

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
January 26, 2021
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Linda Chow, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, Secretary Catherine Mirick, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Interim Assistant Superintendent Mike LaCava; Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov; Director of Human Services Gayle McCracken; Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Dr. Charmie Curry; Director of Technology Kathy Dooley; and Student Advisory representative Rachel White.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Peter Linkow, of 38 Parker Rd., joined to advocate for allocation of funds for the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) Department in the FY22 budget. He believes an annual budget will make the work more effective and establish accountability. He recommends \$100,000 be reallocated from other line items in the budget.

Greg Hurray, of 9 Bacon St., stated eliminating the achievement gap and including all students in the culture of schools to develop agency will take a lot of work. He believes the District can achieve almost all goals in the next five years if steps are taken. He stated the office of DE&I needs a dedicated budget to work towards these goals.

Phuong Petersen, of 24 Cedar St., acknowledged the progress made by the District in dedicating a leader to the DE&I process. She believes it is important to continue to support these efforts and asked the District to continue the commitment by making sure DE&I initiatives are sustained for years to come and become a line item in the budget.

Evelyn Harrison, of 56 High Ledge Ave., has an eighth grader at WMS. She has heard firsthand how passionate students are about doing DE&I work. She believes relying on grants does not portray a positive image of prioritization and asks that funds in the budget be reallocated specifically to DE&I.

Wendy Englehardt, of 19 Kirkland Circle, is a Sprague parent. She noted that where she works DE&I has been given a budget and woven into the backbone of the business. She was struck by how DE&I lies at the heart of the District's core values and believes a dedicated budget for the department is a supporting investment to all other departments.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Mirick noted the Student Wellness Advisory Committee recently met and discussed how everyone is feeling stress and anxiety this year and brainstormed what could be of help. She stated one idea was keeping lines of communication open and letting everyone know people are supporting each other. Another idea was to send a note to a teacher they love to offer positive support.

She also noted the town wide Mobility Committee had met twice since the last School Committee meeting. The committee submitted a Community Connector Grant request to get covered bike racks at the middle school. The committee is working with a consultant on a

sustainable mobility plan to fold in with the climate action plan to develop a vision of transportation in Wellesley.

Ms. Martin offered her thanks to World of Wellesley and a number of students for facilitating their Martin Luther King, Jr. breakfast, which was held via Zoom. She stated it was a fabulous event with opportunities for breakout rooms and small group discussions and people engaged in thoughtful discussions.

Ms. Chow stated she and Ms. Mirick hosted office hours on January 14th. Topics included COVID metrics and the District's dashboard. Additionally, she attended the Boston PTO/PTSO meeting via Zoom. She noted Dr. Curry and Interim METCO Director Cynthia Russell did an excellent job facilitating the meeting, which had well over 90 attendants. She reported that she and Mr. Roberti were participants in the Influence 100 program, which is working to increase racial and ethnic diversity of Superintendents in the state, to help create more culturally responsive districts and leaders, and promote better outcomes for students. Finally, she noted there was another session of the Culturally Responsive Practice Leadership Academy (CRPLA) on January 15th, in which they watched a BBC documentary on the history of racism and had breakout discussions.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier began by officially welcoming Nora Wilkins as the new principal of the Remote Learning School (RLS).

He discussed a message that went out to the Sprague community from principal Leigh Petrowsky. Over the previous weekend a family found a suspicious pill on the playground. He noted they did the correct thing by notifying the Wellesley Police Department (WPD) and giving them the pill. Administration was also notified. WPD is investigating. All elementary principals have been notified to be extra vigilant and to remind their students to report anything suspicious to an adult. He thanked WPD for their partnership.

He recognized the Wellesley High School students who were selected for the 2021 All Eastern Honors Ensembles. The students qualified by receiving a top score at the Massachusetts Music Educators Association All-State festival last year.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes - December 22, 2020 and January 12, 2021

Ms. Chow entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as amended.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

COVID-19 UPDATES

Dr. Lussier began by summarizing the case tracker, noting it is updated as close to real time as possible. The district has had 121 positive cases. Of those, 85 are students, which is approximately 70%, and 36 are staff. Over 70% of cases continue to be identified through external testing. Administration continues to encourage anyone who is symptomatic to be tested at an outside testing site. Around 70% of the cases are at the secondary level.

He discussed that the Governor announced the state is moving forward with a pool testing option and is encouraging districts to join a six-week pilot. This testing uses a different model than what Wellesley is using. Dr. Lussier believes continuing with the model the District is already using is the right thing to do. He notes the state has been open to exploring ways to financially support districts that have been doing their own testing, though there have been no commitments.

