

**Wellesley Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting  
April 21, 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, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendents Joan Dabrowski and Cindy Mahr; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov; and Student Advisory representatives Rachel White and Violet Lahive.

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

**PUBLIC COMMENT .**

Peter Neergaard, Hunnewell parent, expressed concern with the quality of remote learning and does not feel it is up to state standards and that resources are weak, specifically in reading and writing. He believes the math lessons are good, however, they are short. He does not feel that science and engineering lessons are adequate. He hopes that the administration will continue to review and improve this program.

Elona Kogan, Sagamore Road, asked if there is a plan in place if this crisis lasts longer than expected, specifically into school year 2020-21 or if there is a subsequent outbreak that requires a shelter in place scenario. She does not feel that teachers were prepared for this current closure and hopes it does not repeat itself if another closure occurs.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Ms. Martin announced the Committee is considering scheduling **office hours** via Zoom. She and Mr. Kelley will work on the logistics of doing this, as well as developing a schedule for these sessions.

**STUDENT ADVISORY**

Ms. White reported there are still some issues with scheduling and trying to keep up with each class requirement due to the varying teachers' office hours, assignments and classes that are being held on different platforms sometimes simultaneously. This results in a number of ways that things can slip through cracks. She again requested that there be a clear venue to ask general questions, as well as make available a technology help desk. In addition, Ms. White would like to see mandatory advisories brought back for everyone to keep connected since students will not be returning to school this year.

Ms. Lahive finds that teachers have been transferring all their work to the Canvas platform, especially for seniors, which has made things more manageable. She also feels that as students continue getting into a routine, things will become easier.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Ms. Martin entertained a motion to approve the April 7, 2020 Open Session minutes as presented.

**MOVED:** Ms. Gray; **SECONDED:** Mr. Kelley; **ROLL CALL:** Mr. Kelley – Yes; Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Mr. Roberti – Abstained; Ms. Chow – Abstained;  
**MOTION CARRIED:** Yes – 3; No – 0; Abstention - 2

Ms. Martin entertained a motion to approve the April 13, 2020 Open Session minutes as presented.

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

#### **SCHOOL CLOSURE/REMOTE LEARNING UPDATES**

Dr. Lussier announced that earlier in the day, Governor Baker announced that all schools will remain closed for the remainder of the year. Although it is the right decision and it was certainly not unexpected, Dr. Lussier acknowledges it is a difficult one given its implications, most notably for the seniors and all the many activities that mark the end of high school. Dr. Chisum and his teams are working on different ways to celebrate the seniors in coming weeks. In spite of the disappointments associated with school closure, Dr. Lussier applauds the decision for the health and safety of the entire community.

Dr. Lussier indicated remote learning will continue until the end of the school year. The DESE will be releasing additional guidance later this week on remote learning. It is expected that guidance will not change the overall expectation, but will provide clarity on the overall standards that the state would like to see the districts focus.

Dr. Lussier again emphasized that the goal of remote learning is not to replicate school; the traditional curriculum is not currently being followed. Teachers are focusing on building off the foundation already in place before the closure and thinking about extending learning in important areas. It is not possible to replicate the curriculum because the District does not have the time or capacity to do so remotely.

The state is also working with districts on what the return will look like in the fall, as well as what needs to be done to complete this school year, and how summer school will be addressed.

In addition, based on recent news reports it is possible that there may be another significant COVID-19 wave next winter, so there is a need to plan for multiple contingencies such as closing for a period of time, staggering days, or a blended approach of time in schools coupled with remote learning. The foundation built this year, with current and new tools that are being brought aboard to be able to engage with remote learning, will help in exploring multiple scenarios for next year.

Dr. Lussier announced that in the next week, a survey will be sent out to the community to check in on how students and parents are doing as they manage and support learning expectations in this new environment.

Questions were raised concerning the status of attendance in the remote learning environment; how support staff such as nurses, guidance counselors and psychologists

are being utilized; how summer school and summer enrichment activities will be addressed; and whether there will be an updated remote learning platform once the DESE guidance is provided.

Dr. Lussier indicated there was a dramatic increase in attendance upon the implementation of version 2.0. Although attendance will not be reported to the state this year, staff is following up with students who are not engaging to ensure it is not due to access issues,

With regard to utilization of support staff, Dr. Dabrowski informed the Committee that nurses and guidance counselors at the middle and high schools are reaching out to students individually, forming small group discussions and connecting with families. At elementary level, school psychologists are reaching out to students and families.

Ms. Orlov also indicated that she meets with the psychologists regularly to check in on the status of students and families. The nursing staff is also reaching out to students with medical issues, as well as developing regular newsletters for families on relevant topics other than COVID-19 that affect their health. In addition, nurses have started the work of trying to plan what a reopening might look like and changes needed to keep the WPS community safe.

Dr. Lussier indicated that in addition to the learning issues that must be addressed for the end of this year and start of next year, there are operational issues that must be considered including providing safe building access to staff so they can access their classrooms and secure materials, and dispensing of medications that were left in nurses' offices. He acknowledged that there will be a new normal relative to safety measures and practices. He will be working with the Health and Facilities Management Departments to determine best practices for staff and students in the fall to try to avoid or minimize a resurgence of COVID-19.

Dr. Lussier indicated the work that has been done on remote learning to date will allow an easier transition if it is necessary to shift back to remote learning for a period of time in the future. He expects that the state will inform the recovery work in terms of curriculum and how to address some of the time that has been lost this year, recognizing the full curriculum was not implemented and what this means for learning next year.

