to release a statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Task Force has been asked to sign the statement. The Committee agreed that, as the Committee's liaison, Mrs. Phillips should sign on behalf of the School Committee.

Discussion Items

Proposed FY'23 Operating and Capital Budgets

Superintendent Parks and Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste reported.

Topics

- FY'22 Context
- Operating Budget
 - FY'23 Proposal
 - Looking ahead to upcoming budget cycles
- Capital Budget
- Next Steps

FY'22 Budget Highlights

- Special Education
 - Tuition expenses are within budget
 - Expanded special education Extended School Year summer programming (-\$200k) with grant reimbursement from the State (+\$200k) - Net-neutral
 - Flexible-use American Rescue Plan Special Education grants (+\$215k)
 - Contractors filling vacancies in Student Services support positions caused by post-COVID job market disruption (-\$105k)
 - Balances in SPecial Education Reserve accounts not impacted
- COVID Costs
 - Tents, personal protective equipment, and nurses on the district's COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team (-\$160k)
- Grants
 - METCO expansion leads to dedicated additional funding (+\$250k)
 - Teacher Diversification grant (+\$67k)
- External Funds and Other Programs
 - School lunch participation is strong (above pre-pandemic levels)
 - Bus and athletic fee revenue is back to pre-pandemic levels

- Extended Day and Prodigy Program participation is back to pre-pandemic levels

FY'23 Budget Assumptions

- Assumptions
 - Chapter 70 level-funded
 - Circuit Breaker funded at 70%
- Offset Changes
 - Circuit Breaker (-\$74k)
 - IDEA Grant level-funded with FY'22 (+\$78k)
 - Preschool Tuition (+\$25k)
 - Extended Day and Building Use (+\$20k)
 - ESSER III Grant (+\$85k)
 - Solar Power Purchasing Agreement (+\$25k)

Factors Considered in Budget Priorities

- Contractual salary obligations and other fixed costs
 - Collective bargaining with three units this spring presents a significant unknown
- Enrollment Trends
 - Not a significant driver in the FY'23 budget
- Current Student Needs
 - Focus on stabilization and long-term recovery from pandemic, academically and emotionally
- Strategy for District Improvement
 - Continue to make progress in priority areas and goals

School Budgets Are Largely About People

- Salaries: 85.3%
- Other non-salary: 6.5%
- Operations: 4.2%
- Special Education: 4.0%

Enrollment Trends

A chart showing historic and projected elementary, secondary, and district-wide enrollment was shown.

Staffing for Enrollment Trends

- Middle School Enrollment: After several years of significant increases, peaked in FY'18 and began to decline. Staffing cuts were made in FY'20 and no significant change in enrollment is expected.
- High School Enrollment: Peaked in FY'19 and started a projected, gradual decline in FY'21. Staffing cuts were made in FY'21. The impact of such cuts was analyzed and were deemed sustainable.

As staff has been cut at the secondary levels, the FTEs have been reallocated to elementary to support enrollment numbers and class sizes.

Anticipated Elementary Enrollment

A chart showing anticipated elementary enrollment was shown. The numbers for kindergarten students reflect children who are currently "visible" in Town census data. The numbers will likely increase. The budget proposal plans for such a scenario. It also allows for an effective response to spring/summer enrollments. Staff allocations to the elementary schools will be made late spring after kindergarten registration.

Student Needs and Strategic Priorities

The FY'23 budget continues robust funding in curriculum and instruction and about stabilization and long-term recovery.

FY'23 Proposed Operating Budget

FY'22 Final Budget: \$50,012,588

Proposed FY'23 Budget: \$51,762,397
This represents an increase of \$1,749,809, which equals 3.5%.

FY'23 Budget in Context

Operating budget increases in past years:

- FY'16: 5.4%
- FY'17: 6.0%
- FY'18: 3.3%
- FY'19: 3.4%
- FY'20: 3.5%
- FY'21: 3.6%
- FY'22: 3.4%
- FY'23: 3.5%

Major Budget Categories

A chart showing the major budget categories was shown.

