

**Wellesley Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting  
March 31, 2020  
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. Those present included Chair Melissa Martin, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Matt Kelley, member Sharon Gray; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendents Joan Dabrowski and Cindy Mahr; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov, and Director of Technology Kathleen Dooley. Absent: Jim Roberti

Ms. Martin announced that the meeting is being held remotely and recorded by local media and YouTube.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** .

Marc Schwabish, Hardy parent of 2 students, indicated he would like to see a clear plan forward and wants remote learning to start immediately. He suggested that perhaps the District could start with a pilot program and then work out any issues, just to get something going. He also offered the assistance of community members to get the program moving forward immediately.

John Rotolo, Hardy parent, is in agreement with Mr. Schwabish's comments about getting a program in place quickly, and is concerned that other communities have students working from home on live programs with their schools and teachers, and Wellesley does not have this as yet.

Ozgur Eris, 30 Patton Road, is also in support of Mr. Schwabish's comments, but would like to add that he is concerned that it has been more than 2 weeks since school closure and there has been no direct contact between teachers and students at Hardy School. He suggested that teachers should be having 1:1 conversations with students on a daily basis. He understands that moving to a remote online platform which is properly populated with pedagogical content will take time, but having teacher/student connections and an interim plan should be in place.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Ms. Martin thanked Ms. Chow for stepping in and chairing the **School Committee/PBC joint meeting** on March 26<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Martin indicated that at last week's meeting, there was discussion that Annual Town Meeting has been deferred to April 27<sup>th</sup>. At last night's Selectmen's meeting, there was discussion that Town Meeting will most likely be delayed further. In addition, Ms. Martin clarified that the format of Town Meeting that she mentioned at last week's meeting is just being socialized and has not been decided as yet.

**SCHOOL CLOSURE/REMOTE LEARNING**

Dr. Lussier provided an overview of work to date that was developed to address a short-term remote learning plan which was implemented last week. This work is based on clear guidance from the state that the approach was to focus on educational enrichment and flexibility and this approach is very consistent with other districts. However, even as this work was implemented, it became clear that the approach would need to be

revisited with the prospect of an even longer-than-anticipated closure likely, and this was confirmed when Governor Baker announced that all schools in Massachusetts would remain closed until May 4<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Lussier announced that late last week, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released new information on how to approach the extended closure. The guidance, which is posted on the District's website, provides that the main priority is around safety and social/emotional health and wellness for students and staff, which is consistent with Wellesley's focus. In addition, while recognizing there are significant equity issues that challenge the support of all students through remote learning platforms, the Commissioner of Education is encouraging districts to begin planning for a more robust approach to student learning, which is consistent with the planning already underway in Wellesley.

Dr. Lussier emphasized that the guidance is clear that remote learning is not intended to replace in-school learning and is not synonymous with on-line learning, but rather it provides robust and meaningful direct and indirect learning to represent approximately half of what would occur in a normal school day. There is a strong recommendation of reinforcing the foundations that have been built in the first semester of school, while recognizing, in particular with older students, the desire to advance the curriculum. With regard to accountability, while feedback is strongly encouraged, grades may be difficult to discern and perhaps a credit/no credit approach would be best.

It was noted that the DESE's guidance is useful conceptually, however, the Administration is currently working on how to build this out for Wellesley. This conceptualizing will be done in partnership with educators and the Wellesley Teachers' Association (WTA) to ensure there is a joint sense of expectations and work will move forward in a unified manner. Sessions with the WTA began earlier in the day and he hopes to have agreement by the end of the week. Once agreement with the WTA has been reached, he hopes to move forward with version 2.0 of its remote learning model in early April, which is consistent with DESE's timeline. He noted that while 2.0 is intended to provide a structure for meaningful learning at all levels and ensure a continued focus on equity, it will also provide flexibility for families as well as for staff, recognizing that each family is dealing with unique circumstances in their own households that often must take priority.

While recognizing the comments made during Public Comment, Dr. Lussier acknowledged he has also received feedback from many families expressing concern that the pendulum not swing too far in the other direction where the expectations and responsibilities are so significant that families cannot possibly support their children in meeting the requirements.

Dr. Dabrowski provided an overview of the ongoing planning process for remote learning at each level, and specifically since receiving the most recent guidance from DESE. She reviewed work to date and considerations being used in developing a comprehensive plan while being mindful of screen time for students and balancing it with self-directed work, as well as physical activity. A priority for the next iteration of remote learning is a focus on social and emotional work, with teacher-student interactions, and making these the guiding principles. Dr. Dabrowski indicated

administrators are working to balance the advancement of new learning, making things productive and meaningful, while helping kids think about application of knowledge and going deeper with topics they may have already learned. She and her team are excited with the work that they have been doing and the possibilities for creativity. Educators who are already using Zoom and Google Hangouts to connect with students, have really appreciated the time they have spent on these connections.

