

Approved November 15, 2022

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Zoom Video Conference
Wednesday, November 9, 2022, 6:30 p.m.**

Those present from Advisory Committee included Shawn Baker, Doug Smith, Madison Riley, Rani Elwy, Gail Sullivan, Pete Pedersen, Jeff Levitan, Jenn Fallon, Christina Dougherty, Wendy Paul, David Prock, Susan Clapham

Shawn Baker called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and Doug Smith conducted roll call.

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

School Committee Presentation – Overview and Objectives

Leda Eizenberg, Chair, School Committee (SC); Linda Chow, Vice Chair, SC; and David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools were present and provided an update and overview of the Wellesley Public Schools. In addition to David Lussier, participants from the Wellesley Public Schools included Sandra Trach, Assistant Superintendent/Teaching and Learning; Cindy Mahr, Assistant Superintendent/Finance and Operations; Jorge Allen, Interim Director of DEI; Kat Bernklow, Director of Student Services; Monica Visco, Director of Human Resources; Megan Bounit, Director of Educational Technology; and Sharon Gray, Coordinator for Community Engagement.

Questions/Comments

- What does DESE ask of the schools and how do they impact day-to-day work?
 - Education is often known for local control. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is the state regulatory office that sets standards for schools, accountability; manages the flow of money through grants; and has an obligation to the federal government . DESE puts into place new policies and regulations that the schools need to be responsive to. There are compliance checks across the organization. It is very comprehensive. DESE looms large in most aspects of the school’s work.
- Student Opportunity Act was established in 2019; what was done prior to this going into effect and did this impact the school budget and expenses?
 - Chapter 70 has been in effect for a long time. The Student Opportunity Act changed the Chapter 70 formula. Elements of the Chapter 70 formula were revised to provide more funding mechanisms. For example, there is an increment for the number of students in a category of low income. There are different elements, and all districts are experiencing higher increments in Chapter 70 money. The circuit breaker formula was revised to include transportation reimbursement. The Student Opportunity Act provided for the transportation. All districts are receiving more educational dollars than in the past.
- A comment was made about the worth of the SPED programs and how wonderful it is for families to be able to keep families together in the schools. A child can receive an appropriate education within their own school system.
- A question was asked about the pie chart and the cost to maintain schools outside the school budget, i.e., covered within Town departmental budgets.
 - It is about \$30 million. Some of these expenses are charged back to the schools.
- A comment was made that it appears 83% students are in standard programs and 17% have IEPs and are in SPED programs. How much does SPED program cost out of the \$70 million?
 - That number is not available at this time but can be provided later.

- Do you benchmark the number of kids in the SPED program against other communities. Are we attracting students to Wellesley because of the SPED program? What is the budget impact relative to benchmark communities?
 - Wellesley is about 2% lower than comparable communities.
- A comment was made about the declining enrollment and that the big departure point is the middle school. Are exit interviews done?
 - An opportunity for an exit survey is provided. Not everyone participates. Enrollment drops are not all in one place and are distributed across the district. There is no discernable pattern that we see. Demographic trends have occurred over time and there have been historic waves of enrollment declines and increases. No one knows for sure if the pandemic will alter workforce patterns permanently. Declining enrollment drove the consolidation of the district and number of schools and the school building projects.
- A suggestion was made for Advisory members who are not in attendance to watch the presentation.
- A question was asked about hiring and retention efforts for diversity in the teaching staff.
 - A gap exists in the diversity of the student body and teaching force. HR and the DEI director are collaborating to increase diversity of workforce. The district has partnered with DESE and a statewide group committed to increasing staff diversity in schools. The district is also growing a relationship to local colleges to provide lower cost courses. The district is focusing on growing its own internal people to become educators. Given the current labor market, it is important to focus on retention and nurturing our own. The district identifies issues when they arise and then mentors individuals when these issues are identified. The district is also training administrators in the application process to identify more diverse candidates in the process. Another goal is to prepare students for a multicultural and multiracial society. Efforts for diversity are beneficial for all students.
- A comment was made that the Community Engagement Officer represents an important step in continuing to provide transparency to the community. A question was asked as about the full-time substitute program and if it is proving to be cost-effective.
 - The principals are happy to have the full-time substitutes. Finding staff to fill vacancies continues to be difficult so day to day subs are used to fill other absences. It is a little early to determine if the full-time substitutes are cost effective. Building subs give a first line of defense and their presence means there is always someone in the buildings to cover staff who are absent. The overall sub pool is low. The permanent subs were hired early on.
- A question was asked about cybersecurity and whether the district is working with the town on this?
 - The timing is good as the current tech plan has expired and staff is working on making recommendations to the district. There will be conversations with the town to see where there might be overlaps.
- Is the percentage of budget shifting towards the top of the strategic plan?
 - The largest share of the budget is level service and the amount of money for strategic initiatives is small. In general, the district looks for offsets to fund initiatives and supports new things without new revenue by changing practices. The strategic plan will help to map out the next 5 years and develop a feasible budget plan.
- What is the trend in in-district placement versus out-of-district placement?
 - Out-of-district has been on the decrease. However, in the last year or two there has been a slight uptick in the number of students with exceptional needs ; some of these are related to the pandemic. This is not a Wellesley-specific issue. The in-district set of programs far exceed some of the collaborative programs. The district tends to not send students to collaborative programs; rather they are sent to private schools.