FY'23 Proposed Budget

- FY'22 Budget: \$50,012,588
- Increase salaries for existing personnel (contractual): \$326,225
- Faculty/Professional Position Additions (3.8 FTEs): \$215,000
- Support Staff Position Additions (7.5 FTEs): \$233,648
- Net increase to various non-salary accounts: \$69,682
- Net increase to non-salary line due to impact of changes to Offsets and Grants or transfers: \$905,254
- Total change (11.3 FTEs): \$1,749,809
- Total FY'23 Recommended Budget: \$51,762,397

Faculty/Professional Positions

- Add 1.0 FTE High School Adjustment Counselor
- Add 1.2 FTE Elementary Counselors
- Add 1.0 FTE Middle School Dean of Students

Social Emotional Student Supports

A chart showing the various social emotional student supports at the High School, Middle School, and elementary schools was shown.

Faculty/Professional Positions

- Add 0.4 FTE High School Social Studies teacher
- Increase 0.2 FTE Director of Safety and Security

Supports Staff Positions

- 1.0 FTE Special Education Building Substitute
- 2.0 FTE ABA Tutors
- 2.0 FTE Instructional Assistants
- 1.0 FTE METCO Advisor in Elementary
- 0.5 FTE High School Specialized Program Transition Coach
- 0.5 FTE Administrative Assistant for Facilities Department
- 0.5 FTE Administrative Assistant in the Business Office

Non-Salary

Significant increases include:

- Operations
 - Increase in Regular Transportation costs per contract
 - Increase in legal services and other expenses for attorney fees and School Committee policy review
- General Education

- Increase in Technical equipment and maintenance budget to fund Google Workspace, iPad management platform, Verizon hotspots, and dedicated Internet service
- Increase in subscriptions in Curriculum and Instruction to support classroom teachers with individualized intervention and to align with assessment tools
- Special Education
 - Escalation for anticipated tuitions and anticipated placements
 - Increase to SPecial Education contracted services
 - “Pause” of multi-year plan to adjust contracted services, applying one-time increase in IDEA grant

Special Education Focus

The district continues to educate nearly all of its special education students in-district. There are 0.5% of students learning in out-of-district placements.

Focus for FY’23

- Maintaining current programming and service levels
- Meeting our legal and regulatory responsibilities
- Continue to provide robust Extended School Year program
- Increasing mental health supports during the period of recovery from COVID impacts

Special Education Funding Sources

- Town Funds
 - Money appropriated to the school operating budget through the Town Meeting process
 - Special Education Reserve for unanticipated costs, to which the Town has dedicated additional funds in recent years
- Federal IDEA Grant
 - Amount of grant varies year-to-year and has to be estimated during the budget process
 - Likely to have unspent funds from an additional FY’22 American Rescue Plan allocation of \$215k for this grant and these funds would carry into FY’23
- Circuit Breaker Offset
 - State funding that provides partial reimbursement of very high-cost special education placements
 - When expensive tuitions drop, this typically drops
 - Involves a claiming process
 - Paid in arrears: In a given fiscal year, the district must be able to cover tuition expenses, but can apply circuit breaker funding in subsequent years as an offset to the budget

Anticipated Priorities in Upcoming Budget Cycles

- Increase in English Language Learner staffing
- Open an additional Preschool classroom
- Restore library staffing
- Expand elementary specials offerings
- Expand the PEER Program for students with moderate Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Add Human Resources Director

Five Years of Annual Capital Budgets

A chart showing annual capital budgets from FY’19 through FY’23 was presented. Anticipated work for the upcoming fiscal year includes roofs, HVAC, and building improvements.

FY’23 Potential Capital Projects

Examples that may be undertaken in the near-term includes:

- Roof replacements in select areas at Sheehan, Martha Jones, or the Middle School
- Rooftop HVAC units at the Middle School
- Targeted air conditioning unit installation at the Sheehan to address student need
- Other building improvements at Sheehan, depending upon engineering assessment and long-term plan
- Districtwide building improvements that improve safety

- High School and Middle School library circulation desk replacement
- Kiln for the ceramics program
- Chromebook replacements in Grades 6 and 9, iPads for elementary technology packs, and High School Language Lab
- Setting aside Technology funds for significant one-to-one device refresh in FY'26

Comparison of Per-Pupil Spending

A chart showing the per-pupil spending from *Boston* magazine's Top 25 Public High Schools (2021) was presented.

