

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
January 10, 2023
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Leda Eizenberg, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Craig Mack, members Melissa Martin and Catherine Mirick; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Sandy Trach; Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; Director of Student Services Kat Bernklow; and Student Advisory representatives Sofia Dobado and Evelyn Harrison.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Cristina O'Brien, of 316 Walnut St. is a Schofield parent with three students. She joined to read a statement from Schofield staff. It read, in part, that the staff resolves to continue offering their own time above and beyond their contract in creating student materials, collaborating, developing resources, scoring and grading assessments, and reaching out to families. It stated the time required to complete their necessary work does not fit within their contractual school day.

Mandy Baker, of 9 Cross St., stated that as an educator, she understood the complexity of contract negotiations. She stated educators are the backbone and heart of schools. She noted the staff is dedicated to students and are reasonable with what they are asking.

Amanda Crowley, of 20 Crescent St. joined to read a statement from the Fiske and Upham staffs similar to that read by previous speakers. The statement requested that, in return for the dedication staff is showing to students and families, the School Committee also show dedication to families and staff.

Jason Miller, of 5 Lawrence Rd., joined to read a statement from the Hardy staff similar to that read by previous speakers. He added he has four children who went through WPS and credits WPS for preparing his kids for college.

Katherine Cort, of 25 Fisher Ave., has worked in schools for 17 yrs as a TA and is currently a substitute teacher. She noted that making the workplace a better place for educators will help promote a better learning environment for all. She added resources and dollars should only go to what touches the child.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Martin offered an update on the Hardy project. She stated it has passed the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) component of the process and preparation of the site will begin next month. The School Committee will join the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) at their meeting January 12.

She and Ms. Chow hosted the Conversation with the School Committee for the WHS community last week. She thanked the parents who joined. Issues raised were requesting these opportunities be given in the evening as well as different perspectives on standards based grading. Kudos were given to staff and administration at WHS regarding communication this year.

Ms. Chow added that appreciation was expressed at the WHS Conversation with the School Committee for the addition of AP courses.

Regarding the Sprague field projects, there is continued progress on the rebound wall and the foundation is being worked on. She will be providing an update at the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF) meeting on January 13 regarding bathrooms at Sprague. The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) will be funding the project and the School Committee will cosponsor. A community forum will be scheduled and a mailing will go out to neighbors and abutters.

Regarding Hunnewell Track & Field projects, the bathrooms and concession/bathroom approval process is underway. Conversation will continue this week with the Design Review Board (DRB).

Ms. Mirick offered an update on the Hunnewell project, stating construction is moving forward and slabs are being poured. Framing will begin shortly.

Regarding contract negotiations with the Wellesley Educators Association (WEA), she stated the Committee and WEA have reached tentative agreement and common ground on 34 WEA requests and one School Committee request, though they remain far apart in other areas. The School Committee declared the negotiations were at an impasse and requested mediation. WEA filed an objection to bringing in a mediator. The Committee is currently responding to that objection and hopes to have a mediator assigned soon. She added negotiations are complex and the Committee's positions are not reflective of the message that is being communicated out from the WEA.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier recognized Wellesley Fire Department Chief Rick DeLorie, who retired effective January 5. He was a member of Wellesley High School Class of 1975 and a longtime friend of WPS. Dr. Lussier expressed appreciation for their valued partnership.

He offered COVID updates, noting the District has been extremely vigilant in monitoring changes in the pandemic. Testing kits were sent home prior to Thanksgiving and Winter Break. Families are encouraged to reach out to their school nurses if they need additional kits. Masks are also available in all schools. He urged families engage in home screening each day and err on the side of caution if experiencing any symptoms.

He discussed upcoming surveys that will be conducted in the coming month. One regarding the strategic plan process will be sent to the entire community. When it is sent out, it will be live for two weeks. In February, a parent survey around school climate will be sent out, consistent with one previously sent to students and staff.

On Wednesday, January 18, the District will host an Elementary Literacy Webinar. Each principal will send the link to their families.

Also on Wednesday, January 18, an update on the Hardy project will be given to the community via webinar from 8:00-9:00 pm. This will be recorded.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Ms. Dobado stated that due to the AI apps that have been used to generate papers, students have been writing their essays in class. She noted there are positives with this method in that it

ensures original work; however, she noted there were negative aspects in that students cannot write as fast, cannot edit as easily, and are therefore often not putting forth their best work.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes - November 22, 2022

Surplus Materials Memo - WPS Technology Equipment

ACCEPT Education Collaborative FY23 Quarter Two Report

Field Trip Approval - HS Art Trip April 2023 (Relocation to London)

Special Education Stabilization Payment Request #373252

Ms. Eizenberg thanked Thom Carter for coordinating the pivot in plans with the inability to go to Peru. She entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