Dr. Lussier discussed that the WPS Technology Department is working to ensure that the technology platforms that are or will be used by educators meet privacy standards. It is important that the platforms are consistent with the District's legal obligations and the sensitivities that families expect.

Ms. Orlov provided an overview of work being done in the Student Services Department, based on information received from the DESE on general education, as well as more detailed guidance from the DESE Associate Commissioner on Special Education. The guidance provided is a change from the original guidance and more directed toward providing some services to students and holding IEP meetings. Staff will be connecting with families to determine their needs for students on IEPs. Since IEPs are written to be implemented in a school environment, and it won't be possible to implement an IEP as written, she hopes to discuss with families what is most needed and then develop a plan that staff will be able to implement and would be the most impactful for students. Considerations include the length of the 'school' day and how this work will be factored in along with the student's general education materials. In addition to some services being provided, families will be given supports and resources to access. She and her staff will be collaborating with families so to ensure their child's needs are being met as much as possible. She will also be meeting with the Wellesley Parent Advisory Council chairs to discuss how WPS can support parents during this time and talk about how this plan may unfold.

The following questions were asked:

How will remote learning 2.0 be launched by elementary principals? The WPS remote learning sites have a section for principals where they post messages, announce birthdays and continue rituals that they would do if regular schools are in session. They will use this platform for messaging on the next iteration of learning as well.

How are AP exams being handled at the high school? Students will be taking exams at home. The exams have been modified significantly by reducing the scope of content that they will be tested on to reflect content up to the time that schools started closing across the nation. AP teachers have been engaging and holding class sessions and providing supplemental supports around this work.

Please provide examples of remote learning 2.0 at each level. Dr. Dabrowski provided a broad overview of what remote learning 2.0 will look like at each level that will include real time interaction, online platforms, and offline student self-directed work.

In response to a question regarding the status of MCAS, it was indicated that the state is seeking waivers from the state legislature and the federal government for this year's testing.

Will remote learning 2.0 push forward new curriculum? Dr. Lussier explained that the DESE's strong recommendation is that whatever approach districts employ that it is focused on deepening and expanding foundations that are already in place. Recognizing, in particular at the high school level, there may be interest in moving the curriculum forward on a timeline that would be more similar to when school is in session. Dr. Lussier explained that developmentally there is more opportunity to move forward with older students than at the elementary grades. He wants to ensure that whatever approach is taken with younger students that it is developmentally appropriate while being mindful that there is not a teacher at home with each child to ensure if new content is introduced that all students are appropriately supported.

When should parents expect remote learning 2.0 to begin and is the expectation that the current learning format, following the state's previous guidance, will continue until 2.0 is implemented? Dr. Lussier indicated that the expectation is that remote learning 2.0 will be implemented in early April. The exact date is dependent on when negotiations with the WTA are completed and there is a clear agreement of expectations. In the meantime, the current remote learning format will continue.

Ms. Mahr then reported on WPS operational issues. She informed the Committee that WPS continues to provide approximately 90 meals per day to families on free and reduced lunch, and she was pleased to announce that the USDA approved DESE's request for a waiver of the requirement that school meal sites must be located in areas where there is at least 50 percent of participants on free or reduced price. This means that Wellesley is now eligible for reimbursement. Ms. Mahr estimates that it costs \$1600 per week to continue this service, and estimates reimbursement is approximately \$325 per week. She expects DESE will provide more clarity later in the week.

There have been ongoing conversations with DESE concerning payments for services such as food services, bus transportation, and special education private placements. DESE's guidance on private placements is that the districts should continue to pay private school vendors as they continue to provide services to students but in a different manner, similar to what is being done in regular education. WPS is working with neighboring communities who use Eastern Bus to determine how to address the contract with Eastern Bus. She hopes to have an update by next week's meeting. Ms. Mahr is still awaiting guidance around the national school lunch program and how to handle the District's contract with Whitsons.

There was a question relative to any cost savings to be derived due to school closure. Ms. Mahr indicated one of the larger cost drivers is the transportation contract which is now being reviewed. She is in the process of quantifying those items that are being paid and those that are not and hopes to have more clarity on these items in the coming weeks. One issue that has risen is how to handle fees that have been paid for services that are not being rendered such as preschool tuition, where staff is still being paid. She will prepare a report on these items.

