

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
August 19, 2020
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 5:17 PM. Those present included Chair Linda Chow, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, Secretary Sharon Gray, members Jim Roberti and Catherine Mirick; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr, and Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT There were no callers.

SARS-CoV-2 TESTING PILOT PROGRAM

Dr. Lussier provided an update on the testing component of the reopening plan. He noted that WPS is working with a group of parents/scientists/infectious disease experts on a local plan for baseline, symptomatic and potentially asymptomatic testing for students and staff. This group is also working with community partners, as well as the state, to determine funding options for this testing. Four other Massachusetts communities (Brookline, Chelsea, Revere and Somerville) that have similar interests in testing in schools but varying positivity rates, have joined Wellesley to discuss forming a coalition to possibly share information about infrastructure, operational and supply costs.

Dr. Lussier mentioned that symptomatic testing will be critical, and is covered by most insurance, but the challenge is that the timeframe by which those results are reported can vary greatly, from 24 hours to a much longer timeframe of up to 7 days. For school purposes, the impact of having a response time of over 24 hours is significant. It is necessary to have easy access to testing with results reported back within a 24 hour timeframe.

Dr. Lussier discussed that symptomatic and baseline testing are very high priorities, noting that although the baseline test is only a snapshot in time, it is still essential. The third testing component would be that of an ongoing surveillance program testing model of asymptomatic student and staff, which is the most ambitious and challenging, however, would allow the district to move forward very swiftly to identify asymptomatic positive testing individuals. The cost for surveillance testing is significant, although Dr. Lussier noted that testing technology is changing constantly and perhaps costs will be decreasing over the next few months.

The Wellesley Education Foundation included a survey to a recent district-wide communication that went out to families and the response was overwhelmingly positive from families to help finance this initiative. Dr. Lussier expressed his appreciation of the conversations that have been ongoing with other Town leaders including the Selectmen, Board of Health and Town Counsel to work through the many details including operational, financial, and legal needs. He mentioned the urgency of getting baseline testing in place before the start of school.

Ms. Chow reported that the Wellesley Education Foundation has provided information on survey results which indicates tremendous interest and support from families to contribute financially to the program. Ms. Chow also referenced a detailed memo from the group that has been working on the testing efforts, outlining specific operational needs that must be addressed in the near term to move forward with a testing program in Wellesley.

Questions were raised concerning whether DESE is considering a state-wide approach to testing; the relationship amongst the five towns; how would working with a 5-town coalition fit in with the financial and operational model; and how does procurement work? Dr. Lussier responded that he remains hopeful that something will come soon from the state regarding testing, but feels that time is of the essence and in order to hopefully have a program in place by school opening, Wellesley should not wait to move forward. With reference to the relationship among the five-town coalition, this is to be determined, based on where each community is in their reopening process. It was noted that the focus of the survey and the work done by the group of parents in developing the recommendations is specifically for Wellesley at this time. Moving forward, it will be determined how the work done in town can be shared with the other towns.

There was a question concerning the Board of Health's stance on this proposal. Ms. Chow noted that the Board of Health has reviewed the recommendations and developed a list of questions to the group working on the recommendations. It appears they are on board for symptomatic testing, but not clear on surveillance or time zero testing. She suggested it may be appropriate for the Committee to discuss this at an upcoming meeting with the Board of Health.

Ms. Chow mentioned that the Selectmen have identified a number of issues to consider regarding a testing program and they will continue to monitor this work, however, it was noted that the final decision relative to moving forward with testing falls within the School Department's purview. She is pleased to see the overwhelming support from the community, and also noted that WEF has discussed making a significant financial contribution towards the testing program for WPS.

Ms. Chow indicated that in order to have a program in place for the start of school, work must begin as soon as possible. She proposes providing the Administration the ability and flexibility to issue a request for proposal (RFP) for an operations partner that will execute the entire testing program for students and staff, including site set up, test administration, collection of samples, processing of samples, and daily site cleanup.

After a brief discussion, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to authorize Cindy Mahr to issue a request for proposals for the SARS-CoV- 2 testing pilot program.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At approximately 5:40 pm, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to enter into Executive Session under Massachusetts G.L. c 30A, §21(A), exemption #3 to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Wellesley Educators Association because, as Chair, she declared that to discuss this in Open Session would have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee, and to invite into the Executive Session Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendents Cindy Mahr and Joan Dabrowski, Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov, Director of Human Resources Gayle McCracken, and Town Labor Counsel Jim Pender of Morgan, Brown & Joy, and to not return to Open Session at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

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

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Gray
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

None