

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 1, 2022
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; Advisory Member Susan Clapham; and Student Advisory representatives Ivy Wang, Sofia Dobado, Jeremy Lee, Evelyn Harrison, and Abraham Budson-McQuilken.

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

FY23 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Ms. Mirick opened the public hearing at 6:32 pm.

Zhiping Weng joined to ask about the demographic makeup of the current workforce. She stated WPS has lost teachers of color and wondered why exit interviews were not conducted. She inquired about a plan to build and retain a diverse workforce, particularly what budgetary emphasis the District is putting on retaining teachers of color.

Marguerite Chatelier, of 11 Colburn Rd., asked how Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) work is tracked year by year and how success is measured. She urged the District to create a line item for DEI work.

Siena Cohen is a leader of the Menstrual Equality pilot program at WHS. She stated they have raised money for four dispensers of menstrual products in women's bathrooms. They are asking for the budget to include funding to subscribe to a program that will keep the dispensers stocked as well as to install dispensers in four gender neutral and four men's bathrooms for menstruators who do not identify as female or who do not use women's bathrooms.

The hearing closed at 6:36 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no speakers.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Eizenberg wished a Happy Lunar New Year to those celebrating and Ms. Chow echoed her statement.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier wished a Happy New Year to the Chinese and East Asian community. He also noted February is Black History Month, for which WPS will have a number of activities, including a community read for *Caste* in early March.

He offered thanks to Dave Cohen and his team at DPW for their work over the weekend handling the challenging storm as well as the school custodians for working Sunday to clear the schools and ensure a safe and on time opening Monday.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Ms. Harrison stated the orientation for new student representatives has been rescheduled to February 13 due to the past weekend's snow.

COVID UPDATE

Athletics - Dr. Lussier stated the Administration continues to meet with the Health Department on a regular basis to review the additional mitigation steps that were taken over Winter Break. Accordingly, adjustments were communicated out last week that include reopening access to locker rooms for hockey. He added that barring any change in the trajectory of positive cases, spectators will be allowed to return to full and regular capacities for all school-based events beginning February 7.

Dashboard - Case counts continue to decline. Vaccination data has been added to the dashboard and is broken down by students and staff and overall percentage by building. This data will be updated once a week.

Testing - WPS staff have received their first set of kits and students should get them next week. Dr. Lussier stated approximately 3,500 people have opted into the state program and will receive one test per week from the state to be used each Monday whether symptomatic or asymptomatic. Due to February vacation week, WPS will supplement with additional from its stock to be used as needed for symptomatic testing. This means those who opted into the state program will receive four kits before break and those who did not will receive two kits.

Masks - The last of the KN95 inventory from the state was distributed to staff this week. The state's mask mandate for schools is in effect until February 28 at the earliest. Prior to that, localities can make the individual decision to remove the mandate in buildings that meet or exceed a vaccination rate of 80% of staff and students. Currently, WPS has met that threshold in five schools. Dr. Lussier stated the District wants to be cautious but does not want to maintain mitigation strategies if they are no longer necessary. Administration will coordinate with the Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC), WEA, and Health Department and Dr. Lussier added he was cautiously optimistic that the District will be able to relax the mandate barring any uptick in cases.

FY23 BUDGET

Ms. Mahr offered updates on the recommended FY23 budget.

She explained the District was a member of the EDCO Collaborative prior to 2015 at which time WPS withdrew. EDCO has recently dissolved but there are outstanding liabilities from when WPS was a member district. The articles of agreement state a district maintains financial responsibility for expenses that occur when the district was a member. Wellesley's portion of EDCO's outstanding liabilities is approximately \$97,800. Because these are prior year obligations, the District is required to go to Town Meeting to seek approval to pay. As there is currently a surplus, language will be drawn to use surplus funds and the Committee will discuss this further in the next agenda item.

Additionally, Ms. Mahr offered updates on Cash Capital request reductions as well as total FTE and headcount requests.

FY22 ADJUSTED BUDGET

Ms. Mahr reminded the Committee of the discussion last week regarding a surplus in the FY22 budget of approximately \$380,000. Five items were discussed as potential priorities for the money: 1. Targeted academic pandemic recovery support; 2. Funding the 5th grade Hale Reservation program; 3. Responsive Classroom training courses; 4. Early hiring of additional elementary building TAs requested for the FY23 budget; 5. Early hiring of permanent substitutes requested for the FY23 budget. She added there is now a sixth item, the above-referenced invoice from EDCO.

In discussion among the Committee, members agreed the EDCO invoice should be paid from the surplus funds. Regarding options 4 and 5, the hiring of staff, members discussed that while they would be helpful, it is a difficult hiring environment at the moment. Additionally, they are benefit-eligible positions that would also affect the town's budget. There was general consensus that options 1 and 3 were a high priority, as they were student-centric and related to pandemic recovery and there was enthusiasm from surveyed staff for the training. In discussion about the Hale Reservation option, it was stated that while eliminating the fee for families has been a longtime goal of WPS, there was concern that even if the program were to be built into the FY24 budget and funded going forward, there would not be a surplus or similar opportunity to fund the program for next year's fifth grade students. Ms. Mahr and Ms. Trach discussed how the Hale experience is a curricular activity, but is categorized as a field trip, which makes it difficult to help subsidize the fees for low-income students.

After further discussion, Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to transfer funds to support 1. Targeted academic pandemic recovery support; 2. Funding the 5th grade Hale Reservation program; 3. Responsive Classroom training courses; and to cover necessary funds for EDCO.

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

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:00 pm, Ms. Mirick entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

FY23 Recommended Budget Publication
FY23 Recommended Budget Presentation
Budget Update - DEI
FY23 Recommended Budget Hearing Slides