

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 2, 2021
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Linda Chow, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, Secretary Catherine Mirick, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; Interim Assistant Superintendent Mike LaCava; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov; Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Charmie Curry; and Student Advisory representative Rachel White.

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

FY22 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Katy Hanson, of 9 Bacon St., stated she was encouraged when an office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) was created. However she was dismayed to learn the FY22 budget doesn't include any money directly allocated to DE&I department and believes a dedicated budget demonstrates a strong commitment to the office. She is urging reallocation money elsewhere in the budget be directed to the DE&I department.

Ling Xiao, of 15 Webb Ave., has two children attending WPS. She joined to show support for a dedicated DE&I budget. She stated that as a minority resident, she believes a focus on DE&I will make the community stronger and help educate kids as better citizens for the future and that providing a dedicated budget would show the required level of commitment by the District and provide strong support for the work.

Harprit Bedi, of 2 Polaris Circle., firmly believes having a dedicated budget for DE&I is crucial from a symbolism standpoint. He noted it would be a budget neutral endeavor and a symbol of support, commitment, respect, and empowerment, which are all crucial to execute a vision for the betterment of all residents of Wellesley. He stated embracing DE&I gives a child a feeling of belonging and encouragement. He would love to see Wellesley be a leader and force in DE&I work.

Louisa Eaton, of 84 Cleveland Rd. is a junior at WHS. She is a proponent of DE&I and is currently starting a virtual cultural diversity program. She noted the School Committee has shown its commitment through action and mission; however, she believes more funds are needed. She urged consideration of reallocating funds to the DE&I department.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no callers.

RECOGNITIONS

Dr. Lussier noted the following recognitions.

From Kevin McDonald, Interim Performing Arts Director:

Congratulations to the 21 WHS and WMS students who were chosen for the 2021 Eastern District MMEA Junior District Ensembles.

From Thom Carter, PreK-12 Director of Art:

Congratulations and good luck to WHS students **Emma Ling (2024) and Elizabeth Green (2023)** who are finalists in *The New York Times* 8th Annual 15-Second Vocabulary Video Challenge! The final winners will be announced on the *The New York Times* Learning Network website.

Carolyn Collins, PreK-5 Department Head of Science & Technology/Engineering would like to recognize **Beth Bergeron, Karen Thurber and Beth Gillespie** of the Production Center. Given the situation, students cannot share science materials. As a result, the Production Center has been producing individual student kits for every science unit.

From Schofield School Principal Gerardo Martinez: Kudos to the Schofield Staff who will be selecting their favorite poem by an African American poet and making a poster to display on their classroom door. The school will become a gallery to learn about famous poets, but more importantly the messages that those writers wanted to convey. This is part of Schofield's celebration of Black History Month.

Also Kudos to Schofield Art teacher **Christine Desrosiers** and Music teacher **Brittany Hitchcock** who collaborated on designing a virtual art show where 5th graders selected a jazz musician to create a portrait for the school assembly on Black History Month.

Kate Mahoney, Department Head of Guidance at the Middle School, recognizes the **Middle School counselors** who have spent countless hours preparing for the return of students from RLS. The counselors have charted out cohort numbers to make sure that social distancing guidelines have been adhered to, communicated with students, families, and teachers, created schedules, and hosted a 6th grade orientation. It's been a big endeavor and they have completed it with professionalism and care.

From Tim Eagan, Department Head of Classical and Modern Languages:

Congratulations to **Mike Travers**, WHS Spanish Teacher, who will have an article published in **The Language Educator** (TLE), a national publication of the American Council on the Teaching of Languages (ACTFL). His article is called **Rewriting Curriculum: Managing This Complex Change**. In addition, congratulations to Tim Eagan who was invited by the TLE editor to write the framing article on the focus topic: *Program Improvement: Charting Your Course to Improvement*. This is Tim's second article this year in TLE.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Martin stated she, Dr. Lussier, and others attended a meeting of the Hardy Educational Planning Group where she noted there was a great discussion. She acknowledged the excellent work from principal Jeff Dees, the Skills team, and the English learner teams to be sure spaces will be serving the entire district.

