

Approved 02/03/26

**DRAFT Minutes
School Committee
Wellesley Public Schools
January 20, 2026
6:30 PM**

In attendance:

Niki Ofenloch, Chair

Sharon Clarke, Vice Chair

Illana Nissenbaum, Secretary

Linda Chow, Member

Joanne DaSilva Moreira, METCO Representative to the School Committee

David Lussier, Superintendent

Sandy Trach, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning

Cindy Mahr, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations

Midge Connelly, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, Title IX
Coordinator, Students

Hannah Tolla, Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability

Stephanie Xia, Student Representative

Absent: Christina Horner, Member

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by N. Ofenloch. The meeting was held on Zoom, was livestreamed on Comcast channel 9 and Verizon channel 39 and was recorded for future viewing on Wellesley Media. Ms. Ofenloch stated that C. Horner would not be able to attend and confirmed there was a quorum by naming the School Committee members who were present.

Public Comment

John Whyman of 16 Sabrina Rd., a 50-year resident of Wellesley and a physician who has adult children who attended Wellesley Public Schools, spoke about the importance of air quality in schools, particularly advocating for installation of heat pumps as a healthier option for air conditioning/ heating. Dr. Whyman noted the Bates School in particular, because decision making regarding the best option for air conditioning is still in process at this location.

FY'27 Budget Public Hearing

N. Ofenloch opened the public hearing at 6:37 PM.

Amy Grodin of 7 the Waterway is the parent of three students that attend or will attend

Schofield who expressed concern about the prospect of reducing the number of fourth grade sections for the 26/27 school year. Ms. Grodin cited data for the current third grade cohort, arguing that the needs of this particular student population are greater than some of the norms for the district. Ms. Grodin expressed concern about the limited physical space of the classroom and suggested that third and fourth grade are typical entry points into the language based program which is housed at Schofield. Ms. Grodin noted that this group of students were affected by the impacts of Covid during their last year of preschool and have experienced a lot of staff turnover at Schofield. Ms. Grodin asked the School Committee and administration to consider these nuances and maintain four classrooms at Schofield for the 26/27 year.

N. Ofenloch closed the Public Hearing at 6:42 PM.

Reports

School Committee Member Updates

L. Chow participated in the World of Wellesley's Martin Luther King Jr. Day event which was held at Wellesley College. Ms. Chow found the keynote speaker to be very inspirational and he encouraged younger people to explore and be curious. L. Chow expressed gratitude to the World of Wellesley and Wellesley College for hosting the event. L. Chow shared that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) held a debrief on January 8 regarding the two athletic seasons that occurred in the past year (spring and fall). Using data, L. Chow was able to demonstrate to the NRC that the field usage remained within the parameters that were set for the number of night games, practices and hours. A public comment was made; overall comments were positive. L. Chow stated that a spirit of community has been fostered with the installation of the lights. At the Playing Fields Task Force meeting, DPW provided an update on the Team Rooms - the goal is to have the building installed by fall of 2026. Much of the work will take place in the summer, though it may begin this spring. Additionally, the Sprague bathrooms should be installed this summer.

I. Nissenbaum attended the coffee hosted by Principal Jamie Chisum at Wellesley High School (WHS) where productive community minded conversation and feedback took place. I. Nissenbaum also attended the Central Council meeting with N. Ofenloch , where the PTO and PTSO representatives from across the district were in attendance.. At the meeting, an update was provided on the budget, air conditioning and Town Meeting timelines. I. Nissenbaum thanked everyone for sharing their perspectives at this meeting.

S. Clarke attended the World of Wellesley MLK event and found the speaker inspiring and the conversation that followed about how people display courage in small ways very valuable. S. Clarke attended the Community Conversation with the Fiske Community and also attended School Committee office hours, where there was one family that attended.

N. Ofenloch noted the meetings that she attended with I. Nissenbaum and agreed that

there were great conversations that took place. N. Ofenloch will attend an event at Wellesley Middle School (WMS) on Friday. N. Ofenloch attended the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) Lunch and Learn that was on the topic of subcommittees. This Friday MASC will host another Lunch and Learn on using data to inform decision making.

Liaison Updates

(Permanent Building Committee, Playing Fields Task Force, Special Education Parent Advisory Committee, Climate Action Committee, Mobility, Air Conditioning Feasibility Study)

METCO Parent Representative Update

No report.

WHS Student Representative Update

S. Xia shared that the Robotics Team had its kick off last week and that the students are making good use of the new space at WHS. S. Xia also shared that the quarter is coming to a close, therefore students and teachers are working very hard to finish the semester; make up day will provide a great opportunity for students to get caught up or get ahead.

Superintendent Update

D. Lussier shared announcements:

Dr. Stephen Goodwin, Interim Principal at Schofield announced his retirement and the position has already been posted. D. Lussier acknowledged the exceptional leadership that he has provided at Schofield.

D. Lussier noted that the Boston Parent Council School Committee Conversation is on Thursday night via Zoom and Friday morning there is a School Committee conversation in person at WMS.