Ms. Martin also expressed her thanks and appreciation to all the individuals in town who are working so hard on keeping the community informed on all issues relating to

COVID-19. She also thanked parents for their patience as the District works through this process of remote learning.

### **HHU UPDATE**

#### **Hunnewell Project – Project of Significant Impact (PSI)**

The Committee was joined by Alex Pitkin, Kristen Olsen and Erin Presileo of SMMA, the Town's architects on the Hunnewell project, to provide an overview of the proposed Hunnewell Project of Significant Impact submission to the Planning Board and the overall permitting process timeframe. It was noted that the PSI submission requires the owner's signature, hence the discussion to ensure all are comfortable prior to the Chair's signature.

Ms. Presileo, who is SMMA's permitting specialist, provided an overview of the PSI submission, approval process and the timing of the overall permitting process. The PSI work is the start of the local approval process, and is filed with the Planning Board. This step is focused on 'big picture' items such as the impact of utilities on the municipal systems, and traffic and regional parking impacts that the project may bring to the town.

Ms. Olsen indicated the PSI is the first step in a sequential process of approvals that will take approximately one year to complete, including public hearings by several Town boards. It is expected that the PSI review will be completed this summer. As the PSI process moves forward, SMMA will be preparing the Wetlands filing and the application to the Zoning Board relative to specifics about the building and the site. The ZBA application process will begin in the fall, once the PSI is approved. There will also be a requirement to go before the Design Review Board.

Ms. Presileo provided an overview of the PSI submission to the Planning Board and approval schedule, indicating once the submission is made, the Planning Board has 65 days to open a public hearing, with a target date of the first week in June for the first of 2 hearings. Feedback is received during the first hearing and addressed at the second hearing. Once the hearings are complete, the Planning Board will issue a decision, then there is an appeal period and once it lapses, the decision will be recorded at Registry of Deeds and then they will move onto next step of the ZBA approval process.

Ms. Martin indicated there have been emails concerning whether the HHU projects should move forward at this time. She feels that the Hunnewell and Hardy/Upham projects are two separate projects and submission/approval of the PSI will keep the option available of having the Hunnewell project moving forward to possibly have a new school completed by 2023.

The Committee asked questions and provided comments regarding the PSI process. It was the consensus of the Committee that the PSI review process should move forward, and as a result, the Chair will sign the submission.

Mr. Pitkin noted that his team is working on next steps and responding to the questions raised at the joint School Committee/PBC meeting where an update on the Hunnewell Schematic Design was provided.

**Hardy/Upham Project**

Ms. Chow removed herself from the discussion at 7:43 pm

Ms. Gray reported the SBC will be meeting remotely on Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, to hear reports on information requested by the abutters including an option for a new Upham School on the current footprint, to review currently discussed options, updated traffic analysis, redistricting maps options, and to review a draft evaluation matrix of the various options that has been sent to the SBC.

Ms. Gray addressed the emails the Committee has been receiving about halting work on the HHU projects. She explained the upcoming SBC meetings are an opportunity to receive information that has already been developed and is available for review, as well as making it available for the community.

Ms. Gray outlined the steps needed to submit a decision to the MSBA, including the two SBC meetings previously mentioned, development of a recommendation, a public forum on the recommendation, an SBC vote on the recommended option, that will then be presented at a joint meeting with the School Committee and Board of Selectmen for discussion and action. She also reminded the Committee that the SBC committed to reporting back to Town Meeting its final decision. Ms. Gray estimates the earliest possibility of going before the MSBA is August, and could be as late as October or December 2020. It was also noted that in light of the current global issues related to COVID-19, next steps are subject to change based on changes at the State and local level.

Ms. Chow rejoined the meeting at 8:05 pm.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Josephine Okun, parent of a WHS student, commented on the importance of setting schedules and structure for students, as well as personal connections with their teachers and classmates. She also feels that the District's concern for equity for all creates inequity for most. Ms. Okun also wondered whether there is a system to identify and help teachers who are not able to reach out to students for varying reasons.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At approximately 8:06 pm, Mr. Kelley moved to adjourn the meeting.

**MOVED:** Mr. Kelley; **SECONDED:** Ms. Chow; **ROLL CALL:** Mr. Kelley – Yes; Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes.

**MOTION CARRIED:** Yes – 4; No – 0

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley  
Secretary

**Documents and Exhibits Used:**

SC Meeting Agenda/Posting - 3/31/20

Hunnewell Project of Significant Impact Documents