

**Westwood School Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 23, 2016**

Present:

Brian Kelly - Chairperson
Josepha Jowdy- Vice Chairperson
John O'Brien, Clerk
Carol Lewis, Committee member
Charles Donahue, Committee member
Meredith Brodsky, Student Liaison

John Antonucci, Superintendent
Abby Hanscom, Director of Student Services
Heath Petracca, Director of Finance and Business

Meeting called to order 7:00

Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was recorded by WestCAT

Superintendent's report (7:01-7:24)

Student Recognition

The Committee recognized Martha Jones kindergartner Alexis Cahill, winner of the Mass Art Education Association youth art competition. Also recognized was Brianna Winn, WHS senior, National Gold Medal winner of Scholastic Art and Writing Award, for her book jacket project. Both were presented with certificates.

Update on High School Model UN Team

Mr. Bevan and 3 students from WHS spoke about the Model UN Team. It was founded 4 years ago, and the team frequently competes at interscholastic conferences across different states. They research, write a position paper, assume a role, and debate (negotiate solutions, maintain decorum) during these events.

The students said they feel more engaged in what goes on in the world, and enjoy learning about new cultures.

Mr. Bevan recognized Mr. Hilton bringing this club to the High School.

Planned upgrades by AT&T to Thurston Middle School cell tower

Mr. O'Brien mentioned this topic came up at the planning board. Mr. Petracca said AT&T is upgrading the tower over the summer (changing configuration, not adding antennas). Mr. Kelly mentioned this tower funds \$28,000 a year, in the admin/tech line item in the budget.

Additional items

Ms. Lewis asked for an update from the Science Curriculum Review committee

Allison Borchers is leading this committee.

Ms. Borchers said they have completed internal and external scans of the process, looked at objective results, and sought student feedback as well. They went to some model school programs in the area, and researched online. They reviewed curriculum standards created by DESE.

They are in the process of generating recommendations based on some of the below topics:

- o Elementary leadership needed to move elementary curriculum forward
- o Professional development opportunities
- o Expansion of engineering and computer science throughout the schools
- o Need to look at Middle School schedule (42 minutes not a lot of time for an activity/lab)
- o Middle School science literacy (reading and writing)
- o HS level- idea of independent study and research

Best measure of our success can't always be seen in test scores. We need to look at what happens after students leave WPS (post-grad surveys). Do they take science courses, declare a science major, etc.

Public participation (7:21- 7:24)

Mr. Donahue mentioned he was invited to Martha Jones School and was able to observe 5th graders teaching second graders. It was a fun form of education to help kids that are excited with computer programming. He thanked MJS Principal Donna Tobin, and said it was great that kids can begin learning about science and engineering that early.

Discussion Items (7:24-8:32)

Thurston Middle School Chromebook initiative (7:24-8:09)

Steve Oulette, Jesse Murphy

Mr. Oulette began with the Reasons to Go 1:1:

- Productivity and organization
- Teachers love elimination of computer carts
- Availability of online textbooks and resources
- Spontaneity of use
- College and career expectations - kids are digital natives, and are using computers for professional productivity
- Teacher centered-student centered – shift towards student centered learning. Kids are highly engaged with each other, learning from each other

Jesse Murphy continued to speak about the benefits they are seeing:

- Authentic learning experiences - When their work and skills are meaningful outside the classroom, it makes students more motivated, and their work is higher quality
 - One example (Health project - Social media campaigns: the Student art teacher initiated Humans of New York style idea, in order to learn more about who her students were.
 - Also learning a language- reading, writing, speaking, listening, recording, submitting so teachers can evaluate
- Personalized Learning, usually a school might have 125 students with 1 lesson to fit all of them. With the Chromebooks, kids have a choice on how to approach the lesson.
 - Pacing
 - Learning style
 - Academic skill level
- Flipped classroom – a lesson is presented through Google Classroom (recorded as a PPT). Learning is done at night so lab can be during the day (put lessons to work)

Ms. Lewis asked what is the optimal grade for flipped classroom? Mr. Oulette said he knows some research where it starts as early as 4th or 5th grade. They are still kicking the tires on when to start this. Ms. Lewis said we need those computers in the elementary school.

Mr. Oulette covered the distractibility issue, and how is this addressed:

- Freshmen in HS take a seminar- how to organize digital work

- Purchased a Teacher Dashboard (monitoring tool), gives a birds eye view of kids screens
 - Teachers can also enforce focused browsing with this tool
- Teachers teach from the back of the classroom, circulate around the room
- Continue to teach great lessons

Inevitability and readiness of staff and students was also addressed:

MCAS 2.0 will be a fully online test in 2018/19, and we need the capacity to deliver these tests online in grades 3-12.

Ms. Jowdy asked if there was a plan to roll this out to lower grades? Mr. Oulette said this needs to be done by 2018/19.

Ms. Jowdy asked what they cost. They are about \$250 each.

Mr. O'Brien asked if the apps are free? Mr. Oulette said yes, a majority of them are.