Ms. Gray stated that she, Ms. Martin, Dr. Lussier, and Matt King went to Advisory the week prior to discuss the Hardy and Hunnewell projects. She provided an overview of the timeline, and a summary of what is happening with each project. She noted they fielded good questions, including inquiring as to the reason for doing both projects at the same time.

Ms. Gray also discussed that she, Ms. Chow, and Katey Goehring are working with other School Committee members from around the state to put together a guide to in-school testing for School Committees. There may also be a webinar.

Ms. Mirick stated she and Ms. Martin attended the Sprague PTO meeting January 28. She thanked them for hosting. She noted they had a nice discussion about the budget and the possibilities of getting more kids in school.

Ms. Chow elaborated on the testing guide Ms. Gray discussed. She noted the idea originated through the testing collaborative led by Jesse Boehm. She offered kudos to Lauren Nassiff of Medway who spearheaded the effort to put the guide together.

Ms. Chow stated the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) will be joining the School Committee at its February 9th meeting for a joint meeting. The purpose will be to discuss priorities for amenities around the Hunnewell fields complex and next steps.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier began with a COVID update. There have been two new cases as reflected in the District dashboard. The State is continuing to explore pool testing. Administration has been told DESE is going to try to find a way to support early adopters of testing with some level of financial resources.

He noted that on Thursday January 28, the Administration held a webinar to discuss proposed changes to the metrics. A recording with slide deck has been posted to the District's website. The proposed changes utilize more measures specific to WPS regarding testing data and would recalibrate the dashboard to be more weighted in local measures. Approximately 270 people attended the webinar. Administration is continuing to work with the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) to assess feedback and determine if there is consensus to move forward.

Regarding vaccines, he stated that educators, while still in Phase 2, have been moved down in priority. Additionally, the State's plan is to primarily use mass vaccination sites with a small amount of vaccine being allotted to individual communities. Members of a Tri-County roundtable have collaborated on a letter signed by Superintendents and union presidents to be sent to Governor Baker to urge him to move educators up in the timeline.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Ms. White stated that Friday February 5th will be the last day of first semester at WHS, noting this is the first year the whole school has done the two-semester system. She noted many assessments had been disrupted by snowstorms. Next week will start new electives.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes - 1/19/21, 1/20/21, 1/22/21 OS, and ES 1/22/21.

Ms. Chow entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as amended.

MOVED: Ms. Martin; SECONDED: Ms. Gray; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Ms. Martin left the meeting at 7:18 pm and returned at 7:35 pm.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Dr. Curry began by discussing that in many ways schools were designed to be inequitable and that in order to achieve equity, the work has to be an embedded feature.

She discussed that the areas of focus in order to shift outcomes need to be significant disproportionality, opportunity and achievement gaps, and educator and student experiences. She noted the issues Wellesley and other districts are facing are not new but they require a new

way to approach them. In this approach it is critical that there is a shared language and definitions. For example, she noted, equity means fairness and justice, not sameness.

Dr. Curry then discussed the equity work being done in SY20-21. In the student capacity, a DE&I Student Advisory has been created in order to institutionalize the students' voice. She has been impressed with the commitment, seriousness, and heart the students have brought to the process. Students are gaining experience in leadership, equity leadership, and learning to advocate for themselves and their peers. It has created spaces for students of color to share their experiences.

In the educator capacity, an initiative was launched to build a shared ownership and develop teacher leadership. The aim is to have an equity facilitator in every building. While currently there are six across five schools, she hopes to scale it next year. Courses around equity literacy have been made available to all staff, two of which are required.

In the leader capacity, Dr. Curry discussed the District's partnership with Courageous Conversation, which is used to shape district norms. She also noted that DESE has been an outstanding partner and has provided extraordinary resources to districts, including the Culturally Responsive Practice Leadership Academy (CRPLA).

