

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

May 12, 2022

Attendance and Call to Order

Superintendent Emily Parks called the meeting to order at 7:01pm in the Community Meeting Room at the Westwood Public Library. Also present were: Charles Donahue, Anthony Mullin, Dorothy Parmelee, Amanda Phillips, Maya Khuri Plotkin; and student member Ruby Fyffe. Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers was present on behalf of the district.

Jodi Steverman recorded the minutes

Westwood Boy Scout Troop 3 members Charlie Goodman and Liam La Croix lead the pledge of allegiance. The Boy Scouts are part of a project to identify flags throughout the district that need to be replaced. A proper retirement of replaced flags will take place next week.

Westwood Media Center, which provided a live-stream of the meeting and also recorded it for later viewing on their platforms, was recognized.

Reorganization of the School Committee

Outgoing Chair Maya Khuri Plotkin shared her departing thoughts about the past year.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to nominate Charlie Donahue for Chair of the School Committee. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Mr. Donahue then took over as Chair of the meeting.

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to nominate Tony Mullin for Vice Chair of the School Committee. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to nominate Amanda Phillips for Clerk of the School Committee. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Superintendent's Report

Recognition of Mama Mia Lead Performers

The cast and crew of "Mama Mia" was recognized. Alex Mansour, Maddie McDaniels, and Anna McCusker performed "The Winner Takes All."

End-of-year and Transition Events

Superintendent Parks shared that many transition events are underway, including orientation events for students in grades 5 and 8. In addition, the elementary schools and the middle school are planning a schedule of year-end events.

At the high school, events include Senior Week, Class Day at Night, and graduation.

Introduction of Director of Safety and Security

Steven Trask was introduced to the Committee as the district's new Director of Safety and Security. He previously served as Police Chief and Emergency Management Director in Framingham and is also currently working as a consultant.

Mr. Trask is currently meeting with school principals, touring buildings, listening to concerns, reviewing the audit reports, and meeting with Town police and fire officials. He intends to roll out updated response plans in the fall.

Middle School Dean of Students Appointment

Edward Walker has been hired as the new middle school Dean of Students. He is currently working as a guidance counselor at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. His appointment is effective in September.

Upcoming DESE Review

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be conducting a targeted district review during the week of May 23, which includes classroom observations and focus groups. The Office of District Reviews and Monitoring fulfills this federal accountability requirement. It is Westwood's turn to be reviewed.

Grade 5 Wee the People Program

Superintendent Parks acknowledged grade 5 parents' concerns about a program called Wee the People. In planning, the focus for the workshops is for students to be comfortable talking about race. Some parents raised concerns about a hashtag that was used on the host organization's social media posts. The district has contacted the organization about this.

Parents will have an opportunity to see the program before students.

COVID-19 Data

In the past week there were 111 cases in the district. The number is similar to mid-January. There was a cluster at Deerfield School and a large increase in cases at the high school, which has impacted staffing. Case numbers have been trending down recently, which is a positive sign.

Photos from the Prom Promenade and the Prom were shown. Junior Class Advisors Dana Proctor and Fritha Wright, who planned the events, were thanked.

Dori Parmelee was welcomed to the Committee.

Student member Ruby Fyffe was recognized and thanked for her work on behalf of the Committee. She will be graduating in June.

Public Comments

Chair Donahue reminded the community that the next School Committee Roundtable will be held on May 18.

There were no public comments.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's Update

Chair Donahue thanked Elementary Humanities Coordinator Marcia Uretsky for her work to ensure that the annual grade 3 Fisher School Program was a success. The Dale Carnegie course may be returning to the high school; more information will follow soon.

Outgoing Chair Maya Plotkin will be working on the Superintendent's annual performance evaluation which will take place in public session at the June School Committee meeting. Superintendent Parks will provide a written self-assessment on her work toward the year's goals to the Committee in advance of the meeting. The Committee will provide feedback and ratings, which are submitted to the State. Each member of the Committee was asked to provide feedback to Mrs. Plotkin as well.

School Building Project Update

The School Building Committee will now be working in tandem with the Town's Permanent Building Committee. Mrs. Plotkin advised that joint meetings will now be taking place. The groundbreaking will likely take place in July, with a ceremony held in September. It is anticipated that the building will open in February 2024.