Next Steps

- Presentation to Finance and Warrant Commission (FinCom): February 8
- School Committee Budget Hearing: February 10
- Meeting with FinCom Education Subcommittee: Anticipated for February 14-28
- FinCom Budget Hearings: Throughout March
- Annual Town Meeting: May 2

Second Reading of Policy JFABB – Acceptance of International and Exchange Students

The Committee held a second read of the Acceptance of International and Exchange Students policy.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to waive the third reading of Policy JFABB. Motion seconded by Carol Lewis.

Roll-call vote:

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

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve Policy JFABB – Acceptance of International and Exchange Students. 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

Second Reading of Revised Policy EBCFA – Face Masks

The Committee held a second read of a revised Face Masks policy. As part of this reading, Superintendent Parks was asked to present data from the district's COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team.

A chart showing Westwood's case count, percent positivity, and average daily incidence rate was shown. A chart showing the district's weekly COVID cases for the current school was also presented.

Superintendent Parks then shared a chart of cases by school and student vaccination rates.

Some challenges associated with the COVID-19 uptick include:

- Number of staff absences
- Number of students absent while sick
- Contact tracing volume

The district is sponsoring vaccine booster clinics for people ages 12+ in January, February, and March.

The Committee asked Superintendent Parks to inquire about running an additional vaccine clinic and to post student vaccination data on the district's COVID-19 dashboard.

COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group Update

Anthony Mullin reported that the group met yesterday. The Superintendent and the School Committee are in receipt of a letter from the Town's Board of Health Director, Jared Orsini, who "recommends that the School Committee keep the face covering policy in place until the Omicron surge has abated and case counts decrease to their pre-Omicron levels."

Based upon the letter from the Board of Health, and a mask mandate that is currently in place for the Town's municipal buildings, and a surge in positive cases, the Committee chose not to waive the third reading of the policy. The revision will be discussed again at next month's meeting.

Anthony Mullin recommended that a clause referencing having received an exemption be included in the policy. The Committee agreed. He further recommended that a metric be determined the next meeting in order to off-board from the face mask policy. The Committee agreed to that as well.

Action Items

Reauthorization of Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to reauthorize the district's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

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 2022-2023 School Calendar

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the 2022-2023 school calendar. 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

Acceptance of Gifts

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept a gift of \$4,042 from the Class of 2021. 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

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to accept a gift of \$150 from Lueders Environmental, Inc. 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

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept a gift of \$15,000 from Medical Information Technology, Inc. (MEDITECH). 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 December 9, 2021 meeting minutes

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the meeting minutes of December 9, 2021. 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.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to adjourn the meeting. 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

The meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- 2022-2023 School Calendar for the School Committee's review and approval
- Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
- COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team Data
- Draft meeting minutes of December 9, 2021 for the Committee's review and approval
- Draft Policy JFABB – Acceptance of International and Exchange Students
- Draft Revised Policy EBCFA – Face Masks
- FY'22 Proposed Budget slideshow presentation, dated January 13, 2022
- Letter from J. Orsini to E. Parks and School Committee dated January 13, 2022, regarding face-covering policy
- Letter from Medical Information Technology, Inc. (MEDITECH) to S. Ouellette dated December 16 2021, regarding a gift to the district
- Memo from A. Davenport to E. Parks dated January 7, 2022, regarding Class of 2021 Donation
- Memo from J. Cianciarulo to School Committee dated January 1, 2022, regarding gift from Lueders Environmental
- Memo from L. Jn-baptiste to E. Parks dated January 13, 2022, regarding the Operating Budget Report for period ending December 31, 2021
- Proposed FY'23 Budget
 - Executive Summary
 - Exhibits
 - Detailed spreadsheets