

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 11, 2020
Juliani Room, Town Hall**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. Those present included Chair Melissa Martin, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Matt Kelley, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Cindy Mahr, and Student representatives Rachel White and Violet Flahive.

Ms. Martin announced that the meeting was being recorded by local media.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one present wished to speak.

RECOGNITIONS

Dr. Lussier recognized the following individuals and groups:

From Schofield Principal Gerardo Martinez: Schofield would like to thank all the **teachers** who hosted two teams of WPS faculty that participated in the District's first **math walk through**. Opening our doors for others to observe and reflect is one of the highest forms of professionalism.

Schofield also offers kudos to the **three teacher teams** who completed their first PBL round this year. The **Grade 1** team focused on community helpers; **Grade 2** focused on back path erosion; and **Grade 4** focused on math anxiety. These teacher teams are now in the planning stages for their 2nd project of the year.

From PreK-12 Director of Libraries & Innovation Toni Carlson: February 5th was World Read-Aloud Day. **Elisabeth Zimmer, Schofield Librarian**, arranged for students to skype with two authors. First-grade students virtually chatted with Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw author and illustrator of *Same, Same, but Different*, and many other children's picture books. Additionally, she read to the students her new, yet to be published book, *Papa Brings Me the World*. The 2nd grade had a visit with Morris Award finalist S.K. Ali, co-author of *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family*. On February 11th, **Hunnewell Librarian Roxanne Scott** and the PTO arranged for author and illustrator Barbara McClintock to come to speak to all Hunnewell students.

Athletic Director John Brown would like to recognize Assistant Athletic Director **Courtney Albin** who will be leaving WPS on Friday, February 14th. Courtney was a tremendous addition to the WPS Athletic Program and will be missed. She has taken a job with Special Olympics Massachusetts as Director of Development Partnerships. We wish her good luck in her new job and thank her for everything that she has done for our student athletes, coaches and teams.

Hunnewell Principal Ellen Quirk would like to recognize **Suzanne Colangeli and Laura Brooks**, two first year teachers at Hunnewell who are giving 120 percent to help their students succeed. They are doing an amazing job! Laura and Suzanne are former Wellesley teaching assistants who were trained from within. This is a model that works.

Dr. Lussier also recognized WPS Van Driver **Al Tutley**, WPS Van Driver, on his retirement from Wellesley Public Schools after 13 years of service.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORT

Ms. Chow reported she attended the presentation by **Dr. Dena Simmons** during the WPS Professional Development day which addressed diversity, equity and inclusion. She thought the Dr. Simmons was excellent and provided teachers with very actionable solutions. Ms. Chow also reported she is part of the **Hunnewell Security and Technology Working Group** which is considering the types of features needed in the new building relative to security and technology. She mentioned that turf replacement work on the **Sprague Fields** is underway and expected to be completed by April 1st.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Lussier addressed the rescheduled Professional Development Day held on February 5th, with keynote speaker Dr. Dena Simmons from Yale addressing the District's equity agenda. She challenged staff with actionable items that teachers can do each day in classrooms to ensure students are recognized, heard and valued. The keynote was followed by debrief sessions for the remainder of the afternoon. He recognized Dr. Joan Dabrowski, DE&I Director Charmie Curry, PD Director Chelsea Bailow and all the facilitators for the sessions.

Kindergarten Roundup was moved to tomorrow, February 12th, from 3 – 6 pm in Sprague Library. Secretaries, nurses, and principals will be there to greet families. The second Roundup is scheduled for Saturday March 7th, from 9 am to 1 pm, at Sprague.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes Approval: January 21 and 28, 2020 Open Sessions Minutes – 1/21 and 1/28

After a brief discussion, upon a motion made by Ms. Gray and seconded by Mr. Kelley, the Committee **VOTED** to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The vote was 4 in favor; 0 opposed; 1 abstention.

FY21 BUDGET

Ms. Martin provided an overview of recent events including the Administration's presentation and School Committee's acceptance of reductions totaling \$86,454 to the FY21 budget, which was voted on February 4th, and then presented to the Advisory Committee on February 5th. In addition, the Committee had asked the Administration to prepare a 3.5 percent budget, as requested by the Board of Selectmen, which was also presented to the Advisory Committee at its meeting on February 5th. The 3.5 percent budget proposal resulted in a deletion of all Strategic Plan and Other Critical Needs requests, as well as cuts in Level Service.

Ms. Martin then provided a synopsis of the Board of Selectmen's budget discussion the previous night which ultimately resulted in the recommendation that the Board of Selectmen approve the Schools' budget as presented with the \$85,454 in reductions. This recommendation is based on the Town's solid financial position this year. It was

the general consensus of the Selectmen that based on the Town's current solid financial position, they are comfortable with the numbers as presented last week and want to move forward to Town Meeting with those numbers with no additional adjustments. Ms. Martin also informed the Committee that a number of board members suggested that it would be good to have a working group after Town Meeting to discuss different ways of determining guidelines for the Schools and the Town moving forward.

Ms. Martin expressed her appreciation of all the time that was spent between the Chairs and Vice Chairs of both boards, as well as Town and School administrators, to work in resolving such complex issues.

Ms. Gray suggested that perhaps in the future, when budgetary questions or issues arise, it may be helpful to have a joint meeting to discuss how to best resolve the issue.

Ms. Martin stated the Selectmen do not plan to request additional reductions from other departments, and any remaining gap will be addressed by free cash or potential savings in health insurance costs.

Dr. Lussier again reminded the Committee that there is an inherent structural deficit in the School budget in the context of the overall Town budget. There are elements of the budget that cannot be reduced or removed, and are not addressed even with declining enrollment. For example, the Schools' employment structure and the cost it creates limits the amount that can be used for other elements of the budget in an environment of ever-shrinking guidelines. Previously, these reductions would be addressed by periodic overrides however, there is no conversation about this in recent years. A major portion of the School budget is non-discretionary and it should be recognized that there are unique features of the School budget that do not allow reductions to be made as they can be made in other departments.