With regard to summer programs, Dr. Lussier explained the District has a legal requirement to provide summer school for some students, however it is not clear at this time if there will be opportunity to have access to students in person to provide supports that may be difficult to provide remotely, or whether remote work will continue into the summer. With regard to summer enrichment activities, particularly for the most at-risk students, one of the challenges that is expected is that there will be remote learning fatigue at the end of the regular school year. He is concerned that offering enrichment activities to a broader student base will be met with resistance and little interest. He will be exploring optional enrichment as well as the required summer work.

Mr. Roberti asked about next steps after the new DESE guidance is announced. Dr. Lussier does not expect this guidance to be a major change, but rather some calibration of the current work, providing clarity on content and identifying the standards on which to focus. He also indicated that guidance on graduation will be left to the districts to determine.

Ms. Martin mentioned that parents have offered to help and would like to partner with the District on moving forward. Dr. Lussier is appreciative of the offers of assistance and encouraged parents to engage with their PTOs to channel some of this creativity and generate conversations that can help the District move forward. He also strongly recommended that students, parents or staff should reach out to their teachers and/or building administrators if there are questions on scheduling or other topics that need clarity. Ms. Chow emphasized the important role of advisories to inform and connect student communities.

While recognizing the necessity and appropriateness of closing schools through the end of the year, the Committee members are saddened by the many missed opportunities for students and staff, from being in the classroom together to end of year traditions.

### **Operational Impacts**

Dr. Lussier indicated now that school closure for the balance of the year is confirmed, it will help clarify some of the budget modelling. At the next meeting, the Committee will be provided with a clearer picture of the status of this year's budget and how the FY21 budget landscape has been changed due to the crisis. Information on the FY21 capital budget reduction is being reviewed and will be presented to the Committee within the next few weeks.

### **HHU UPDATE**

#### **Hunnewell Project**

Ms. Gray indicated there is nothing new to report on this project beyond last week's update. There will be a substantial update presented to the PBC on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, which will also be presented to the School Committee in the next few weeks.

#### **Hardy/Upham Project**

Ms. Chow left the meeting at 7:19 pm.

Ms. Gray reported the SBC met on Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, which will be the last meeting until potentially July or August. There was discussion on the schedule and next steps, cost, and traffic. The SBC discussed getting a deeper analysis around circulation and the traffic issues at the Hardy site, defining what information is needed based on the traffic study work that has been done, and have it available for deliberation when the SBC reconvenes in July or August. The modelling will be based on the assumptions gathered by the traffic surveys conducted last fall.

Regarding cost, the general consensus is that the cost estimates that have been solicited by the team are not estimates that will be submitted to the MSBA for the project, given the current landscape, anticipating up to a 6-month delay to the project

and not knowing what the impact of COVID-19 will be on construction costs. The team has recommended that updated cost estimates be obtained when the SBC reconvenes so they can be submitted to the MSBA as part of the preferred schematic report, which is planned to be submitted to the MSBA by the end of October for consideration at a December MSBA Board Meeting.

Ms. Gray also noted that there was general agreement that the baseline cost of the building for either site would be about the same with the addition of estimated premiums and differentiators, which she outlined for both schools, based on the options being considered: new Hardy behind the current Hardy (baseline plus an estimated \$600,000 for up to 4 modulares during construction); Hardy addition/renovation (baseline plus an estimated \$500,000 for site work and an estimated \$5.8 million for a full modular school as swing space); new Upham behind the current Upham (baseline plus an estimated \$4.1 for ledge removal/site work); and new Upham on the current footprint (baseline plus an estimated \$2.6 million for ledge removal/site work plus the \$5.8 million for swing space). She hopes to have firm numbers in the fall that will be submitted to the MSBA.

Mr. Roberti asked if all available information and key dates can be posted on the website for public review. Ms. Gray will review the materials to determine what will be helpful to include on the website.

Ms. Gray noted that with regard to the schedule, the SBC reached consensus that it is difficult to meaningfully engage the community under the current environment. The SBC plans to reconvene in August/September for a decision on the preferred option by the end of September, and submission to the MSBA by October 27 for the mid-December MSBA Board meeting.

The SBC has some tentative meetings scheduled for mid-July and August primarily to review the additional data that has been requested, reviewing the analysis that has been received to date, and discussing the evaluation matrix. Substantive deliberations will begin with the SBC meetings in early September, with the expectation of reaching consensus at that time. A community meeting will then be scheduled for the week of September 14<sup>th</sup> to bring the information forward in, hopefully, a more traditional forum. After the community forum, the SBC will vote on its recommendation, which will then be presented to the School Committee and Board of Selectmen, who will go through their process of receiving feedback. SBC will also need to determine how to update Town Meeting on their decision prior to submitting it to the MSBA by October 27<sup>th</sup>.

A letter to the MSBA has been prepared and will be signed by the Board of Selectmen Chair. The letter, which is due to the MSBA on May 1<sup>st</sup>, confirms the new date of October 27, 2020 for the submission deadline to the MSBA.

Ms. Chow returned to the meeting at 7:36 pm.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** No one wished to speak

**ADJOURNMENT**

At approximately 7:39 pm, Ms. Martin entertained a motion to adjourn.

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

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY:** Yes – 5; No – 0

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley  
Secretary

**Documents and Exhibits Used:**

SC Meeting Agenda/Posting – 4/21/20

Draft Minutes 4/7 and 4/13/20