

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
April 28, 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 Student Advisory representatives Rachel White and Violet Lahive. Absent: Jim Roberti

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Richard Howes, Schofield parent, thanked the WPS teachers for their hard work in adapting to remote learning protocols. He had a number of questions he recommended the School Committee ask of the Administration regarding the current learning platforms, and expressed his belief that neighboring towns have remote learning platforms that are superior to Wellesley's and listed where he felt the deficiencies lie, including what he feels is a minimal amount of live interaction with teachers. He does not feel the current system can continue for the balance of the year, and asked the Committee to supervise the Administration and the work that is being done.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Chow announced that School Committee will be holding its first **virtual Office Hours** session on May 4th at 10 am. More information will be available on the Committee's webpage and in this week's newsletter.

Ms. Martin reported that on April 27th she, along with Dr. Lussier and a number of District administrators, joined a remote **Central Council** meeting, which provided an opportunity to connect with the various schools' PTO leadership.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Lussier announced the appointment of **Grant Smith** as the next principal of Hardy Elementary School, effective July 1, 2020. He expressed his appreciation to all the volunteer parents and staff who were involved in the selection process, and looks forward to having Mr. Smith join his administrative team.

Dr. Lussier reported he attended the first **remote Central Council meeting** since the closure. Many members of the WPS team including principals and senior staff, as well as Ms. Martin were in attendance. Much of the conversation was around school closure and remote learning, clarifying expectations for students and how to engage with teachers at the school level.

Dr. Lussier recognized **Dr. Mark Kline and the Human Relations Services (HRS)** in Wellesley for providing mental health support to WPS at the District level as well as at

individual schools supporting teachers, students and families. Dr. Kline joined this week's Administrative Council meeting earlier in the day to address the challenges of leadership during this time, thinking about the level of anxiety in the community relative to the COVID crisis, acknowledging the impact on school leaders, and the importance of self-care for school leaders while trying to support others. He announced that HRS will be facilitating a series of community forums related to parenting during the pandemic. Details will be posted on the District's website.

Dr. Lussier announced the passing of Marsha McGoldrick, **mother of Transportation Coordinator Deane McGoldrick**. Condolences to the McGoldrick family from the School Committee and Administration.

STUDENT ADVISORY

Ms. White feels students have been getting more comfortable with **remote learning**. She echoed her request to provide to students information on the **point of contact** for general questions as well as for technology issues. She also recommends the restoration of **mandatory advisories**.

Ms. Lahive feels that **emotionally students are doing well**, even with the realization that they will not be returning to school, especially seniors who are trying to make the best of the situation. She also acknowledged that students do feel supported by the faculty and administrators during this time.

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Martin entertained a motion to approve the April 14, 2020 Open Session minutes as presented.

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

MOTION CARRIED: Yes – 3; No – 0; Abstention - 1

SCHOOL CLOSURE/REMOTE LEARNING UPDATES

Remote Learning

Dr. Lussier reported that DESE released updated guidelines on Friday evening which he indicated are consistent with the District's current approach. DESE provided guidance on what they believe are the most important standards on which to focus for the remaining weeks of school at each grade level.

Dr. Lussier also announced he has released two surveys – one for parents and one for students in grades 7 through 12, primarily to obtain feedback on Version 2.0 remote learning on a range of topics focusing on technology, screen time, parent support, and quality of learning experiences. The student survey version has similar questions but more tailored to the students' perspective. The survey will be available until May 4th at 3 pm.

Questions were raised relative to the specific curriculum areas that the state considers most important, and whether there are opportunities to do project-based learning (PBL) within the remote learning model. Dr. Lussier referred to one of the documents that accompanied the DESE guidance which provides content materials and defines those

areas of importance at each level. With regard to PBL work, he acknowledged that the nature of PBL work – close collaboration and contact – goes against the remote learning model. However, Dr. Dabrowski noted that she has been in contact with the District's PBL partner which is working to quickly pivot to an online platform. She hopes to have some guidance in early or mid-May.

Dr. Lussier is pleased to announce the District is rolling out SeeSaw which is a new learning platform for the youngest learners in kindergarten and grade 1. This allows students and teachers to post materials in a more intuitive way. Teachers have been training and over 300 parents have signed up for training on this platform.