Policy Review Subcommittee

Policy Review Subcommittee Chair Amanda Phillips shared that Section B was provided to the Committee. The policies will be fully adopted after the entire manual is reviewed, which will likely take a year.

Vice Chair Mullin recommended, and the Committee agreed, that Policy BBBE (Unexpired Term Fulfillment) replace "Board of Selectmen" with "Select Board" and that Policy BDE (Subcommittees of the School Committee) be updated to replace the organizational meeting with the regular meeting.

Other Liaison Reports

There were no other liaison reports.

Discussion Items

Social Studies Curriculum Review

Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers shared the Social Studies Review presentation.

Review Cycle and Process Highlights

- Examined standards; alignment review
- Questions/concerns
- Vision/mission
- Classroom visits and debriefing
- Outreach to other districts
- Leadership participation in Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-facilitated meetings

Vision Statement

Students in the Westwood Public Schools explore geography, history, economics, politics, and social movements in order to learn about the past, make sense of the present, and shape the future. They observe, ask questions, define problems, find information, and propose solutions.

Students investigate primary and secondary source material, including texts, images, artifacts, and digital media. They recognize the importance of perspective as well as the impact of bias, and they seek varied sources of evidence in order to examine events and political systems from multiple points of view. They engage in civil discourse in order to share their thoughts and to understand experiences, ideas, and opinions that differ from their own.

Students participate actively in their communities, using what they learn in social studies to advocate for change, and preparing to become engaged citizens in a democratic society.

Major Themes

- Curriculum mapping and investment in quality resources to support consistency and coherence.
- Professional development to expand educators' depth of content understanding, strategies for differentiation, tools, and supports for discussion of politically-charged topics.
- Real world issues and student choice to support investment and meaningful learning

Recommendations – District

1. Develop PreK-12 curriculum maps that outline content at each grade level, identify practice standards, articulate essential questions, and list foundational curriculum resources at each grade level.
2. Expand the social studies curriculum through diversification of perspectives, voices, and topics.
3. Create more opportunities for students to choose topics for in-depth study and methods to demonstrate their understanding of what they have learned.
4. Create schedule structures and provide professional development and curriculum development time to support interdisciplinary instruction.
5. Help teachers stay up to date in their knowledge and understanding of history and social science by providing frequent professional development opportunities and developing a structure for teams/ departments to routinely update curriculum to reflect the latest research and scholarship.
6. Identify foundational curriculum resources (text, online, etc.) to be used in grades 3-7 and grades 9-11.
7. Engage the wider community in supporting the civic engagement of students.

Recommendations – Elementary

1. Invest in teaching resources to support an updated K-5 curriculum that is aligned with the current Massachusetts frameworks.
2. Create and enhance opportunities for culturally responsive experiential learning to complement and extend in-class instruction (e.g., the Fisher School program, Plimoth Pawtuxet Museums, Tsongas Industrial History Center in Lowell).
3. Provide professional development opportunities to teachers led by specialists in history and social studies (such as high school teacher leaders) focusing on both the content and practice standards.
4. Invest time and resources for grade-level teams to unpack standards and align them with age-appropriate instructional strategies.
5. Provide faculty with professional development on how to explicitly teach discussion strategies for elementary students.
6. Update report cards to reflect updated social studies standards.

Recommendations – Middle School

1. Develop overarching essential questions for each grade level as well as essential questions for each unit.
2. Explore and invest in learning resources for students that allow them to deeply and critically examine/explore historical events, ideas, and concepts.
3. Invest time and resources to refine and implement the Civic Action Project (CAP).
4. Develop uniform language and writing procedures and methods that explicitly build on each other year-to-year.

Recommendations – High School

1. Create a required course for students to complete their community action projects.
2. Expand the history curriculum through diversification of perspectives, voices, and topics.
3. Evaluate the course sequence for grades 9-11.
4. Develop additional options for engaging, rigorous courses in social studies.