From Lauren Saracino, Director of Performing Arts: Performing Arts has had a strong start to 2026! Since returning from break, we've had 30 WHS students participate in the Eastern District Senior Festival. All students reported having an enriching experience and did a wonderful job representing Wellesley as part of these honors ensembles. We've also had a concert for the Beginner Band, Band, and Orchestra over at Sprague, a visit from the WHS Improv Troupe to WMS Drama classes, and a middle school chorus concert that featured 260 singers in grades 6 & 7 alone. We thank all the Performing Arts teachers for helping to make these incredible events happen. Tonight, we also kick off our annual Step Up Concert Series with the 8th grade and WHS Band. These transitional concerts and events are among the most special events on our calendar, and a favorite for audiences. The 8th grade and WHS Orchestras will have their Step Up Concert on Thursday, January 29th, and the 8th grade and WHS Choir Step Up Concert is on Tuesday, February 10. All events are at 7pm at the high

school, and are free to attend.

D. Lussier shared Appreciations and Recognitions:

D. Lussier attended the World of Wellesley event that was hosted at Wellesley College and found it inspirational and engaging. D. Lussier expressed gratitude to those who hosted the event.

Consent Agenda

Minutes - 12/17/25, 12/18/25, 1/6/26 New England Medical Billing Field Trip-Galapagos Islands 2027 Field Trip-WHS DECA Gifts & Donations-Landscaping

N. Ofenloch noted that Ken Bateman, Biology teacher, WHS, joined the meeting and is available for any questions regarding the field trip.

In response to S. Clarke's inquiry, K. Bateman stated that WPS has taken students on trips to Panama, Iceland and Belize through EF Tours through the WHS Science Department and that WPS planned to take the students on a trip to the Galapagos Islands a few years ago, however the plans were altered due to political unrest at that time. K. Bateman stated that the Science Department would like to take the students on the Galapagos Islands trip next year, seeing as the political unrest has resolved.

Motion: That the School Committee approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Moved: I. Nissenbaum

Seconded: S. Clarke

L. Chow Yes

S. Clarke Yes

I. Nissenbaum Yes

N. Ofenloch Yes

Motion carried: 4-0

N. Ofenloch thanked K. Bateman for being present at the meeting and thanked the Hunnewell 5th grade class for their gift.

Action/Discussion Items

Discussion: FY'27 Budget

D. Lussier provided the introduction to the agenda item, stating that the budget is dynamic based on many factors such as shifts in enrollment. While there is no change to the budget total, D. Lussier shared that the team is making the presentation as they would like to inform the School Committee about adjustments that have been made to

certain line items. D. Lussier shared the slide deck *Wellesley Public Schools FY 27 Budget* with the School Committee earlier today that illustrates the changes.

C. Mahr shared and reviewed the slide deck *Wellesley Public Schools FY 27 Budget*.

On the Budget Change Summary slide, M. Connelly shared information regarding Special Education Out of District Placements, which are somewhat dynamic based on changes in student need that are often unexpected. M. Connelly stated that the unfilled full time Teaching Assistant position under the I.D.E.A. federal grant will be reallocated to a .5 elementary level Student Services Secretary supporting elementary school special education compliance. This change was driven by updates to special education compliance requirements that have increased the workload significantly.

Communication and engagement has occurred with the Wellesley Educators Association (WEA) and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC).

In response to S. Clarke's inquiry regarding the Student Services Secretary, M. Connelly provided the information that this is an ongoing grant, and that the district trusts that it will continue to receive this funding. Additionally, M. Connelly stated that the change is budget neutral, though the "head count" is half. C. Mahr added additional information regarding funding sources for the position and stated that the Teaching Assistant position that is being eliminated was unfilled. In response to S. Clarke's inquiry about risks of being out of compliance for special education laws, M. Connelly stated that being out of compliance would put the district at risk for lawsuits and filings with organizations that oversee compliance. In response to N. Ofenloch's inquiry regarding the decrease in FTEs but an increase in **amount, C. Mahr commented that the slide was for the general fund only**. In response to N. Ofenloch's inquiry regarding the need for replacement of the auditorium screen at WMS, C. Mahr stated that she will follow up with her as she does not have more information readily available. In response to N. Ofenloch's question regarding the cafeteria expense, C. Mahr stated that warming bins are showing their age, two in particular are in need of replacement.

I. Nissenbaum brought forth a discussion regarding the public comment that referenced the reduction in fourth grade sections at Schofield. I. Nissenbaum expressed concern that reduction in the number of sections will have negative consequences for students and considered the notion that this particular cohort at Schofield may have more significant needs. I. Nissenbaum also questioned if the extreme swing from 16 students to 24 may make this particular cohort unique.

D. Lussier responded by stating that the enrollment report on Oct. 1 each year is how the number of sections in each grade, at each school, are planned. Additionally.

because the elementary schools are small, small fluctuations of student numbers can have great consequences as far as the number of planned sections. D. Lussier stated that the district is always within the class size guidelines that are set by the School Committee policy. D. Lussier also stated that town leaders have pointed out that the district has been running class sizes that are smaller than the guideline and that additionally, needs can be great across all of the schools and that the district needs to apply consistent policy across the schools.