Ms. Martin asked Dr. Lussier to address the concern heard earlier during Public Comment about the amount of time students are in synchronous and asynchronous learning. Dr. Lussier noted although there is much interest in having more synchronous learning, DESE is promoting more asynchronous learning. Secondary level students are more likely to engage in real time with teachers. When putting together the remote learning plan at the elementary level, there were many conversations with faculty and administrators of how it should look. Live interactions at the elementary levels were desired but more in the form of small group and morning meeting models. Going live to teach a lesson with 20-22 young learners can be quite challenging. It was also discussed that not all students learn well in a remote environment, and having the ability to rewind and review materials and lessons is helpful. The asynchronous sessions are consistent at grade levels across the district and provide flexibility in home learning schedules. Dr. Lussier acknowledged there is no perfect answer and he and his team continue to review the process in an effort to find the right balance for students, their families and faculty.

Dr. Lussier was asked when asynchronous lessons are provided by specialists, how do students follow up after the lesson? He encouraged students or parents to check in with their classroom teacher during a small group meeting or by email.

Ms. Gray discussed the comparison by parents with work in other districts, noting that the Massachusetts Association of School Committee list-serve comments reflect that committee members from all over the state appear to be receiving the same comments and questions. Dr. Lussier acknowledged that in speaking with colleagues in other districts, they are all hearing similar concerns with comparisons to other districts and that other districts are doing it better. He indicated that there is far more commonality in approaches amongst districts but with nuanced differences rather than significant differences, and noting that each district is unique in its processes with their unions etc. Dr. Lussier and his team will continue to review the approach and determine if there are ways it can be improved as time goes on.

Operational Impacts

FY20 Fees and Potential Refunds

Ms. Mahr reviewed the proposed refunds by category, including methodology and reasoning, the timeline and options for refunds. The fee categories include Athletics, Student Parking, Bus Transportation, Before School Programs for elementary and PAWS, IVEP, MS and HS Visual Arts, Student Activities, PAWS tuition and Child Lab. She discussed each fee category and the reasoning for the recommended refund option

of each category: full, partial, no refund or applying the refund to a school related negative household balance. The value of each refund category was also provided.

Ms. Mahr is requesting the Committee's guidance relative to the Child Lab proposed refund methodology. Child Lab has 18 students, 9 of whom are children of residents, and 9 who are children of WPS staff members. She reviewed the two proposed methodologies being considered, noting that the \$300 deposit is non-refundable in both options.

Methodology 1 takes into consideration the number of school days held this year (113) versus number of days expected (172) or 65 percent of the time. The anticipated refund would be 35 percent of the \$5,500 tuition or \$1,925 per person. This would result in a total refund of \$35,000, leaving an \$18,800 deficit in the fund balance.

Methodology 2 considers that 95 percent of the Child Lab tuition covers the salary of one full time faculty member and one part time teaching assistant who have continued to be paid in full during the closure. This version proposes to refund the amount that is not related to salaries, which totals \$6,900, or \$385 per person, leaving an \$8,900 balance in the fund.

The breakdown of all categories and refund recommendations are included in the slide presentation for this topic.

Mr. Kelley asked about the overall thinking of different refund approaches in each category. Ms. Mahr explained her thought process in determining the fairest approach given the costs being incurred in each category.

Ms. Gray asked how this proposal fits in with the overall current fiscal landscape, whether there are funds available in FY20 to cover these costs, and whether there is an expectation that a certain amount will be turned back to the town at the end of this fiscal year. Dr. Lussier indicated he expects to have turnback funds at the end of the year and there will be considerations relative to how this also affects the FY21 budget. More information on the broader fiscal outlook will be presented next week during the Quarter 3 report.

As part of Quarter 3 report Ms. Mahr will provide more specific information regarding impact of fund balances and budgeted offsets based on the refunds being proposed. It was also suggested that if Committee members have additional thoughts, questions or comments, please send them to the Administration so they can be addressed as appropriate.

FY21 Cash Capital

Dr. Lussier reviewed that all town departments were asked to make a 25 percent reduction in FY21 cash capital budget which totals \$276,230 reduction for Schools. This budget encompasses Fixtures, Furniture and Equipment (FF&E) and Technology requests for WPS. Ms. Mahr reviewed the proposed reductions which include the elimination of all FF&E requests totaling \$111,711, and in Technology, deferment of the blade server replacement and laptop replacements, totaling \$164,519. The technology

items are being deferred to FY22, noting the need has not been eliminated, but shifted to FY22. Dr. Lussier noted that over the years, WPS has strived to smooth out and have a consistent run rate for technology replacement requests, however, deferments such as these make it difficult to do this.

Ms. Mahr reviewed the historical cash capital since FY18 overall, then by location, and then a review of the technology equipment that has been deferred to FY22. Ms. Mahr explained that it was decided to defer the blade server because it was unlikely that it could have been ordered and ready for installation this summer since ATM was delayed and approval would have been received too late to order for this year. This work cannot be done during the school year. The deference of the blade server and laptop replacements to FY22 will put more pressure on the FY22 budget.

