

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
August 24, 2021
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; Director of Nursing Ashley Hulme; and Student Advisory representative Rachel White.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Benjapon Jivasantikarn and husband David of 56 Beechwood Rd. stated they were happy to hear there will be a mask mandate to begin the year. They added they hoped additional measures would be added at elementary schools to make it safer for young kids who cannot be vaccinated. They stated that since the delta variant has shown to be twice as infectious, mitigation measures should be at least as rigorous.

Lisa Huang stated she has three young kids unable to be vaccinated and joined to share her concerns over the decision to have masking be the only layer of protection. She believes the District should participate in the state testing program and look into mandating vaccines. Additionally, she asked what would be required for remote learning to be considered again.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Eizenberg attended the recent meeting of the Waste and Natural Resources subcommittee of the Climate Action Committee (CAC). She noted there was interest from those devising a plan to both meet carbon goals and overall environmental goals to return to the solid waste diversion program. Noting this is more the purview of the Facilities Management Department (FMD), she added the hope is to connect someone from the schools, FMD, and CAC to discuss restarting and expanding the solid waste diversion program.

Ms. Chow provided an update on the Hunnewell Track & Field projects. She stated postcards were sent to abutters, inviting the neighborhood to respond to a survey. Knowing people may still be away on summer vacations, the survey will remain open a while longer. She noted the proposed lighting design was submitted to the International Dark-Sky Association. They are currently waiting on the final report, at which point the design will be Dark Sky certified.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier stated school begins Wednesday, September 1, which will be a half day at the elementary level and a full day at WMS and WHS. He added September has a number of holidays and encouraged parents to look for "Back to School" messages from schools for further details. There is also a District calendar on the web site.

He stated new teacher orientation begins August 25. Ms. Trach will be working with the Teaching & Learning and Human Resources teams to onboard the new staff members and assign mentors. Additionally, the All-Staff Kickoff is Monday, August 30 when all staff report back for the year. The event will be remote.

He noted the Administration received a demand to bargain from Wellesley Educators Association (WEA) about aspects of the District's COVID mitigation strategies. They will meet in the coming days to begin bargaining.

Finally, Dr. Lussier stated at the next meeting on August 31 he will bring forward a recommendation regarding Star Academy, which is a gifted and talented program that has applied to be approved as a new private school in Wellesley. They will be located in the space previously occupied by St. Paul.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Ms. White stated that on Monday, August 30, the senior class will go on what is usually known as the Junior Boat Cruise. She added it will be nice to get together as a senior class, which they have not been able to do in a while.

CONSENT AGENDA

Meeting Minutes 8/10/21

Declaration of Surplus - Sprague, WHS

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

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

HUNNEWELL PROJECT UPDATE

VOTE: HUNNEWELL SCHOOL 90% CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENT ESTIMATE

Ms. Mirick stated there will be a presentation to Advisory on both Hardy and Hunnewell projects on August 25 at 6:30. She noted that she will attend along with Ms. Martin, Dr. Lussier, and Ms. Mahr to provide an overview of the details of both projects.

She reminded the Committee of the discussion and numbers from the 90% construction document presented at the previous meeting. She added the Committee will take a final vote on 100% documents before the Town Meeting vote in October, noting they will have received bids from contractors before Town Meeting.

Ms. Mirick also noted that approximately \$1,000,000 included in this number will likely come out before Town Meeting, as the Municipal Light Plant (MLP) has agreed to incur the cost of the PV arrays. The plan is to do the same for Hardy, but that decision will come later.

Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to support the Hunnewell school project moving forward to Advisory with the 90% construction document bid estimate of \$54,937,000.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

START OF SCHOOL COVID-19 MEASURES

Dr. Lussier stated the Administration was informed the previous Friday that the Commissioner of Education would seek authority from the Massachusetts Board of Education to initiate a statewide mask mandate for the month of September. The vote occurred the day of this meeting, August 24, authority was granted. He expects a formal announcement from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on August 25. This will mandate universal indoor masking of staff and students regardless of vaccination status for the month of September. After October 1, vaccinated middle school and high school staff and students in districts in which 80 percent of students and staff are vaccinated can lift the mask mandate, though that is subject to change based on conditions at the time.

