

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 15, 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; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov; Advisory Member Susan Clapham; and Student Advisory representatives Rachel White, Ivy Wang, Sofia Dobado, Jeremy Lee, Evelyn Harrison, and Abraham Budson-McQuilken.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ashley Ranaldi, of 9 Patten Rd., has two WHS alumni and a current sophomore. She stated she was concerned about continued masking and asked that the mandate be removed as of March 7, as the Committee has previously discussed. She was encouraged by Dr. Lussier's message regarding the protection offered by one-way masking. Additionally, she stated metrics need to be put in place for when masks might be needed again.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Chow discussed Article 31 on the Town Meeting warrant from the Recreation Commission who would like to enforce a policy in place that prohibits or discourages leveraging town resources for commercial benefit. As an example, private tennis instructors have been using courts and providing lessons without acquiring a proper permit. Given the tennis courts are on land owned by both the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and the School Committee, both boards are being asked to approve the article. She noted the Committee will discuss the article at the next meeting.

Ms. Mirick stated the budget was presented to Advisory the previous week. Advisory then discussed it at their next meeting and came up with more questions. She added the School Committee will likely go back to them at their March 2 meeting to answer questions.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier offered the following recognitions:

Performing Arts Director Mike LaCava is pleased to announce that 22 Wellesley High School and Middle School Music Students were recently selected for the 2022 Eastern Junior District Ensembles and 6 students from Wellesley High School were selected to participate in the All-State Music Ensembles.

Congratulations to all the students involved and to the faculty members who assisted the student in preparing for the auditions: Directors Kevin McDonald, Steve Scott, Dave Adams, Lauren Connors and Sergey Khanukaev.

He noted today is National School Resource Officer Day. He offered a shoutout to Matt Wall and Kathy Poirier, stating they are integral parts of the school community and do so much to build relationships through daily work supporting students, staff, and families. He also

acknowledged Winnie, the district's service dog, as an "honorary SRO" who has been a huge addition to the engagement with WPD.

He noted earlier that day, Ms. Mirick and Colette Aufranc joined with Meghan Jop and staff members from the Safe Routes to School program. He emphasized the town's commitment to sustainability and their ambitious goals, adding progress continues to be made in reducing traffic.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Mr. Lee stated he and others attended the Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) Student Representative Conference on February 13. It was attended by student and adult leaders and discussions included the role of student representatives and what it means to be representatives of all students in the district, not just high school. He added they plan to continue working with MASC in the future.

Ms. Wang discussed ideas to make the School Committee more well known to all students. One is by encouraging WHS and WMS students to participate in Public Comment and another is for the student representatives to visit WMS to ask the middle school students what they think and if they have ideas to share.

Ms. Harrison stated WHS is preparing for Seminar Day on March 2. They are looking for community members, parents, and students who have a passion, skill, or story they would be willing to share to be speakers. These are hour-long seminars. She encouraged people to sign up soon so faculty leaders can be in touch after break. Anyone interested can reach out to her at her WPS email address.

CONSENT AGENDA

Meeting Minutes – February 1, 2022

Gift Acceptances

Surplus Materials Memo - Hunnewell books, cassettes, VHS tapes

Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

WHS LED INDOOR LIGHTING PROPOSAL

Joe McDonough from the Facilities Management Department (FMD) joined the Committee.

Mr. McDonough discussed Article 21 on the upcoming Town Meeting warrant, which is the High School LED Replacement Project. The request in this article is for \$1,200,000, which will be funded from Free Cash. He explained this is part of a larger, 11-year project to replace all fluorescent lights one-for-one with new LED lights. By the end of FY22 the project will be approximately 50% complete and will be 100% complete in FY25. The total cost of the project is projected to be \$6,500,000 with an overall life cycle cost analysis showing full payback in less than five years.

He explained this current Phase II includes the high school. WHS uses 28% of the town's electricity and there are approximately 3,000 lights to be replaced. He stated next steps are to present to Advisory on February 16 then seek approval at spring Town Meeting. If passed, the project will begin with anticipated completion in 2024.

The Committee thanked Mr. McDonough for his presentation.

At this point in the meeting Ms. Martin, noting she would need to leave the meeting early, took a moment to acknowledge Mr. Roberti's service on the School Committee, as this would be their last meeting together. She offered her thanks to him for being willing to serve on the committee for "Round 2" and for all his contributions to the community while also serving on another board. Mr. Roberti thanked Ms. Martin for being a good friend and colleague.

COVID UPDATE

Dr. Lussier stated the community, and more specifically the schools, has remained on a positive trajectory regarding trend in overall case counts, which peaked after winter break and has steadily declined since. In addition the Health Department continues to see fewer serious implications than in earlier strains, which is in large part due to high vaccination rates in town. Including staff and students, all WPS buildings (except PAWS) are now above the 80% vaccination threshold.