Legislative Council Outreach

- Legislative Council – Representative student group at high school
- Concerns discussed at Legislative Council
 - Student input in decisions around curriculum
 - Representation in curriculum

- Subcommittee brought concerns to Principal Davenport, then to Assistant Superintendent
- Discussed possibilities of discussion forum (students and faculty), smaller focus groups, surveys, more student representatives on Curriculum Review teams
- Generated potential survey questions; reached out to Social Studies leadership team for feedback
- Meeting with high school faculty and department heads next Monday; Survey launch as soon as possible

Next Steps – 2022-2023

- Summer 2022
 - Initial K-5 curriculum mapping
 - Preparation for Advanced Placement World History to replace Advanced Placement European History for Fall 2022
 - Preparation for civics course at high school
 - Refine and implement grade 8 Civic Action Project
- 2022-2023 School Year
 - Piloting of new curriculum resources for grades 3-5
 - Exploration of new curriculum resources for grades 6-7 and grades 9-11
 - K-5 professional development focused on social studies (content, instructional strategies)
 - Develop common language and approaches to skill development in grades 6-8
 - Continue refining curriculum maps K-12
 - Evaluate course sequence for grades 9-11
 - Develop options for additional electives in grade 12 social studies

Next Curriculum Reviews

- Spring 2022: Mathematics
- Fall 2022: Library Media/Digital Literacy and Computer Science
- 2023-2024: Visual and Performing Arts
- 2024-2025: World Languages

Capital Needs at Sheehan School

Superintendent Parks shared that the Sheehan School was considered as part of the Deerfield-Hanlon project. The Committee commissioned a design study at Sheehan. Last spring, the School Committee shared a potential timeline for undertaking the Sheehan building project based on the capacity of the district, while also managing the Hanlon-Deerfield project:

- Spring 2023: Town vote for funding for design through bidding
- Fall 2024: Town vote for funding for full project
- Fall 2026: School opens

The district applied to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for the Sheehan School, but it was rejected. The application was resubmitted again last month, with a response expected by the MSBA in December. If Sheehan were to be accepted into the MSBA program, the timeline would be longer.

There is a clear understanding of the capital needs at Sheehan, and the district is carefully determining the priority list of improvements. There are specific rules about the project scope that need to be considered. The next steps are to focus on the roof and lighting. The roof is currently under review.

Grant funding is being pursued to convert the lighting to LED. The capacity of the electrical panel at Sheehan is limited, and upgrading the lighting would free capacity.

It was suggested that the schools and the Town come together to revive a combined, long-range planning committee, which will help the community to understand where Sheehan falls on the priority list.

Chair Donahue would like the Committee to begin reviewing the Sheehan study to identify issues beyond lighting and roofs.

Vice Chair Mullin suggested that the Committee maintain Deerfield until there is a plan for Sheehan.

Proposed 2022-2023 School Committee Meeting Dates

Chair Donahue asked that Committee members review the proposed meeting dates and share any feedback.

School Start Times Subcommittee Update

Vice Chair Anthony Mullin, who is also the Chair of the School Start Times Subcommittee, provided an update.

Context

Research supports later start times for adolescents.

- Research has determined a shift in sleep cycles (circadian rhythms) beginning in adolescence makes it more difficult for most adolescents to fall asleep early. Typical sleep cycles begin around 11pm for teenagers, and continue through 8am. This means that an early school start time not only allows for only six or seven hours of sleep per school night, but also deprives adolescents of a critical part of their “deep sleep” that is part of their sleep cycle.
- Early school start times for adolescents contributes to sleep deprivation. Public health experts have declared that sleep deprivation is a national public health epidemic.
- Sleep deprivation in teens is a contributing factor for a number of health, development, mental health, well-being, and academic outcomes for adolescents. Incidences of anxiety, depression, obesity, high blood pressure, risky behaviors, and motor vehicle accidents are all increased for sleep-deprived adolescents.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics urges middle and high schools to aim for start times of 8:30am or later.