The Committee asked clarifying questions with this item slated for action at its next meeting.

HHU UPDATE

Hunnewell Project

Ms. Gray reported that at the recent PBC meeting, the project team discussed cost estimates which were developed before the COVID crisis occurred so the accuracy of these estimates is not certain. She also noted that the square footage of the building has increased due to several factors that have been added to the Hunnewell plan and has resulted in a \$5 million increase to the total base construction cost from what had been presented at Town Meeting in December. The feasibility conceptual cost estimate was \$45.1 million and the updated cost presented by two estimators is \$50.3 million and \$50.1 million. There are several factors that affect this number, with the largest item being the inclusion of a geo-thermal system. This is an item that has evolved and has been discussed in the past, but has not been decided upon.

The PBC has expressed concern with the additional costs and there was some discussion on whether to request that the project team adhere to the conceptual budget presented in December to Town Meeting. PBC also asked about the School Committee's thoughts on this increase. It is anticipated that the PBC will have additional discussions about the items that have resulted in the increase in cost and square footage, to determine what is important to the PBC and School Committee, and what should be removed from the new estimate. The value engineering process will provide a more critical review of the items that have been discussed in the working groups and work towards a plan for design development.

Ms. Gray addressed recent discussion about putting the project on pause at the end of a milestone, which is the end of schematic design. The schematic design work does continue and once completed, further design work will be on hold for several months.

There is a need for School Committee engagement on scope before schematic design gets to its final version. This will be addressed within the next few weeks.

Mr. Kelley asked when the consideration to include a geo-thermal system was put back in the discussion, and how will roles be defined relative to decision making for various

components of the project. Specifically, he noted that the value engineering process includes two categories: items that have an impact on supporting the educational program which would require School Committee feedback versus technical items such as geo-thermal which would not necessarily require School Committee feedback.

Ms. Gray discussed that the PBC is responsible for the design and construction of all municipal buildings, including schools, and School Committee is responsible for the scope of work as it relates to the school projects. There is a continued interest in reducing the square footage and cost of the Hunnewell project, while delivering the educational plan as developed. The PBC is trying to determine how to reduce these costs and ensure that there is value for all the items included in the plan. Any items that are being considered for reduction that may impact the educational plan will require input from the School Committee, Superintendent and his team. These conversations will begin next week at PBC.

Hardy/Upham Project

Ms. Chow left the meeting at 8:10 pm

Ms. Gray reviewed that the decision on the siting of the Hardy/Upham school has been deferred to the fall and the project is currently on pause other than essential business that needs to be addressed. A letter will be sent by the Chair of the Board of Selectmen to the MSBA confirming the delay in submission of the final siting recommendation until October 27th, due to the COVID crisis and the limitations of public participation.

Mr. Kelley feels that the timing in the fall for the SBC to do its work and arrive at a final decision will be tight, taking into consideration the SBC deliberations, as well as the School Committee and Board of Selectmen discussions, and then community forums. He also hopes that the School Committee and Board of Selectmen have an active role in the discussions and development of the final recommendation.

With reference to both HHU projects in general and thinking about the goals of the two projects: providing educationally appropriate facilities for students and teachers and doing it in a fiscally responsible manner, he feels that cost is important at this time in consideration of both projects and hopes that groups will not get caught up in items that will incur significant additional cost without making a difference on the delivery of education to students. He believes there should be more focus on the financial side of these projects, especially in light of the COVID crisis and the increasingly uncertain economic times. It is important for the SBC, School Committee and Selectmen to be looking closely at value engineering and making these buildings more economical while not sacrificing the educational plan. For instance, he questioned why premiums would be paid for non-educational items such as ledge removal or swing space, when a school could be built without these added costs.

Ms. Martin discussed the schedule for late summer and fall and feels there will be opportunities for joint meetings with the SBC to ensure that there are thorough discussions on these topics.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT No one wished to speak

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:20 pm, Ms. Martin entertained a motion to enter executive session in order to comply with M.G.L. c. 30A § 22 to review minutes from the April 13, 2020 executive session, and to invite Superintendent David Lussier and Assistant Superintendent Cindy Mahr into the executive session, and the Committee will not return to open session at the conclusion of the executive session.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: Yes – 4, No – 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

SC Meeting Agenda/Posting – 4/28/20

Draft Minutes 4/13/20 Executive Session and 4/14/20 Open Session

FY20 Refund Discussion Presentation & Revenue Refund Summary Sheet

FY21 Cash Capital Proposed Reductions Presentation