He then discussed the District's dashboard. He reminded the Committee that it was developed at the end of summer to help guide the Administration's practice around when to switch from hybrid to remote. It is focused on the number of new cases and rates of positivity at the state, county, and local levels. With Wellesley's incidence rate being markedly lower than the county's and state's and with its testing program, there have been many conversations with the Health Department and Board of Health regarding revising the dashboard metrics to allow for targeted action at classroom or school level, which the Administration has found to be effective. In that context, the Administration has been working with colleagues to think about what a new dashboard could look like with more localized measures. They will be presenting the revised dashboard in draft form at a webinar on Thursday January 28th to present their rationale about why they think the change should occur. There will be ample time for Q&A after the presentation. A Zoom link went out to the school community and the slide deck and recorded session of the presentation will be posted on the District's website.

Finally, Dr. Lussier discussed vaccinations for school personnel. He noted school nurses were in Phase 1 and most WPS nurses have been vaccinated or will be soon. The remainder of public education staff was moved down the priority list a little. He stated his disappointment to learn that municipalities will not be receiving the vaccine to administer on their own for categories identified in Phase 2, as it was hoped the District would be able to vaccinate its staff. Rather, the state's plan is to rely on mass vaccination sites such as Fenway Park and Gillette Stadium.

RLS TRANSFER UPDATE

Mr. LaCava provided an update on families who requested to return to the hybrid model from the RLS. The transfer will take place at the semester break. In total, of the 497 students initially enrolled in RLS, 67 requested to return to hybrid. Of those, 25 were at the elementary level, 24 at the middle school, and 8 at the high school. He then explained the process families underwent to make the transfer. In December, a survey was sent out to all RLS families, of which approximately 85% responded. Families who did not respond to the survey will remain in RLS. The lists of families requesting a transfer were sent to principals. From there, there was coordination between principals, Guidance, transportation, and METCO to facilitate the requests. All schools were able to accommodate RLS students moving back except Bates, for which the District is working on alternate plans. Bates principal Toni Jolley has communicated with each of those families. Mr. LaCava commended Toni Carlson for her tremendous work.

Ms. Wilkins added that the RLS had received several requests emails from parents expressing their thanks and gratitude for the RLS and having the option. They stated they were requesting the transfer because of missed socialization and because they feel safe going back. She added the schools have been going above and beyond to reach out to students who are coming back.

In discussion with the Committee, it was noted that middle and high school students will begin surveillance testing upon their return to the buildings. It was also noted that the transfers were fairly evenly distributed across the grades, bringing RLS class sizes down only slightly, not necessitating any reconfigurations of classes. Ms. Wilkins stressed that there will be continued communication to be sure any gaps in curriculum due to transition are addressed and noted at

each level RLS educators have been maintaining contact with their counterparts in the buildings to establish continuity.

SY21-22 STUDENT REGISTRATION UPDATE

Ms. Mahr began by explaining how the registration process will be different this year, as all registrations will be online and there will not be the traditional in-person Kindergarten Round-Up. Given registration has been virtual since March, she states the District has experience and has been able to work through early hiccups. The last week of January, the Administration has been working to communicate to the community what the timeline will be. Registration for Kindergarten will begin February 1st. A letter will go out to all individuals who were deferred from this year or who were on the census as being eligible, which is approximately 270 families. The [registration forms](#) will be available on the District's web site starting February 1st. On March 1st, enrollment for grades 1-12 will open as well as open enrollment, which will close on April 30th. All completed registration forms are to be submitted to registrar@wellesleyps.org. The Registrar is available to answer questions any time via email or phone. The forms will be translated into Spanish and Simplified Chinese and can be translated in other languages upon request. The District has narrowed down a search for an online registration platform with the hope it will be ready by July 1st.

In discussion with the Committee, Ms. Mahr noted the Administration will utilize their relationship with town partners to advertise to new and returning families regarding registration. She also noted that the District won't have firm enrollment numbers until closer to the beginning of the school year.

DISCUSSION: FY22 BUDGET

Advisory liaisons Jenn Fallon and Lauren Duprey joined the meeting.

Ms. Chow began by reminding the Committee and the community that the guidance given to the Administration from the School Committee was to build a budget that followed the guideline received from the Select Board of a 2.5% increase over last year's budget as well as a level service budget. The guidance was also to use the enrollment assumptions that had been developed based on Future Think insights and detailed in the enrollment report previously presented by Ms. Mahr.

She also reminded the Committee of the assumptions that were made in previous budget discussions. These include the assumption that the District will be full in-person in the fall, that there will be no strategic improvements requested in the budget, and acknowledgement that if the District is still dealing with COVID in the fall, there will be a need to look for and advocate for additional funding. It is recognized that, due to remote and hybrid learning, there may be educational gaps and the budget would need to reflect that. The Administration came back after the holidays with a recommended budget that is in line with the Select Board's guidance. The Committee will vote on the final budget at the February 9th meeting.