School Committee recognized Dr. Lussier and Ms. Mahr for their thoughtful work in the preparation of and adjustments to the FY21 budget.

HHU UPDATES

Ms. Gray reported on the joint meeting of the SBC, Selectmen and School Committee on February 6th. This was an opportunity for the group to check in on SBC's work regarding the Hardy/Upham project, the ongoing feasibility study, as well as discuss the upcoming referendum question relative to having 6 versus 7 elementary schools. The group discussed costs of having three, 12 and 15 section schools, specifically as they relate to operational costs. In addition, other stakeholders joined the meeting including representatives from the Historical Commission and the Playing Fields Task Force. Ms. Gray expressed her appreciation with the feedback received from these boards as well as the community on different aspects of the project.

Dr. Lussier and Ms. Mahr reviewed the projected annual cost savings for closing a school, which totaled approximately \$420,000 in FY21 dollars, excluding facilities costs.

Ms. Gray reviewed the SBC's upcoming schedule.

REFERENDUM QUESTION ON MARCH 17TH BALLOT

Ms. Martin asked how the Committee feels about taking a position regarding the referendum question which asks voters if they want to keep six or seven elementary schools open. She indicated the League of Women Voters is holding a public forum on February 26th on this ballot question and asked if the Committee would like to present its position at the forum.

The Committee's position is clear on this topic, based on the voted policies. It was noted that there is a Ballot Committee in opposition of the referendum question and will be present at the meeting.

After a discussion, it was decided that it may be helpful for the School Committee to restate its position for those residents who do not have children in the schools and may not follow these issues closely. Discussion was deferred until the next meeting. A position statement will be developed for discussion at that time.

REDISTRICTING

Ms. Chow removed herself from the table at 6:30 pm

The Committee was joined by AppGeo project manager Priya Sankalia and GeoSpatial Analyst Ashley Tardif, members of the Superintendent's Redistricting Advisory Committee, Hardy and Upham Principals Charlene Cook and Jeff Dees, respectively and Transportation Director Deane McGoldrick.

Dr. Lussier provided an overview and timeline of the work to date on the redistricting process. He reviewed the previous maps options for Hardy and Upham. He then presented revisions to each map based on feedback received from the community at forums, through the survey, and from emails.

PUBLIC HEARING

Ms. Martin opened the public hearing at 6:56 pm.

Ten individuals spoke relative to the current redistricting proposal and provided the following comments:

There are currently students who cross Route 9 to attend school and this should not be an issue for future redistricting. Walkability should be the focus.

A petition, signed by 125 residents, was presented. The petition urges the Committee not to redistrict Upham students south of Route 9 as proposed in Hardy map 3.

A number of parents expressed concern with safety for those students who will be required to cross Route 9 to attend Sprague School, as well as the increased traffic and decreased walkability that will result from some of the redistricting proposals.

Specific to the Bates community, there is concern that one section will be redistricted to the farthest schools from their residence.

There was concern with Schofield 2 and 3 being moved from their neighborhood community to a school that is 2.5 miles away.

Redistricting students to the Sprague School will result in increased traffic on Route 9 in an already congested area.

The Committee was urged to keep school communities together, keep elementary schools walkable, and be cognizant of traffic issues that will be created by some of the maps.

Questions were raised regarding the timetable for implementation of the redistricting maps.

There was also concern that the survey was not sent to all community members, but rather only those who currently have children in the school system. It should have been sent to all community members, parents as well as non-parents and the elderly.

Public hearing closed at 7:25 pm

Mr. Roberti expressed his concern that the maps as presented will divide neighborhoods. He is also concerned with the projected enrollment capacity at Hunnewell, noting it is low on some of the maps, and wondered whether a smaller school size should be considered for the Hunnewell project.

Committee members acknowledged the challenges and tradeoffs that come with redistricting, and recognize that parents value their school communities, walkability, and have safety concerns. However, it is also important to consider all that happens within the school buildings during the day and that students have the appropriate learning space to succeed.

The Committee thanked the members of the Redistricting Committee, Administration and AppGeo for their very thoughtful work in considering all aspects and preparing maps.

The Committee discussed specific areas of concern and suggested potential adjustments to Schofield 2 and 3 staying at Schofield, and accommodating Upham 2 and 3 at Bates.

The Committee reviewed the number of residential parcels in each district and the projected number of students in each area, recognizing that the number of students fluctuates over time.

Dr. Lussier will revise the maps with the recommended changes and will post the revised maps on the website for feedback, with a tentative vote scheduled for February 25th.

The Committee thanked the members of the Redistricting Committee, Administration and AppGeo for their very thoughtful work in considering all aspects and preparing maps.

Ms. Chow returned to the table at 8:20 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Jeremy Davis asked if it would be possible to have the vote to meet current MSBA requirements, however, leave the opportunity open for future revisions of the plan in 2024 when the redistricting plan is scheduled to be implemented.

Mr. Michael Sullivan urged the Committee to revisit Bates 9, because in all scenarios these students are being moved with some requiring that they cross Route 9.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:30 pm, upon a motion made by Ms. Gray and seconded by Mr. Kelley, the Committee ***unanimously VOTED*** to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

Wellesley Redistricting SC Presentation 2/11/20

Hardy Map #3

Upham Map #3

JMcDonough Memo – Cost Impacts for 3 HHU Schools 2/5/20

Projected Cost Savings – 6 Schools – 2/4/20

Residential Property Breakdown – Hardy & Upham Options 3, Current