

Approved 01/20/26

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

In attendance:

Niki Ofenloch, Chair
Sharon Clarke, Vice Chair
Illana Nissenbaum, Secretary
Linda Chow, Member
Christina Horner, 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
Alex Budson, Student Representative
Maria Hammel, Student Representative
Stephanie Xia, Student Representative
Tim Eagan (left after Consent Agenda)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by N. Ofenloch. The meeting was held in a webinar format and was recorded for future viewing on Wellesley Media. Ms. Ofenloch confirmed that all School Committee members were present.

Public Comment

No public comment

Updates

L. Chow provided playing field related updates: The Department of Public Works has informed L. Chow, that they have confidence the funds appropriated in 2023 for the Sprague bathrooms should be sufficient for the project and that an article for Town Meeting will not be needed. The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) will hold a debrief on Thursday evening regarding usage of lighting at Hunnewell Track and Field. The NRC has limited the school's usage to a total of 100 hours for the year; for all of 2025 the total was just under 73 hours, and 3 hours of those were for graduation. Only a couple of complaints were recorded regarding the lights and sound and they have been

addressed by AD. Communication to the community in advance of nighttime field use and traffic management has contributed to positive feedback. WPS will be bringing in an environmental consultant to conduct an update on the wildlife habitat assessment initially performed prior to the 2024 installation of lighting. This update is required in the usage agreement.

C. Horner shared updates from the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) which are as follows: SEPAC will be co-hosting a presentation on the Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC) and the Launch program at Regis College on Friday morning at 9:30AM. More information can be found on the SEPAC website. The next SEPAC meeting will be via Zoom on Monday January 26 at 7PM. SEPAC will be hosting a Zoom presentation by Newton Neuropsychology Group on February 11 at 7PM entitled *Fostering Age Appropriate Independence by Empowering Children's Capabilities*. Additionally, SEPAC is building out Independent Educational Program (IEP) toolkit materials for their website. SEPAC will be presenting at the Hunnewell Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting on Thursday, January 8.

S. Clarke shared that she attended the Grades 3-5 AI Steering Committee meeting where the committee shared excitement about the research and findings that they have gathered over the last few months. S. Clarke shared that the committee is awaiting further guidance from the State of MA on the topic. S. Clarke shared that her term on the School Committee will end in March and that she will not run for a seat. S. Clarke encouraged others in the community to run for the seat.

N. Ofenloch shared that C. Horner will be participating in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner's Advisory Council on Diversifying the Educator Workforce and offered congratulations. N. Ofenloch, I. Nissenbaum and D. Lussier will be at the WHS Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) on Friday morning for an informal discussion with the WHS parent and caregiver community.

School Committee Updates

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 update

WHS Student Representative Update

M. Hammel shared that the students have just returned from break and are adjusting to returning to the school year, that the term ends in January and the student parking raffle is open until January 15. S. Xia shared that the WHS Robotics Team- Team Ultraviolet, held a ribbon cutting ceremony today for the new space they will be working out of at WHS.

Superintendent Update

D. Lussier shared announcements:

D. Lussier also noted the Team Ultraviolet ribbon cutting in Room 157 at WHS. Additionally, he thanked Bob Ellis for hosting the team and its equipment for the past five years out of his garage.

Effective immediately, Lauren Sarancino has been appointed as the Director of Performing Arts for WPS.

D. Lussier informed the community that inclement weather is expected tomorrow and that school cancellation is possible.

D. Lussier shared Appreciations and Recognitions:

Cynthia Mahr has been reappointed to the ASBO International Education Advisory Committee for the 2026–2029 term as a member of the Finance, Budgeting, and Resource Management Track. Through this role, Cindy will support the development and review of professional development materials that advance best practices in school finance and budgeting.

Consent Agenda

Field Trip - French Exchange, Gifts and Donations, Minutes - October 29, 2025, December 9, 2025, December 16, 2025

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

Moved: I. Nissenbaum

Seconded: L. Chow

L. Chow Yes

S. Clarke Yes

C. Horner Yes

I. Nissenbaum Yes

N. Ofenloch Yes

Motion carried: 5-0

N. Ofenloch thanked all of the community members who donated through Friends of Wellesley METCO or the PTOs in support of the students.

Action/Discussion Items

FY' 27 Budget Discussion

N. Ofenloch provided the introduction to the agenda item and shared that the administration's proposed budget was presented to the School Committee on December 9 and that there were two budget working meetings on December 17 and 18. N. Ofenloch stated that the discussion this evening provides an additional opportunity to discuss the proposed budget and ask questions. N. Ofenoch shared the *Budget Architecture- Detailed* slide which summarizes the changes in the budget from FY 26 - FY 27. N. Ofenloch shared the topics that garnered a lot of attention at the working meetings. They are as follows:

-Reductions based on enrollment; especially at WMS and WHS, which are both expected to experience a decrease in enrollment. C. Horner brought forth the topic of bus transportation and the potential of combining bus routes for which the ridership is very low. C. Mahr responded that bus sign up and ridership are not one and the same and that elementary schools each have one or two buses for roads in and around the school building and confirmed that eliminating bus routes would provide cost savings.