The first topic of discussion with the Committee involved projected enrollment. Using the agreed upon modified enrollment projection, there is an anticipated decline in enrollment at the high school. Therefore, the budget will reflect a reduction in one section across each of the content areas. Generally, a section is the equivalent of a 0.2 FTE. The reductions will vary across grades depending on signups. At the elementary level, the budget plans for 107 sections while typical enrollment would project the need for 100. Budgeting for 107 sections aligns with both level services and Select Board guidance and allows for flexibility depending on enrollment while showing thoughtful and reasonable effort at accuracy. Ms. Fallon asked if Committee and

Administration members would be willing to join Advisory to discuss enrollment, perhaps even prior to on March 3rd when the School Department is currently scheduled to present the FY22 budget to Advisory. Dr. Lussier stated they'd be happy to engage. Ms. Gray added it was her understanding based on the budget workshops that any cuts suggested were enrollment driven, not program driven.

Discussion then centered on DE&I and the public comments urging a dedicated budget for the department. Dr. Lussier noted that DE&I work is part of the District's strategic plan and they are looking to build off the work that has been done to go deeper and be more impactful. While he acknowledged there was a natural relationship between district priorities and budget line items, he stated a budget is an imperfect representation of where work is happening in a district. He stated DE&I work throughout the District has increased and is embedded across all classrooms and all schools. He noted Dr. Curry will make a presentation at the next meeting regarding current work and a multiyear plan. Ms. Martin added she was grateful to hear from the community regarding their budget priorities and from the middle school student who spoke about the DE&I discussions happening in her class.

In further discussion, Ms. Mirick noted the District was able to build a budget that was close to the 2.5% guideline largely due to decreases in special education expenses and one-time COVID expenditures as well as stretching technology devices beyond their natural life. She wanted to be sure it was acknowledged that wasn't something that can be done year over year. Mr. Roberti added it was important to be aware of structural changes that can arise suddenly.

Ms. Chow concluded the discussion by stating that the District is fortunate to have an administrative team that has taken a thoughtful approach to the budgeting process and that arrived at a budget that is in line with the School Committee and Select Board's guidance. She thanked them for their work.

HARDY AND HUNNEWELL UPDATES

Ms. Gray offered an update on the Hunnewell project. She stated the design and permitting processes were going on in parallel with nothing currently of note in the permitting process. In the design process, discussion at Permanent Building Committee (PBC) has involved conditions within the Project of Significant Impact (PSI) permit that need to be met within the budget. They are going through a cost estimating process and will provide a more formal update in February. She noted there is also significant discussion regarding outdoor classrooms, though no decisions have been made.

She discussed that she, Ms. Martin, and Matt King will be going to Advisory on January 27th to provide updates on the Hardy and Hunnewell projects. As there are seven new Advisory members, this will be an opportunity to describe the projects and answer any questions about them. It will not be a budget discussion.

The final topic regarding the Hunnewell project was appointing a new School Committee liaison to the PBC, as Ms. Gray's term on the School Committee will soon be complete. Ms. Martin proposed that someone be appointed to her current alternate position so as to get up to speed with the project. Then after the election, this appointed alternate would become the liaison and Ms. Martin would resume being the alternate. Ms. Mirick and Mr. Roberti both offered to be appointed.

Mr. Roberti made a motion to appoint Catherine Mirick as alternate School Committee liaison to the Permanent Building Committee for the Hunnewell project. Ms. Martin seconded.

ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin
– Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Ms. Gray left the meeting at 8:51.

Ms. Martin provided an update on the Hardy project. She stated the project has entered the schematic design phase, following the same process as Hunnewell approximately one year behind. January 26th was the first Town Development Review Team (TDRT) meeting, a preliminary meeting to look at the site plan and preplanning for permitting. The project is moving forward with a Construction Manager at Risk model. Ms. Martin and Dr. Lussier will be involved in the committee conducting the prequalification process in February. The aim is for the schematic design to be submitted to MSBA in July.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lina Musayev, of 26 Cedar St., joined to commend and thank the School Committee and Administration for their commitment to DE&I including the hiring of a DE&I director. She believes it is necessary to dedicate a budget outside of grants to the department. She presented a letter signed by over 200 Wellesley parents agreeing with this belief. She noted they are not asking for additional money to be added to the budget, they are asking for reallocation. She stated it is important to the community to see a commitment to DE&I by the District.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 9 pm, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Mirick
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

RLS Update to School Committee
Student Registration Presentation 1-26-21