Dr. Curry ended by looking ahead. She noted that while strategic planning is on hold this year, her department is looking ahead to a five-year plan. The plan aims to create equity by design, embedding it into the District. This can be strived for by investing in equity centered curriculum and pedagogy; eliminating significant disproportionality and opportunity and achievement gaps; by amplifying student voices; diversify staffing; investing in community education on equity; and investing in Wellesley METCO.

The Committee stated they were impressed with the work Dr. Curry and the District had done thus far and looked forward to hearing future updates. They thanked her for joining them and for her presentation.

FALL 2 ATHLETIC SEASON

Athletic Director John Brown and WHS principal Jamie Chisum joined the Committee.

Dr. Lussier opened the topic by stating the MIAA and the State had been working to add an additional sports season between winter and spring in order to accommodate some fall sports that were postponed. The Board of Health (BOH) was presented with the plan and they did approve.

Mr. Brown stated the proposed Fall 2 season would start February 22 and would include football, girls volleyball, boys and girls indoor track, which will take place outside, and sideline cheerleading. There will be no middle school athletics. On January 29 the MIAA Board of Directors approved all proposed modifications and recommendations to allow the season to proceed. The approval process went through the MIAA Sports Committee, Sports Medicine Committee, COVID Task Force before the MIAA Board of Directors made their decision. The proposed schedule would end April 10 to allow for makeup time and time between Fall 2 and Spring seasons. He noted Sailing was not listed, as it is not an MIAA sport. The hope is to begin Sailing mid-March but more conversations are needed. Safety considerations for the Fall 2 season include assigned player seating for indoor events, locker room restrictions, mask break areas, assigned seats on buses, and all athletes will wear masks. For spectators, no spectators will be allowed in school buildings, and a limited number outdoors. Coaches will be required to take a COVID Course.

In discussion with the Committee, it was noted that wrestling has been moved to the Spring season and that COVID testing will be mandatory for all players. Ms. Martin also emphasized the discussion held at the BOH meeting that it needs to be made very clear to parents as they register the risks they are accepting. Mr. Brown noted that in the previous two seasons this year, there were only a few cases of COVID that needed to be dealt with and he did not believe any cases came from athletics. There was no transmission from other teams, and none from school to school.

Ms. Chow entertained a motion to approve Fall 2 sports season as recommended.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; SECONDED: Mr. Roberti; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

DISCUSSION: 2021-22 MS AND HS PROGRAM OF STUDIES

WMS principal Mark Ito joined Dr. Chisum and the Committee.

Dr. Lussier introduced Mr. Ito and Dr. Chisum to discuss proposed changes to the Programs of Study for WMS and WHS.

Mr. Ito began by stating most of the programming at WMS will be staying the same. One change is in regards to teaming in 8th grade with one team becoming a 6-teacher team. When asked he stated some teachers will be teaching multiple subjects. Additionally, an Advanced Computer Science course will be added and the Introductory Course is going to be revised somewhat. The course previously used Bootstrap and will now be using Python as a general purpose language.

Dr. Chisum first discussed that the Fitness for Life course will be moved from the Family and Consumer Science Department (F&CS) to the Fitness and Health Department. This will allow for a new course to be added to F&CS, Advanced Studies in Early Childhood Development. Next he discussed the plan to revise the schedule regarding electives. He stated that the majority of classes offered three times per cycle will now be offered five times per cycle, with many introductory classes meeting for one quarter rather than a semester. Teachers believe the greater frequency will allow for a greater connection with students and more depth of knowledge while allowing students to try out more courses with a shorter commitment. He noted not all classes will expand to five times per cycle.

After discussion with the Committee addressing possible positive and negative outcomes from the schedule changes, Mr. Ito and Dr. Chisum were thanked for their presentations. A vote will be taken at the next meeting on February 9.

DISCUSSION: EQUAL ACCESS POLICY LANGUAGE UPDATES

Ms. Mirick began by reminding the Committee that new equal access language was approved at the December 22, 2020 meeting. She stated that she and Ms. Chow had since met twice as the Policy Subcommittee to incorporate the language into School Committee policies. Their second meeting included Dr. Lussier, Ms. Orlov, and Mr. LaCava. Of note, no current practices are changing, just the language in the policies is being updated. They identified seven policies requiring updating to include equal access language and two new policies to be added. Ms. Orlov stated the changes aimed to strengthen policies regarding educational stability. She noted they will not change current District practice.