Context: Tri-Valley League Schools’ Start Times

- Dover-Sherborn: 8:35am-3:10pm
- Ashland: 8:30am-2:55pm
- Bellingham: 8:30am-3:15pm
- Holliston: 8:15am-2:43pm
- Norwood: 8:15am-2:50pm
- Medway: 8:04am-2:31pm
- Hopkinton: 8:00am-2:30pm
- Millis: 8:00am-2:20pm
- Norton: 7:40am-2:09pm
- Medfield: 7:35am-2:10pm
- Dedham: 7:35am-2:10pm
- Westwood: 7:25am-2:05pm

Survey data was then reviewed:

- 80% of parents support or are neutral on later secondary start times
- 59% of parents are very familiar or familiar with research on secondary start times
- High School parents’ perspectives on start times at 8:10am or 9am were shared
- Middle School parents’ perspectives on start times at 8:30am or 9am were shared
- Elementary parents’ responses on the impact from early start times on busing and childcare were presented
 - The impact on childcare and parents’ work schedule was cited in comments as key concerns to shifting elementary start times significantly
- 59% of students support or are neutral on later secondary start times
- After-school work commitments are the top concern of high school students
- Data on high school students’ sleep patterns was presented

Conclusions

- Overall, there is a high level of support from parents for changes to secondary start times
- 8:10 to 8:30 generally seen positively as start times for secondary, with 9am having more mixed feedback
- Need to continue to educate the community on research supporting later secondary start times, especially elementary parents
- The biggest concern, if elementary start times moved before secondary, is the impact on childcare and parents' work schedules
- Need to analyze changes in busing demand and traffic impacts
- High School students' perspectives were mixed on changes to start time, with after-school commitments, especially work, being a top concern

Criteria for Evaluation of Options

- Degree of change in secondary start times that leads to increased sleep
- Financial cost
- Impact on parents/staff work schedules, particularly impact on childcare
- Potential impact on athletics and after-school activities, including high school work schedules
- Middle and High School schedule alignment
- Degree of disruption/change

Next Steps

- May: Communication to community on survey results, FAQs, and updating timing of decision
- September: Community forum to get input on different options
- October: School Committee discussion and vote on changes to start times
- 2022-2023 School Year: Work through implementation logistics
- Fall 2023: Planned implementation of new start times at start of 2023-2024 school year

Student member Ruby Fyffe provided some insights around student results. Mrs. Parmelee asked whether Boston families were included in the elementary survey. While they were not, it was discussed at the METCO event with elementary families.

Clerk Phillips brought up the importance of considering safety when reviewing start times.

Action Items

Approval of Section A (Foundations and Basic Commitments) School Committee Policies

Chair Donahue advised that this vote is to approve the policies. At the end of the policy review, the Committee will vote to adopt all of the policies.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve Section A of the School Committee Policies. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Annual Vote on School Choice

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin that

WHEREAS the Educational Reform Act of 1993 requires that the enrollment of non-resident students under the School Choice provision unless the Committee votes by June 1 not to participate, and

WHEREAS the School Choice provision reallocates funds from the sending district and awards such funds to the receiving district, and

WHEREAS the maximum reimbursement allowed by the School Choice provision is less than Westwood's per pupil expenditure, which means Westwood Public Schools would be required to subsidize each choice student, and

WHEREAS once Westwood accepts a choice student, Westwood must keep such student through graduation, regardless of whether Westwood's demographic situation has changed, and

WHEREAS it is likely that a number of students will return to their sending districts or otherwise leave Westwood, thus creating a potential income loss, now hereby be it

RESOLVED that the Westwood School Committee respectfully declines to participate in the School Choice Program; provided, however, that if surrounding school districts subsequently, and prior to June 1, decide to accept the provisions of School Choice, the Westwood School Committee reserves the right to do likewise in order to protect its fiduciary interests in this matter.

Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Charles Donahue: Yes

Anthony Mullin: Yes

Amanda Phillips: Yes

Dorothy Parmelee: Yes

Maya Khuri Plotkin: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Vote to Ratify the Westwood Teachers' Association Collective Bargaining Agreement
This vote was tabled until the union ratification vote takes place.

Acceptance of Grant from Special Olympics Massachusetts

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to accept the grant from Special Olympics Massachusetts. Motion seconded by Maya Khuri Plotkin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Gift from American Heart Association

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to accept the grant from the American Heart Association. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Grant from the Norfolk County District Attorney's Office

MOTION made by Dorothy Parmelee to accept the grant from the Norfolk County District Attorney's Office. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Gift from the Westwood Environmental Action Committee

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to receive a gift from the Westwood Environmental Action Committee. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of School Start Times Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to accept the School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of March 30, 2022. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Policy Review Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to accept the Policy Review Subcommittee meeting minutes of March 23, 2022. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Approval of Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the School Committee meeting minutes of April 7, 2022. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Result: 4-0-1 – Approved (Mrs. Parmelee abstained.)