- Is the percentage decline in enrollment and sections the same and how are sections adjusted for declining enrollment?
 - The relationship is not as linear, and it is a function of the number of students and how they are distributed across schools and grade levels. Classroom guidelines are also applied in determining this. For example, there could be a 100-student decline in enrollment but across 100 classrooms so the number of sections would not be impacted. Enrollment is dynamic and is always changing. Teaching positions are contractual and staffing decisions must be made by the end of school year when enrollment for the next year has not completely known.
- What are the plans for addressing academic excellence and communication together as part of strategic planning?
 - There is much overlap, and the district needs to get feedback from the community. Often those who are doing the work are often too busy to broadcast the success of a program. Therefore, the Community Engagement officer position was created. Gathering feedback and communication from the community is also important. The new position offers opportunities for connections and understanding between families and educators which haven't been happening over the past few years.
- Given the importance of the role of the elementary adjustment counselors, what is the long-term discussion of the support needs and continued funding for these positions?
 - The pandemic's impact will not be resolved in a year or two. There is focus on learning loss and gaps but there has been a toll on emotional and social impact. The some aspects of the mental health crisis existed prior to the pandemic. There have been discussions on the state level and federal levels for these resources to be extended beyond a couple of years.
- Will the redistricting plan be impacted by the additional 77 students from the Nines?
 - These projections were included in the discussions regarding redistricting. The Nines is located equidistant between Fiske and Schofield so students could be shifted to Schofield if necessary. The 77 additional students are for K – 12, not just the elementary level.
- Are students from other public-school districts placed in programs at WPS and how is this reflected?
 - Other districts often ask if we will accept a referral and we look to see if we have room in the program and grade and if the student fits demographically. We collect tuition and develop tuition rates. We collect revenues and these are deposited in the revolving fund and used to offset expenses. The idea is that there is no cost implication to the district.
- Do we benchmark historical trends in enrollment against other towns?
 - Yes, the Future Think presentation has this benchmarking.
- How does the new 14% inflation factor affect the circuit breaker rate?
 - FY24 costs will be increased by 14% and these costs are eligible for reimbursement in FY25. Extraordinary relief is available for a 125% escalation of the previous year's costs, and this would be reimbursed in the current year.
- Does decreased enrollment savings correspond to increased class size?
 - It depends on grade level and which way enrollment is going. We don't want to run more classes than we need to. And we try to stay within ranges. Varying class sizes are the result of the neighborhood school model.
- A comment was made that it would be helpful to see the percentage increase for cost per student and a slide that had numbers from peer communities of the reductions in enrollment.
- A question was asked about the national trend in decrease in test scores and how Wellesley schools results compare to this.
 - On November 1 the district presented the MCAS results to School Committee. The district has held on to MCAS levels through the pandemic and Massachusetts fared better

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then national test results. Wellesley is still strong in the state. Students are on track with comparable communities.

Preparation for ATM

- STM Debrief – lesson learned is adherence to the deadlines on the calendar.
- ATM volume will be much greater. Attention to the calendar is important.
- Guideline for write-ups to be sent out.
- Warrant opens November 22; the scope of the Warrant should be known by the end of December
- Review of the calendar was provided.
- Budget meeting template was reviewed.

Minutes Approval

Wendy Paul made, and Jenn Fallon seconded a motion to approve the October 24, 2022 minutes.

Roll Call Vote

Jennifer Fallon – yes

Jake Erhard – absent

Jeff Levitan - absent

Doug Smith – yes

Susan Clapham – abstain

Al Ferrer - yes

Wendy Paul – yes

Pete Pedersen - yes

Madison Riley – absent

Rani Elwy - yes

Christina Dougherty - yes

Gail Sullivan – yes

David Prock -absent

William Schauffler - absent

October 24, 2022 minutes were approved, 8 to 0.

Liaison Updates

BOH/Christina Dougherty - Development on Route 9 at 40 Williams Street – built a pool with no plan sent to the BOH; cease and desist order was issued to stop the work; with the change in ownership, it was assumed when the information was uploaded for the building permit that it would go to the BOH.

CAC/Gail Sullivan – recap of recent meeting was provided and next steps on projects were discussed such as bringing the opt in stretch code to TM. Green Collaborative is on Nov. 16.

Planning/Madison Riley – Eric Arbeene will be the interim Planning Director. There is no decision on the schedule for hiring a new Planning Director. Inflation is having an impact on salaries and hiring.

Schools/Rani Elwy – Schools have three potential articles – one adding bathrooms at Sprague; the annual transfer to the SPED stabilization fund; additional money for Hardy may be needed.

Select Board/Doug Smith – SB filled two open board positions – Wellesley Housing Authority commissioner – Lisa Heyison; NRC - Michael D’Ortenzio; Brian DuPont presented on the cybersecurity assessment; a traffic modification was approved to put a stop sign on Oakridge at Westgate; approved an EV charging rate of \$2 per hour for first 4 hours and then \$10 after 4 hours. Traffic study approved for old SunLife building which is being developed into biotech labs; approved Executive Director contract through 2025.

Coming attractions

Next week’s meeting is Tuesday instead of Wednesday. No meeting on November 23.

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Adjourn

Madison Riley made, and Gail Sullivan seconded a motion to adjourn.

Roll Call Vote

Jennifer Fallon – yes

Jake Erhard – absent

Jeff Levitan - absent

Doug Smith – yes

Susan Clapham - yes

Al Ferrer - absent

Wendy Paul – yes

Pete Pedersen - yes

Madison Riley – yes

Rani Elwy - yes

Christina Dougherty - yes

Gail Sullivan – yes

David Prock -absent

William Schauffler - absent

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Documents Reviewed

<https://www.wellesley.ma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/1899>

- FY23 Advisory Committee Presentation (11-9-23) PowerPoint