He offered a summary of guidance received to date. The CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all students age 2+ and all staff and visitors regardless of vaccination status. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has provided a similar recommendation. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) recommends indoor masking for grades K through 6. The CDC, AAP, and DPH have provided consistent guidance that masks are not needed outdoors or when eating. WPS is recommending all staff and students wear masks indoors regardless of vaccination with the decision to be revisited in early October. The Wellesley Board of Health has voted to recommend indoor masking. He added that an FAQ document will be sent out with additional details based on the School Committee vote.

Dr. Lussier and Ms. Hulme then offered a summary of the [FAQ document](#) and answered questions from the Committee to include the following, among other topics:

Regarding **physical distancing**, DESE has made no requirements and WPS will not require distancing; however, students will be outside as much as possible.

Regarding **remote learning**, districts have not been authorized by the State to offer a remote learning option. Longer term absences will be supported in ways seen prior to pandemic. The FAQ details a very few exceptions. Additionally, without the option to shift to remote for heat days or other conditions, if it is necessary to cancel school for any reason, those days will be added to the end of year.

Regarding **assigned seating**, due to ongoing obligations to conduct contact tracing, there will be assigned seating in classrooms but there will not be on buses or in the cafeteria.

Regarding **vaccinations**, vaccination rates for the school community are currently very high, with staff vaccinated at just under 90% and eligible students over 80% already and ticking up. There are currently no active conversations regarding a vaccine mandate at the District level.

WPS has been accepted into the **state testing program** and will offer on-site, rapid/antigen testing for students and staff who exhibit COVID symptoms while at school. Additionally, a “test and stay” plan will be used for asymptomatic close contacts, allowing them to stay in school while they are being tested each day for 5-7 days.

The District will not conduct **surveillance testing** to begin the year. If the situation were to change, this could be brought online quickly through the State as a way to augment other two pieces of testing. Dr. Lussier stated the District did not feel it was warranted at this time and that the Board of Health was in agreement.

Regarding **close contacts**, Ms. Hulme explained the most current definition is within 6 feet of a positive individual while indoors for at least 15 mins in a 24-hour period. She outlined the exemptions for close contacts not needing to quarantine or be tested, including asymptomatic,

fully vaccinated contacts and instances where both individuals were masked and at least three feet apart. She added she is seeking clarification if test and stay can be applied to vaccinated individuals as well, given breakthrough cases. She also stated she believes exempted individuals will still be notified of their close contact status.

Dr. Lussier then discussed items in the FAQ that are still to be determined, namely **volunteers in school buildings, field trips, and performing arts**. He noted that while districts await further information and guidance from the State, the District will start the year with very little access to buildings as a precaution and field trips will be limited with discretion used. He added Mike LaCava is working with Ms. Mahr around protocols for performing arts and more details will be shared when they are available.

Finally, they discussed **student illness and absences**. Students should stay home if they are experiencing fever, runny nose, or a cold. If a student begins to experience these symptoms at school, they will be tested at school. To report absences, parents fill out a Google form, the link for which is available on their student's school's homepage. The school nurse will receive the form response. Ms. Martin inquired as to how students return to school after staying home with symptoms. Ms. Hulme stated if a child is kept home, they can return to school with physician clearance with or without a PCR test.

Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to support the administration's proposed COVID-19 mitigation strategies for SY2021-22, including that all students and staff, except students who cannot do so due to documented medical conditions or behavioral needs, begin the school year wearing masks indoors and that we re-evaluate the necessity for masks after October 1st in cooperation with the Board of Health.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:06 pm, Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Martin; 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:

Declaration of Surplus - Sprague

Declaration of Surplus - WHS

WPS COVID-19 FAQ for SY2021-22