

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
January 11, 2022
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Catherine Mirick, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Leda Eizenberg, members Melissa Martin and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Sandy Trach; Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov; and Student Advisory representatives Rachel White and Ivy Wang.

Ms. Mirick announced that the meeting is being held remotely and recorded by local media and broadcast live by Wellesley Media.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no speakers.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Martin stated that prior to break, the Committee hosted the first two Conversations with the School Committee at Bates and WHS. She noted these were great opportunities for informal conversations with members of each school community. Similar opportunities with other school communities will be scheduled in the coming weeks. Ms. Martin also provided a brief update on the paving project at WMS scheduled for this summer. She noted the Committee will receive a brief presentation by Dave Hickey at the January 19th Budget Workshop meeting.

Ms. Eizenberg stated she and Ms. Mirick visited Student Congress, where topics included COVID anxieties and restrictions, teacher expectations, and wanting school to feel like a community again. She also noted that a Policy Subcommittee meeting was held earlier in the day attended by Dr. Lussier, Ms. Orlov, and Amy Rogers. Policy ICFB - Bullying Policy, Prevention & Intervention Plan was discussed and an additional meeting will be held in the coming weeks.

Ms. Chow offered an update on the Hunnewell Track & Field projects and proposal. She and Mr. Roberti joined the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meeting on January 6 to provide an update, including sharing the response to the December 2nd neighbors' presentation. She noted there was a meeting of the neighborhood representatives last week, which may be renamed "neighborhood advisors." Regarding the bathrooms, they are moving ahead as planned. For next steps on the lighting proposal, NRC will devote the entirety of their January 20 meeting to the proposal.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier noted the middle school choral concerts have been rescheduled due to a number of student absences.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Ms. White thanked Ms. Mirick and Ms. Eizenberg for attending Student Congress, noting it was a great discussion. She stated there were four students interested in becoming Student Advisory representatives, including Ivy Wang who was in attendance at tonight's meeting. She also stated students appreciated the snow day the previous Friday, noting it brought a little bit of happiness.

Ms. Wang introduced herself, stating she was a member of the Class of 2024. She stated being a Student Advisory representative was a great opportunity and she was looking forward to learning more.

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to approve the minutes from December 8, 2021 as presented.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Eizenberg; ROLL CALL: Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes; Ms. Martin – Abstain.

MOTION CARRIED 4-0 with one abstention

Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to approve the remainder of the Consent Agenda as presented, to include meeting minutes from November 30, 2021 and December 14, 2021, Gift Acceptances, and Declaration of Surplus - Sprague music storage room furniture, Sprague cassettes and CDs.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Chow; ROLL CALL: Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

COVID UPDATE

Dr. Lussier began by stating the past few weeks have been extraordinarily challenging due to the recent surge and offered thanks to the staff for their teamwork and flexibility, offering a special thanks to the nursing staff.

Dashboard - This is updated daily. He noted that to date there have been 644 positive cases this school year with 505 just since December 25 and 358 just since January 3. It has been confirmed by the Health Department that the level of sickness has not been as severe, especially in the vaccinated population.

Athletics - There was a significant increase in cases across many winter sports over the span of a few days, which prompted the decision to temporarily pause all winter sports. They resumed less than a week later with modifications to locker room usage and spectator capacity.

Masks - The District is encouraging students and staff not to wear cloth masks in school. He noted surgical masks should be the baseline and N95 or KN95 are even better. A shipment of KN95 masks from the state were distributed to staff. He added the schools have an ample supply of surgical masks students can avail themselves of. DESE has extended the mask mandate to the end of February for now.

Rapid test kits - The District was provided one rapid test kit per staff member from the state and distributed them the Sunday before they returned after break.

Current testing protocol remains the same - Onsite symptomatic testing is conducted for staff or students when symptoms begin during the day. Close contacts who are unvaccinated and asymptomatic participate in the test and stay program, which allows them to not have to quarantine outside of school. Weekly surveillance testing is offered for Pre-K through grade 6, which has become increasingly challenging to implement. It is expected the state will recommend changes in surveillance testing.

Contact tracing - Given the surge over the past few weeks, the system is no longer feasible, which is the case for districts across the state. As a result, the process has shifted to be as targeted as possible. Families are notified when there is a case in the classroom. It is expected districts will receive additional guidance from the state.

Vaccines - Eligibility for boosters has expanded to students age 12 and up. Ms. Hulme has reached out to Pelmeds regarding scheduling additional vaccination clinics. The District is strongly urging people to be vaccinated and boosted if eligible.

In discussion with the Committee, members thanked everyone for their efforts to keep up with changing variants as well as DESE and CDC recommendations. Noting some families are still feeling nervous, Dr. Lussier stated staff at each building are doing their best to create in school accommodations particularly around eating and adapting to colder temperatures. When asked if there was data regarding student vaccination rates since 5-11 year olds have become eligible, Dr. Lussier replied the state database was not up to date due to a backlog.

2022-23 MS AND HS PROGRAM OF STUDIES

Dr. Mark Ito, WMS Principal, and Dr. Jamie Chisum, WHS Principal, joined the Committee.