The statewide indoor mask mandate for schools will expire February 28 and decisions after that will be up to localities. He stated in continuing conversations with the Health Department and Board of Health (BOH), all agree it is important to continue making steps towards normalcy. As the end of the mandate coincides with the return from February vacation, the current draft proposal for WPS is to allow for one additional week to manage anything that could happen as a result of vacation and travel then go to a mask optional environment as of March 7. He noted those who prefer to continue wearing masks will be welcome. There will be a meeting with the Joint Labor-Management Committee (JLMC) February 18 to review the rationale and answer questions with the hope of bringing the proposal to the Committee the week after break for a formal vote. Ms. Hulme added there will be a need to educate students to ensure a positive culture around individual decisions regarding mask wearing. Dr. Lussier noted a federal mandate is still in place for masking on public transportation. Additionally, masks will be required in nursing suites and health offices.

In discussion, Committee members expressed their appreciation for feedback and input from the community as well as the concerted efforts to keep messaging consistent across town, with the Select Board agreeing to remove the mask mandate from town buildings as of March 7. Additionally, it was noted that the District does reserve the right to reinstate a mandate if warranted. It was noted that it remains important to be mindful of sensitivities and anxieties around this adjustment and any family with specific medical situations should engage in conversation with their school nurse. All aspects of the mitigation changes will be monitored very carefully.

Ms. Martin left the meeting at 7:30 pm.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Dr. Jamie Chisum, WHS Principal, and Dana Plunkett, WHS Head of Guidance, joined the Committee.

Ms. Mirick introduced the topic by stating there is a citizen's petition on the Town Meeting warrant that looks to advise WPS that academic excellence should take priority over all other initiatives and funds should be expended in a manner that reflects the priority to return WHS to a top five ranking by the US News and World Report.

Dr. Lussier stated there have been conversations regarding what academic excellence looks like and what are 21st century needs, noting schools have been redefining themselves to meet the needs of the future. Additionally, he noted excellence means equity in excellence and success for all students academically as well as socially and emotionally. He, Dr. Chisum, and Ms. Plunkett addressed WPS' measurable academic excellence in the following areas.

Rankings - Several media outlets produce rankings and US News and World Report is one of the better known. In 2021, it ranked WHS 26th in Massachusetts. Their top ranked traditional public high school is Bromfield School in Harvard, which they ranked 5th overall. The difference in overall score between 5th and 26th was minimal: 98.82 compared to 96.11. This ranking compares college readiness, AP exams, math and reading proficiency, and graduation rate.

Advanced Placement (AP) - A longitudinal look at AP tests at WHS since 2013 shows significant growth both in the number of students taking at least one test and number of tests taken. If a particular course is not offered at WHS or if the course will not fit into a student's schedule, students may take an online course through a virtual high school. Ms. Plunkett added that there is not a certain number of AP courses that colleges look for but rather the level of rigor of a student's schedule in the context of their school.

MCAS - Per the data from spring 2021 testing, WHS scored the second highest in the state in math, only slightly behind Lexington, and was tied for the top spot in ELA. Outside of high school, grades 3-8 compared favorably to comparable communities. Dr. Lussier also cautioned against the use of a single year of data, particularly during a pandemic, to determine success or failure.

SAT/ACT - Often viewed as a high profile indicator, mean SAT and ACT scores for WHS show a similar trajectory of improvement from 2016 through 2021.

College acceptance - Overall, acceptance rates at colleges have decreased across the US due to a surge of applications over the last few years, particularly with more colleges moving to a test-optional model. Wellesley is consistent in its students acceptance rates with even a slight increase. Ms. Plunkett noted that on average, colleges are seeing about half of their applicants submitting standardized test scores and they are accepting approximately 50% or greater who did not submit tests, indicating that test scores are becoming less important.

Accreditation, PISA, enrollment - In addition to addressing the specific metrics noted in the citizens petition, other highlights were discussed. Dr. Chisum explained the extensive NEASC accreditation process WHS goes through every ten years, consisting of a year-long qualitative and quantitative self study, a team of 20 peer educators examining the school, observing classes, and interviewing parents, students, and faculty. He also stated that in 2019 WPS had the opportunity to participate in the PISA exam, which is offered every three years around the world and consists of a random sampling of 15 year olds. As a district, WPS scored higher than every country who participated in math, reading, and science. The next closest mean score was Singapore. Regarding enrollment, Dr. Lussier stated there has been an acute drop in enrollment as a result of COVID on top of an already decade-long trajectory of decline in enrollment. Looking back over several decades to when there were 12 elementary schools, the community has gone through significant trends over time that have seen large drops then increases then

drops again. There is currently no way to know if new trends are being developed as a result of the pandemic and there are many factors that impact enrollment, including housing affordability and birth rates.