WPS ADMINISTRATION FY24 OPERATING BUDGET PRESENTATION

Dr. Lussier acknowledged the work of colleagues around the District throughout the fall to think deeply about needs while being mindful of the stewardship of town resources. He noted the full budget book is posted on the WPS website and tonight's presentation will be a summary with detailed discussions to come in upcoming meetings. He discussed factors that were taken into consideration when formulating the budget, such as ongoing pandemic recovery, strategic plan development, and building projects, including swing space needs. He noted enrollment is continuing to decline, though the acute drop has stabilized and the slight decline currently seen is consistent with what the District was seeing prior to the pandemic. Additionally, he highlighted the District's equity and excellence priorities, including MTSS work, and noted all the above factors were considered in the context of the town's fiscal landscape.

Ms. Mahr stated the Administration was asked by the Committee to provide three budget models: Model 1 based on the Select Board's guidance to all town departments of a 3% increase over FY23, totalling \$2,544,068; Model 2 indicating a level service budget, which came in below the 3% guidance at \$2,427,266 over FY23, or 2.86%; Model 3 indicating level service plus critical needs and year one of strategic investments, which came in slightly above guidance, adding \$528,996 (0.62%) in strategic priorities and \$15,890 (0.02%) to level services, or 3.5% over FY23.

Dr. Lussier and Ms. Mahr discussed budget drivers, including enrollment, compensation, including step increases, special education, Circuit Breaker reimbursement, and changes to mandated and fixed costs. Key points include a projected decrease in enrollment resulting in a savings of \$112,661 in salary at the elementary level and \$236,390 in salary at the secondary level. Notably, with regards to Out of District costs, Dr. Bernklow discussed that the Operational Services Division (OSD) sets tuition prices for approved private special education programs. Historically, year-to-year increases range from 1.15% to 2.72%. For FY24, however, rates will increase 14%. Therefore, although WPS is projecting fewer Out of District placements, costs will increase by \$865,668.

Regarding proposed fee changes, the recommended budget continues to fully fund the Grade 5 Hale Reservation trip at \$237 per child. The optional transportation fee will be reduced by \$100

to \$400 and three free performances will be offered. Additionally, Child Lab tuition will increase by \$150 to \$6,450 annually.

Overall, the proposed level service budget includes a reduction of 2.46 FTE while the reopening of Hunnewell will add 2.0 FTE and strategic plan initiatives will add 4.50 FTE, for a net increase of 4.04 FTE and \$2,972,152, or a 3.5% increase over FY23, totalling \$87,774,420. Drivers putting the budget over guideline include Out of District rate increases, and transportation costs.

Ms. Bounit reviewed technology cash capital requests. New equipment includes devices for new staff and new students, assistive technology, and Soundfield systems, which had been bumped from previous years. Replacement equipment to support level services include desktops and laptops, network infrastructure, and printer, projector, and battery replacements. Overall, requests total \$1,299,135.

Next steps include budget review meetings with the Committee on January 19 and 20. A Budget Hearing will take place January 31 and the Committee is slated to vote February 7. The budget will be presented to Advisory Committee on February 8 in preparation for Town Meeting in March.

DISCUSSION: 2023-24 MS AND HS PROGRAM OF STUDIES

Jamie Chisum and Mark Ito joined the Committee.

Dr. Ito discussed two changes to the WMS Program of Student. The first is a budget neutral Grade 8 Science elective, "Science, the World, and You." He stated it will meet every other day and be conducted in a project-based learning format. The course will be taught by Department Head Kate Morton. The second change is to change the name of the current Grade 6 "Literacy Workshop" and Grade 7 "Lab" classes to "Flex."

Dr. Chisum stated WHS was able to sunset some courses and introduce new ones in a budget neutral way. He discussed several new course offerings, including AP Language and Composition (to be offered in the 2024-25 school year), AP Chinese, Spanish for Heritage Speakers, Honors Intensive Robotics, Rock Band, and Rings.

For both WHS and WMS, name changes in performing arts are proposed, changing Song Sisters to Overtones and Brooks Brothers to Subharmonics.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:20 pm, Ms. Eizenberg entertained a motion to enter into Executive Session under Massachusetts G.L. c 30A, §21(A), exemption #3 to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Wellesley Educators Association because, as Chair, she declared that to discuss this in Open Session would have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee, and to invite into the Executive Session Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations Cindy Mahr, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Sandy Trach, Director of Human Resources Monica Visco, Coordinator for Community Engagement Sharon Gray, Laura Giordano and David Guarino from Melwood Global, and Jim Pender, Labor Counsel, and to not return to Open Session at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Mack,
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

ACCEPT Education Collaborative FY 23 Quarter Two Report
Special Education Stabilization Payment Request
FY24 Recommended Budget
Program of Studies 2023-2024