Ms. Trach began by outlining proposed language changes. It is proposed that the name of the "Guidance" Department in grades 6-12 be replaced with "School Counseling" Department and that faculty titles be updated to School Counselor. Additionally, it is proposed that the "Classical and Modern Languages" Department in Grades 6-12 be replaced with "World Languages" Department and that faculty titles in PreK-12 be updated to World Language Teacher. She noted these changes reflect the current pedagogical language in these professional fields.

Dr. Ito discussed the proposed updates to the WMS Program of Studies. He noted the changes do not include any deletions or additions to courses. The proposal includes decreasing the Grade 8 six-person team to a four-person team due to declining enrollment, clarifying language around the Social and Emotional Education Development (SEED) Program as well as Advisory Program, and a potential change in the Master Schedule from a six-day cycle to a seven-day cycle. Additional updates to the Program of Studies involve description changes in the areas of English, Math and Computer Science, and Social Studies.

Dr. Chisum discussed proposed changes to the WHS Program of Studies, all of which consist of new course offerings. These include an Environmental Science interdisciplinary study open to 12th graders, a Makerspace and Design Thinking class open to all students in all grades, Modern Dance open to all grades, Senior Science Capstone open to 12th graders and designed to be more guided than an independent study, as well as a 21st Century Literature course focusing on newer works and including novels, poems, short stories, plays, film, and digital literature. This will be offered to 12th graders at Honors and ACP (Advanced College Placement) levels.

The Committee asked Dr. Ito and Dr. Chisum clarifying questions, particularly regarding the potential change in the Master Schedule at WMS and the levels of the new WHS offerings. The proposed changes will be voted on at the next meeting.

WPS ADMINISTRATION'S RECOMMENDED FY23 OPERATING BUDGET

Dr. Lussier introduced the budget by discussing various areas of focus that factored into building the budget. He noted that declining enrollment has resulted in retractions and reductions, including staff. He stated critical investments around pandemic recovery are a priority, such as adding counselors, as are additional continued investments in strategic priorities. He emphasized the importance of being creative and responsible stewards of federal resources that have become available as a result of COVID and of maximizing them in a deliberate manner. He stated tonight's presentation is to offer an overview and that a deep dive will be done the following week throughout multiple budget workshops.

Ms. Mahr presented the Administration's proposed FY23 Operating Budget. She noted that they were asked to develop two models. The first was based on joint guidance provided by the School Committee and the Select Board of a 2.75% increase, as was the guidance provided to all Town departments. This model results in a total operating budget of \$84,813,015, which represents a \$2,272,761 increase over FY22, or 2.75%. The second model was based on additional guidance from the Committee to look at a level service budget. This model results in an increase of \$1,828,149, or 2.21% over FY22.

Ms. Mahr discussed the various budget drivers that shaped the recommended budget, including enrollment, compensation, special education, Circuit Breaker reimbursement, and changes to mandated fixed costs. Key points include a projected continued decline in enrollment, an overall decrease in mandated fixed costs, and a projected continued high Circuit Breaker reimbursement rate. Compensation projections have been calculated based on the FY22 scale, as collective bargaining is ongoing.

Regarding proposed fee changes, the Administration is proposing to eliminate all Visual Art fees for grades 8-12, which currently range from \$30-200 per class, eliminate the student activity fee for grades 6-12, which is \$150 per year, and reduce the optional transportation fee by \$21 to \$500. Additionally, it is proposed to raise the Instrumentals and Vocals Extension Program (IVEP) participation rate by \$2 per hour in order to raise the instructor rate by \$1 per hour, thereby remaining competitive with neighboring communities.

Ms. Mahr discussed aspects of the strategic plan, including a pandemic recovery emphasis on math instruction at the elementary level. This will entail eliminating 4.5 elementary math paraprofessionals in favor of six Unit A math specialist teachers. Additional positions in the plan include school adjustment counselors and increasing the WMS school psychologist to a 1.0 FTE. Other critical needs include elementary building Teaching Assistants to provide coverage for recess, lunch, drop off, hallway monitoring, and covering of classrooms.

Regarding next steps, Ms. Mahr stated the budget document would be uploaded to the web site the following day to be available to the public. Budget review meetings will take place January 19 and January 20. A Budget Hearing will take place February 1 and the Committee is scheduled to vote on the recommended budget February 8 followed by a presentation to Advisory February 9. Finally, Town Meeting will vote on the budget at their Annual Meeting, which begins March 28.

QUARTERLY REVIEW - EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES FOR RELEASE

Ms. Mirick stated the Superintendent and the Committee Chair are expected to review on a quarterly basis minutes from executive session meetings to determine if any can be released. She noted at this time they do not feel any should be released.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:57 pm, Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Chow; ROLL CALL: Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Leda Eizenberg
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

Gift Acceptances 1/11/22

Declarations of Surplus - Sprague music storage room furniture, cassettes, and CDs

Memo - WHS and WMS Proposed Programs of Studies Changes 2022-2023

FY23 Recommended Budget Publication

FY23 Recommended Budget Presentation