N. Ofenloch added that the early enrollment projections are showing that the cohort can be accommodated with two sections and that educators are able to manage larger class sizes as evidenced by larger class sizes that have been successfully managed at Hunnewell and Hardy due to elementary redistricting. N. Ofenloch stated that class size is a policy discussion and that change in class size should not be considered on an exceptions to the policy basis.

L. Chow added that the class size guidelines have existed unchanged for years, and are very consistent with peer communities. L. Chow agreed that the number of cohorts is a policy decision and should not be managed on an exceptions to the policy basis.

S. Clarke invited a discussion from the School Committee regarding what questions might come about about the budget at Town Meeting. L. Chow stated that the longitudinal studies confirmed what the key budget drivers are and have been and that additionally the Chair of Advisory had commissioned work looking at the detail of the school budget, which provided information that was very similar to that of the longitudinal analysis done by C. Mahr. N. Ofenloch encouraged the School Committee and administration to think about questions that may come up at Town Meeting and suggested planning time to discuss, ahead of Town Meeting. I. Nissenbaum commented on the portion of the budget that is discretionary; which she stated is very small in relation to the portion of the budget that is accounted for.

Discussion/Vote: Demographic/Enrollment Study Request for Quote

D. Lussier provided an introduction to the agenda item stating that for the last fourteen years, every three to four years, the district compliments its internal analysis with an outside comprehensive professional demographic and enrollment study; An RFP was put out to obtain quotes for a study.

C. Mahr shared and reviewed the *Request for Quotation: Comprehensive Population and Enrollment Study and Forecast (2026-01)* document. In response to S. Clarke's inquiry, C. Mahr stated that the data will be available in April.

N. Ofenloch requested the motion: that the School Committee approve the contract with FutureThink for a ten year demographic and enrollment study to support the long term planning for the Wellesley Public School.

Motion: That the School Committee approves the contract with FutureThink for a ten year demographic and enrollment study to support the long term planning for the Wellesley Public School.

Moved: I Nissenbaum

Seconded: S. Clarke

L. Chow Yes

S. Clarke Yes

I. Nissenbaum Yes

N. Ofenloch Yes

Motion carried: 4-0

Discussion/Vote: Policy Subcommittee Policies

-JECA: Middle School Pathways Exploration

-JG-R: Elementary Transfer Option

L. Chow stated that discussions took place about the new policy- JECA and minor amendments to JG-R at the last School Committee meeting. No feedback has been received on these proposed policies and there were no questions. Both of these policies have been posted in the public meeting materials and on the district and School Committee website.

Motion: That the School Committee approves policy JECA: Middle School Pathways Exploration as recommended by the Policy Subcommittee.

Moved: I. Nissenbaum

Seconded: L. Chow

L. Chow Yes

S. Clarke Yes

I. Nissenbaum Yes

N. Ofenloch Yes

Motion carried: 4-0

Motion: That the School Committee approves policy JG-R: Elementary Transfer Option as recommended by the Policy Subcommittee.

Moved: I. Nissenbaum

Seconded: S. Clarke
L. Chow Yes
S. Clarke Yes
I. Nissenbaum Yes
N. Ofenloch Yes

Motion carried: 4-0















Discussion: Solar at Hunnewell and Hardy Schools

N. Ofenloch shared and reviewed the slides *Update: Hardy and Hunnewell Solar Project*.

S. Clarke stated that the vote that will be taken at the next meeting is a vote to move the project forward. N. Ofenloch shared that there is additional money outside of the funds for the solar roof projects set aside for finishing up any projects that are outstanding at Hardy and Hunnewell. N. Ofenloch shared that the plan is that the funding sources will be enough to cover the entire project cost with no further ask at Town Meeting, while L. Chow brought forth the concern that the MSBA funding is a reimbursement. N. Ofenloch stated that, if the funds are not used for Hunnewell and Hardy, they will need to be returned to the town to the general fund. A vote will be taken at the next meeting.

N. Ofenloch adjourned the meeting at 8:16 PM.

Referenced documents:

-  **1. 1_20_26 SC Agenda Posting.pdf**
-  **3. NEMB.pdf**
-  **4. Field Trip-Galapagos 2027.pdf**
-  **5. Field Trip-WHS DECA.pdf**
-  **6. Hunnewell Donation Landscaping.pdf**
-  **7. FY'27 Admin Recommended Budget_Dec 9 SC Pres_22.pdf**
-  **8. SC Recommendation_FutureThink.pdf**
-  **8a. Wellesley_RFQ_Published Document_OCR.pdf**
-  **8b. proposal_wellesley_260102_futurethink.pdf**
-  **9a. Policy JECA (New) - Middle School Pathway Exploration (2).pdf**
-  **10a. Policy JG-R (Amended) - Elementary Transfer Option Procedure - redlined.pdf**
-  **End-of-Season Update for NRC on Hunnewell T&F - 1.8.26.pdf**
-  **FY'27 Budget Update_Jan 20.pdf**
-  **SC_Solar Update_01202026.pdf**