New Business

Amanda Phillips shared that the Centers for Disease Control released new data that gun violence is the top cause of death in students. She suggested that the community plan an event regarding the safe storage of firearms. Westwood Youth and Family Services and the Westwood Police Department have offered their assistance in planning this parent program.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 8:12pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft 2022-2023 School Committee meeting calendar
- Draft School Committee meeting minutes of April 7, 2022 for the Committee's review and approval
- Memo from A. Borchers to E. Parks regarding WPS Social Studies Curriculum Review Report Draft, dated May 6, 2022
- Memo from A. Davenport to E. Parks regarding Safe Celebration Grant, dated May 6, 2022
- Memo from A. Davenport and N. Rycroft to E. Parks regarding Westwood Environmental Action Committee Donation, dated May 6, 2022
- Memo from M. Kuklantz to E. Parks regarding Gift from American Heart Association, dated May 6, 2022
- Memo from E. Parks and L. In-baptiste regarding Sheehan Capital Needs, dated May 6, 2022
- Memo from M. Redmon to E. Parks regarding Grant from Special Olympics Massachusetts, dated May 6, 2022
- Policy Review Subcommittee meeting minutes of March 23, 2022
- School Committee Policies – Section A (Foundations and Basic Commitments)
 - AA—School District Legal Status
 - AB—The People and Their School District
 - AC—Nondiscrimination Policy Including Harassment and Retaliation

- AC-R—Nondiscrimination Policy Including Harassment and Retaliation
- ACA—Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex
- ACAB—Sexual Harassment
- ACE—Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability
- AD—Vision/Mission/Core Values
- ADC—Tobacco Products/Vaping on School Premises Prohibited
- ADD—Safe Schools Policy
- ADDA—Background Checks
- ADDA-R—DCJIS Model CORI Policy
- AE—Commitment to Accomplishment
- School Committee Policies – Section B (Board Governance and Operations)
 - BA—School Committee Operational Goals
 - BAA—Evaluation of School Committee Operational procedures
 - BB—School Committee Legal Status
 - BBA—School Committee Policies and Duties
 - BBAA—School Committee Member Authority
 - BBBA/BBBB—School Committee Member Qualifications/Oath of Office
 - BBBC—School Committee Member Resignation
 - BBBE—Unexpired Term Fulfillment
 - BCA—School Committee Member Ethics
 - BDA—School Committee Organizational Meeting
 - BDB—School Committee Officers
 - BDD—School Committee-Superintendent Relationship
 - BDE—Subcommittees of the School Committee
 - BDF—Advisory Committees to the School Committee
 - BDFA—School Councils
 - BDFA-E-1—School Improvement Plan
 - BDFA-E-2—Submission and Approval of the School Improvement Plan
 - BDFA-E-3—Conduct of School Council Business
 - BDG—School Attorney
 - BE—School Committee Meetings
 - BEC—Executive Sessions
 - BEDA—Notification of School Committee Meetings
 - BEDB—Agenda Format
 - BEDC—Quorum
 - BEDD—Rules of Order
 - BEDF—Voting Method
 - BEDG—Minutes
 - BEDH—Public Participation at School Committee Meetings
 - BEDH-E—Guidelines for Public Comment
 - BEE—Special Procedures for Conducting Hearings
 - BG—School Committee Policy Development
 - BGB—Policy Adoption
 - BGC—Policy Revision and Review
 - BGD—Committee Review of Regulations
 - BGE—Policy Dissemination
 - BGF—Suspension of Policies
 - BGH—Policy Implementation
 - BHC—School Committee-Staff Communications
 - BHE—Use of Electronic Messaging by School Committee Members
 - BIA—New School Committee Member Orientation
 - BIBA—School Committee Conferences, Conventions, and Workshops
 - BID—School Committee Member Compensation and Expenses
 - BJ—School Committee Legislative Program
 - BK—School Committee Memberships
- School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of March 30, 2022
- School Start Times Subcommittee Update slideshow presentation, dated May 12, 2022

- School Start Times Survey Results
 - Families
 - Staff
 - Students
- Social Studies Review slideshow presentation, dated May 12, 2022