-Reductions in FTEs due to decreased student need and decreased need for student services. L. Chow spoke about the increased complexity of student needs. S. Clarke stated that students' needs shift year to year. M. Connelly stated that WPS always strives to remain in compliance with Federal and State regulations and that WPS intends to keep students' needs at the center of all of its decisions. M. Connelly stated that a full time teacher was added to the Skills program, while reducing the Teaching Assistant positions as the students have developed independence and skills and that the current number of Teaching Assistants is no longer needed. M. Connelly stated that WPS intends to have the most highly qualified educators in front of the students. S. Clarke brought forth a discussion about Dyslexia diagnoses, to which M. Connelly stated that there are 15 additional educators becoming certified in Orton Gillingham. M. Connolley spoke about the complex nature of student needs, that oftentimes involve more than one diagnosis. L. Chow stated that the reductions in the budget this year are not tied to the elimination of unfilled positions, which was the case for last year's budget.

-N. Ofenloch confirmed that the Strategic Plan work can and will continue, even with a level service budget and existing staff.

-Expense reductions include areas where there was turnback in the prior budget.

-The FY 26 budget included a strategic priority to change three Reading Intervention Paraprofessional positions to three Literacy Specialists, as the Literacy Specialist position requires a higher level of certification. S. Trach stated that each elementary school now has one Literacy Intervention Teacher with expanded training. The data indicates that the student results are positive as a result of students entering into work with the interventionist. S. Trach shared that Foundations and Heggerty along with other curriculum, are being used with positive results. J. DaSilva, a member of the Literacy Steering Committee, offered her praise and support for the literacy programs and work that is occurring at the elementary level.

-Critical needs related to WHS; Family Consumer Science course and Instructional Assistant, Library. D. Lussier shared that there have been more sections opened, allowing more students to take the Family Consumer Science course due to the .4 FTE investment. D. Lussier stated that .5 FTE has been added to library staff to provide library coverage and as an additional benefit, support for the new cell phone policy.

FY 25 Strategic Priority; Addition of Assistant Principal/ Special Education Team Chair at Hardy School- pilot program feedback. D. Lussier stated that an additional administrator in each elementary school is desired, however budget constraints have not allowed for expansion of the pilot. In response to S. Clarke's question, D. Lussier stated that the additional administrator is involved in IEP services by attending IEP meetings and that it is a benefit that the administrator knows students and families well as they are not posted at multiple buildings. This administrator can be present to respond to instructional and operational matters as well. Additionally, D. Lussier stated that this position might provide a leadership path for educators. C. Horner requested that the questions asked at the budget meetings be made available to the community, to which D. Lussier responded that they would be posted to the School Committee public meeting materials which can be found on the School Committee website.

N. Ofeloch stated that the budget hearing will be on January 20, 2026 during the School Committee meeting.

Discussion: Policy Subcommittee Update

JECA: Middle School Pathways Exploration

L. Chow stated that she and C. Horner held the Policy Subcommittee meeting on December 23, 2025. S. Trach shared and reviewed the document *JECA-Middle School Pathway Exploration*, which is a new policy required by DESE that requires schools to inform and educate families and students about Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. S. Xia expressed her support for this policy and inquired about historical







data regarding students who have attended CTE schools and further expressed interest in knowing if the provision of more information about the schools will result in more students attending. D. Lussier stated that this data will be made available and S. Trach stated that the counselors will assist students with the application process. In response to S. Clarke's question, S. Trach responded that the district must make all students aware both in person and by sending information home. A vote on this policy is required by the School Committee by January 31, 2026. In response to I. Nissenbaum's inquiry, M. Connelly stated that the district must provide transportation for students that choose to attend a CTE school. C. Mahr stated that students in vocational education are included in the yearly enrollment report that is submitted to DESE every February.

JG-R: Elementary Transfer Option

L. Chow shared that this is a companion policy to policy JG. D. Lussier shared and reviewed the document *JG-R: Elementary Transfer Option*. D. Lussier highlighted the red lining that refers to randomization of applications and discussed the prioritization process and further stated that five spaces are reserved at the elementary schools for future neighborhood growth. L. Chow stated that the policy will need to be voted and posted as soon as possible, or at the latest by March 1.

N. Ofenloch adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Referenced documents:

-  [1_6_26 SC Agenda Posting.pdf](#)
-  [3. Field Trip-French Exchange.pdf](#)
-  [4. FY26 Gifts & Donations 1_6_26 Consent Agenda - Sheet2.pdf](#)
-  [5. FY'27 Admin Recommended Budget_Dec 9 SC Pres_22.pdf](#)
-  [6. Policy JECA \(New\) - Middle School Pathway Exploration.pdf](#)
-  [7. Policy JG-R \(Amended\) - Elementary Transfer Option Procedure - redlined.pdf](#)