Ms. Trach discussed how equity and excellence go hand in hand in working towards the goal of ensuring all students are secure in benchmarks at the end of each grade level. She stated the collective focus is on academic as well as social emotional learning and support. She explained how professional learning focusing on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and High Expectations Teaching provide a method of rigor, a growth mindset, and culturally proficient instruction to improve student achievement. She outlined academic and social emotional supports provided to students, including math intervention, academic tutoring, Open Circle, and school adjustment counselors.

After a brief discussion, the Committee thanked Dr. Chisum and Ms. Plunkett for joining the presentation and thanked Dr. Lussier, Ms. Trach, and their teams for their continued hard work.

HUNNEWELL TRACK & FIELD LIGHTING

Ms. Chow offered updates on the Hunnewell Track & Field projects and sought input from the Committee on how to proceed. In light of discussions around town, including with the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF), she reiterated that the proposal for lighting is focused solely on scholastic use and that any talk about expanding it would be problematic. Additionally, a few NRC commissioners have stated they would like temporary lights to be used, though Ms. Chow reiterated this was not a viable option. Regarding the proposal as a whole, she stated there has not been substantial feedback from the NRC other than a question around incremental costs associated with having games under lights, to which Ms. Chow responded. She stated the NRC's process remains unclear. They have scheduled a public hearing for February 17, though it is not clear they will take a vote without providing feedback to the School Committee. She appreciates the increase in comments and emails of support from the community and hopes people attend the public hearing. She asked the Committee if they should ask for a joint meeting with NRC.

In discussion among the Committee, Mr. Roberti noted Wellesley has one of highest sports participation rates in the state, a state of the art stadium, and has worked with experts to identify measures to mitigate impacts on neighborhoods. Ms. Mirick stated the NRC needs to be clear with the town and schedule a date to vote on the proposal. Ms. Chow added her hope there can be a back and forth conversation between the two elected boards before a vote is taken. Ms. Eizenberg expressed her appreciation for all of Ms. Chow's and Mr. Roberti's hard work, adding it is not clear where the goalposts are.

POLICY JICFB - BULLYING POLICY, PREVENTION & INTERVENTION PLAN

Ms. Chow stated there was a meeting of the Policy Subcommittee earlier in the day with Ms. Eizenberg, Dr. Lussier, Ms. Orlov, and Amy Rogers, during which they drafted a revision of the policy. She added it will be presented for discussion at next week's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Committee was joined by Jay McHale, Tom Ulfelder, and Representative Alice Peisch to pay tribute to Mr. Roberti, as this was his final meeting as a member of the School Committee.

Dr. Lussier offered his appreciation on behalf of WPS staff and Administration for Mr. Roberti's commitment to public education, to the district, and to families, especially in the past two extraordinarily challenging years. He stated Mr. Roberti was a steadfast advocate for schools and was not afraid to stand up and defend what was right and defend the district's core values. He added that personally he appreciated their professional work relationship and friendship.

Mr. McHale and Mr. Ulfelder stated they appreciated working with Mr. Roberti. They remarked that Mr. Roberti cares a lot about the students and making their school experience as positive as possible. They wished him luck in his future adventures and looked forward to his continued service on the Planning Board.

Rep. Peisch remembered when Mr. Roberti was first elected to the School Committee in the 1990s, when the issue motivating him was special education, noting he has been a fierce advocate to ensure students were well-served. She thanked him for his years of service.

Ms. Mirick stated that Mr. Roberti always had his ear to the ground in order to bring the community's concerns forward to the Committee and that he would be missed. Ms. Eizenberg added that as a parent, one knew they could call Mr. Roberti with questions and he would listen. She appreciated learning from him. Ms. Chow stated it had been an adventure working with him and that she valued their conversations and his guidance. Mr. Budson-McQuilken added his thanks on behalf of the students for all Mr. Roberti's contributions.

Mr. Roberti thanked everyone for their kind words. He noted it was hard to say goodbye and how it had been an emotional few days. He stated his service has not been about him but rather about the people he worked with and the people they have helped. He thanked the School Committee members, the Administration, principals, and parents.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 9:11 pm, Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

MOTION CARRIED 4-0

Respectfully submitted,

Leda Eizenberg
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

WHS LED Project Presentation

WPS Academic Excellence Conversation 2.2022

Update on Hunnewell Track & Field Proposal for School Committee 2.15.2022