Ms. Lewis asked Ms. Borchers if a flipped classroom helps the issue of lack of lab time in the middle school. She said perhaps, they would need to look into that further.

Recommended revision to District Boundary Map for 156 Sunrise Rd. (8:09-8:11)

It was noted that 156 Sunrise Rd. is mapped to the Martha Jones School district, but all the other homes on Sunrise Rd are currently part of the Sheehan district.

Ms. Jowdy made the motion to make 156 Sunrise Rd. part of the Sheehan district.

Ms. Lewis seconded.

Official vote: Unanimous approval

Fy17 Budget Update (8:11-8:32)

Dr. Antonucci said there was an 800K gap between the proposed budget and what the town was hoping we'd present.

Presented budget at the Fin Com meeting at the beginning of March. Many Westwood residents came out to support the schools.

Board of Selectmen reached out to Mr. O'Brien to resolve the budget issues. He, Dr. Antonucci, and Mr. Petracca met with them last week.

They worked together and proposed revisions to the original budget:

- \$129,050 in FF&E moved to school capital budget, to be funded from free cash
- Remove \$64,800 in University Station bus expense from operating budget, and move it to the section of town budget called University Station Related Direct Services
- Remove \$150K from operating budget to acknowledge some impact of the students in the University Station development. To be put in the same section as above.
- Remove \$100K in SPED tuition costs; in the event the expenses are realized during the fiscal year, some type of "SPED mitigation" reserve account will cover them.

Mr. O'Brien clarified that the SPED money, if not used, would still be available to us the following year.

The Operating budget is reduced by \$443,850, so the increase now is 4.6%. In effect the original budget is fully funded.

Future considerations were mentioned:

- Competing priorities in the town, still. Will there be funds available next year?
- Town officials say that operating budgets in the range of 4% is not unreasonable
- Our ability to fund long-term capital needs is still a question mark

Vote on FY17 School budget

Ms. Jowdy made the motion to accept the proposed FY17 school budget with revisions: total budget amount is \$41,830,053

Mr. O'Brien seconded.

Discussion

Mr. O'Brien thinks this will be very good news to the town.

Official Vote: Unanimous

Mr. Donahue had some additional comments.

He thinks it is important to explain that to the public that 20% is also for social welfare (helping troubled kids). It is important to make Fin Com see the other things we are doing for the public.

Long-term capital needs, he suggested we go out and have meetings, to get a consensus that the town wants us to do something about these capital issues we are facing.

One troubling statistic is how much we spend on kids for education per pupil- we were 28th in the state in keeping up with the cost per pupil. Mr. Donahue is concerned that the decisions we make today may cause the school system to slip in the future.

Mr. Donahue also stated the he didn't think it was fair that Dr. Antonucci was getting picked on for fighting for the budget at the Fin Com meeting.

Vote on FY17 Capital Budget

Ms. Jowdy made the motion to vote on the capital budget, which totals \$885,050.

Ms. Lewis seconded.

Official vote: Unanimous approval

Action items (8:32-8:45)

Tentative approval for the 2016-17 China exchange

It was clarified that the committee needs to approve the OK to plan this trip, as it will take a tremendous amount of money and effort to put it together. The exchange would be with the same school that came here earlier this year.

Discussion:

Ms. Lewis how many kids would go? It could be as many as 20 students, open to any one, but the requirement is that they would need to host the Chinese students when they come.

Dr. Antonucci mentioned we would send 3 administrators in June to scout out the program.

Mr. O'Brien asked what grades are eligible? The grade is not determined yet, most likely upper classmen.

Ms. Brodsky thinks there would be tremendous interest across the board for this trip.

Mr. O'Brien says some people might be uncomfortable with students being in a home by themselves that far away. He said it is not prudent to not look at the other side of the coin.

Dr. Antonucci said the program we work with vets those families, and the situation is no different than the students from China coming here and staying with our families.

The committee agreed they are open to the trip planning, and they would study it when it comes before them.

Approval of minutes February 11, 2016

Motion to approve: Ms. Lewis

Seconded by Ms. Jowdy.

Official vote: Unanimous approval

New business (8:45)

None at this time

Public Participation (8:46-8:52)

A resident asked about parent feedback on Chromebooks- Mr, Oulette said there is basically zero negative feedback.

A resident reiterated positive feedback on Chromebooks, and thanked the committee for all the work they have been doing on the budget discussions.

A resident mentioned they were happy they were able to work out the budget differences. They too felt Dr. Antonucci was treated unfairly, and expressed concern about the future: that the schools are not being made much of a priority. We have to make sure we invest in the schools and maintain quality

Dr. Antonucci said the residents are the best protection we have. People move to this town for basically one reason- the schools. The residents need to be less complacent about using their voices with the town.

A resident asked about the public meeting on long-term capital needs. Dr. Antonucci said there is no date yet, hopefully in April.

Motion to adjourn: Ms. Lewis.

Seconded by Ms. Jowdy.

Official vote: Unanimous approval

Meeting adjourned at 8:52