Ms. Chow stated the policies will be posted to the District website for the public to view and the Committee will vote on the updates at the February 9th meeting.

DISCUSSION: FY22 BUDGET

Jenn Fallon and Lauren Duprey from Advisory Committee joined the School Committee.

Dr. Lussier began by addressing the discussions around a dedicated DE&I budget sharing his appreciation for the community's passion around this topic. He acknowledged there was a level of symbolism and significance in having a dedicated line item; however, he noted Administration wanted to avoid creating a separate silo that would work against embedding the DE&I work across the District. Ms. Mahr added that municipal and school budgets are unique in that they are not meant to be granular; rather they are meant to ensure consistency of reporting across the state. She noted it is important to be transparent about how multiple funding sources are used to fund priorities. The District is fortunate to receive grants and though amounts vary, they are a funding source that can be counted on. As an example, the METCO program is primarily funded through a state grant but that funding doesn't fully support the program and the balance is supported through the general fund. Funding for DE&I work is similar in that it comes from state grants, federal grants, dedicated general funds from Professional Development line items as well as funding from Wellesley Education Foundation (WEF). She stated the budget is dedicating 15% of the Special Education grant for disproportionality work and funding for equity facilitators will roll into next year, as the District did not fully spend those grant funds.

Ms. Fallon inquired about who applies for grants. Dr. Lussier noted that all senior team members work on grants in some form. He added many are not competitive grants but rather Title grants.

Ms. Martin remarked she understood the restrictive chart structure of the budget in that it is not an activities based approach to budgeting. However, in listening to individuals who have spoken at the public hearing and in public comment, she wondered if in budgeting processes in the future it would be possible to highlight in narrative format some deeper dives into the budget that could serve to marry the District's work with line items in the budget.

Ms. Chow reiterated Dr. Curry's statement that DE&I work cannot be an add-on and must be deeply embedded. This made her question the premise that it needs to be its own budget, which could signal that the work is siloed. Regarding comments asking money to be reallocated, she does not see that as a role for the School Committee, as they do not have a role in an operational capacity.

Next, Dr. Lussier noted there were general budget updates. Ms. Mahr stated originally they put forward a 2.74% budget. As of this meeting, the budget is at 2.69%, which is down about \$43,000 from what was originally proposed. This is in part due to a correction of the WHS ILA and Athletics budget. There have been 11 personnel changes that will have an impact in next year's budget. Regarding cash capital, the Town has made a request to reduce the requested amount across all town departments by about \$400,000, which equals around \$17,000 for schools.

She offered an update about new grants. The Esser II grant will bring \$447,000 to the District and can be spent until 2023. In addition, two state grants - Coronavirus Prevention Program for \$145,000 and Special Support Earmark grant for \$21,000 - have been granted and must be spent by June 30, 2021.

DISCUSSION/VOTE: EXPEDITED COVID VACCINATIONS RESOLUTION

Ms. Chow explained that other districts have been drafting resolutions in an attempt to expedite vaccinations for educators. She noted the letter Dr. Lussier discussed that he and WEA president Kyle Gekobi signed addressed to Governor Baker. Ms. Gray looked at examples other districts were sharing and drafted a resolution for the Wellesley School Committee. She incorporated language from the Superintendents and union heads' letter. The resolution advocates for educators to be vaccinated as soon as possible. Not covered in the resolution is how they will receive it, whether through local or mass vaccination sites.

Ms. Chow entertained motion to adopt the resolution in support of expedited COVID-19 vaccinations for educators as amended.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Martin; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 10:17 pm, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; SECONDED: Ms. Martin; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Mirick
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

DE&I Presentation to School Committee
WPS Athletics Plan Fall II
WMS-WHS Programs of Studies Updates
List of Policies with Equal Access Language
Budget Hearing 2/2/21
Resolution in Support of Expedited Vaccinations for Educators

