

**Wellesley Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting  
September 6, 2022  
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Leda Eizenberg, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Craig Mack, members Melissa Martin and Catherine Mirick; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendent Sandy Trach; Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; Director of Student Services Kathleen Bernklow; Director of Human Resources Monica Visco; Advisory Liaison Rani Elwy; and Student Advisory representatives Evelyn Harrison and Armita Hamrah.

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

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Diane Campbell, of Grove St. is a retired educator at Hunnewell and former School Committee member. She joined to pay tribute to Charles Bennett who passed away a few weeks ago at age 97. Mr. Bennett graduated WHS in 1942 and worked at Hardy for 33 years as teacher and principal. He is remembered with respect, admiration, fondness, and for his smile. He knew everyone's name in the Hardy community and for decades afterward. The Hardy library is dedicated to him.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Ms. Chow stated there will be a Dog Job on Sunday, September 18 at WHS. This is a fundraising event to benefit the Julie Fund, which raises awareness and funds for women's cancers.

She updated the Committee on developments regarding the Sprague lacrosse wall. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) approved the project in May. They are reconsidering the idea of putting down turf and are considering installing permanent bathrooms similar to the type being proposed at the Hunnewell Track & Field. She added the master plan for the Sprague complex envisioned in 2007 included bathrooms. As they want to be sure that putting up the lacrosse wall would not preclude or interfere with possibly putting in bathrooms at a later date, they will be talking to the leadership of the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF).

Mr. Mack welcomed the student representatives. He also noted his appreciation that the School Committee was invited to the Admin Council retreat, noting it was great to learn about professional development programs for educators and hearing about the needs of the system for the year.

Ms. Eizenberg stated it was exciting to have the opportunity to meet new staff a few weeks ago and last Monday to attend the first in-person all-staff kickoff in three years. She highlighted the student performances and hearing from Dr. Lussier about the year ahead.

**SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

Dr. Lussier offered the following recognitions:

From Toni Carlson: Roxanne Scott for her ability to quickly jump in and help our district when we had an area of need. In mid August, with three weeks left of the school year, she pivoted her focus from the special job she was assigned for this year to the

new Sprague full-time librarian. Roxanne is always willing to do what's best for students. Thank you Roxanne for your flexibility!

He noted he received a number of requests to recognize all the District's Custodians for their amazing work this summer setting up Hunnewell classrooms at Bates, Sprague, Hardy, and Upham and the cleaning of the buildings in preparation for another year.

To the Department of Public Works (DPW) for the completion of the Middle School paving project prior to the opening of school as well as an appreciation of the patience of WMS neighbors.

From Sarah Mattloff: I would love to give a shout out to the Technology Department for all of the fires they have put out over the past week! Amy R and Laurie O have been particularly helpful with PowerSchool, as always.

From Ellen Quirk: Every member of the Hunnewell Staff and the host schools' principals and staff for their coordination and spirit of teamwork.

Congratulations to the 14 National Merit Scholarship recipients from WHS!!

#### **STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT**

Ms. Harrison introduced the student advisory representatives for this year. She stated she was a sophomore, Ivy Wang, a junior, and Sofia Dobado, a sophomore could not attend tonight's meeting, and Armita Hamrah, a new representative this year, is a sophomore. Ms. Hamrah stated she was excited for the year.

#### **CONSENT AGENDA**

Gift Acceptances

Meeting Minutes - 6/21/22; 7/27/22 and 8/18/22 ES Open Session

NE Medical Billing Invoices WELLS2203 - \$3,455.14; WELLSFY2021 - \$1,617.60

Surplus Materials Memos - Upham Library Books; Food Services Washer & Dryer; Special Education Testing and Instructional Material

Ms. Eizenberg entertained a motion to approve the June 21 minutes.

MOVED: Ms. Chow; SECONDED: Mr. Mack; ROLL CALL: Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Mack - Yes; Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Martin - Abstain.

**MOTION CARRIED 4-0 WITH 1 ABSTENTION**

Ms. Eizenberg entertained a motion to approve the remainder of the Consent Agenda as presented.

MOVED: Ms. Martin; SECONDED: Ms. Chow; ROLL CALL: Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Mack - Yes.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

#### **STAR ACADEMY ADDING GRADE 9**

Dr. Lussier reminded the Committee and community that last year, the School Committee approved the launch of Star Academy's K-8 school in Wellesley after a thorough process led by

Ms. Trach. This past spring, Star requested to add Grade 9. Ms. Trach once again led the review process.

Ms. Trach stated the District is recommending approval of Star Academy's request and she highlighted key points that lead to the recommendation. It is a main requirement that a private school's curriculum rises to the same level of thoroughness and efficiency as the district's public school. She concluded Star Academy's proposal does meet that level. Their proposed curriculum aligns with Common Core and is similar to a typical high school program with courses in elective languages, STEM, and arts. The courses will be leveled and a review of the corresponding textbooks indicated the resources sufficiently meet standards. Their calendar will follow the WPS calendar with trimester grading periods and extracurriculars.

Margarita Druker, a Director at Star Academy, stated they had an incredible first year in Wellesley and were thankful for the warm welcome from neighbors. She thanked Dr. Lussier and Ms. Trach and their teams for reviewing their application. She noted many of last year's Grade 8 students were eager to continue at Star for Grade 9. When asked, Ms. Druker stated she does not foresee adding a Grade 10 or beyond to their Wellesley school due to space constraints.

The Committee discussed that the standard practice is to have an item presented and discussed at one meeting then take a vote the following meeting. Ms. Mirick stated that given students were waiting to begin the school year and that during the approval process last year there were no comments or concerns brought forth by the community, she felt comfortable voting at this meeting. The other Committee members also stated they felt comfortable and ready to vote.

Ms. Eizenberg entertained a motion to approve Star Academy adding Grade 9 per the recommendation of David Lussier and Sandy Trach.

Upon a motion made by Ms. Martin and seconded by Ms. Mirick, the Committee **unanimously approved** the motion.

#### **OPENING OF SCHOOL REPORT**

Dr. Lussier offered an update after the first partial week of school. He thanked Ms. Trach, Dr. Bernklow, Ms. Visco, and the Technology team for helping to get staff set up. He noted the District held its traditional All Staff Kickoff in person for the first time since August 2019. Wednesday, August 31, was the first day of school for students.

**COVID** - Guidance from the state before the end of summer encouraged returning to as much normalcy as possible. WPS will remain a mask optional environment and vaccinations continue to be highly recommended. He stated the District will be working with the Wellesley Health Department to host a webinar to provide education to parents. Additionally, the Health Department strongly recommends everyone receive a flu vaccine. He added WPS still has an ample supply of test kits and while the District is not hosting or implementing a viral testing program this year, home screening remains essential and families can inquire with the school nurse if tests are needed. The state is not requiring districts to report positive cases unless the positive test occurs at school; therefore WPS will not be maintaining a dashboard.

**Enrollment** - Ms. Mahr offered an enrollment update based on data as of September 2 comparing numbers to the state reported enrollment from October 2021. There are currently 4,136 students attending WPS, which is 50 below October 2021 and 76 above the projected

SY22-23 enrollment. Enrollment at the elementary and high school levels are up, while middle school enrollment is down slightly. Based on current enrollment, kindergarten at Fiske and Upham are either closed or close to closing while Grade 2 at Fiske and Grade 3 at Upham are closed. She added FutureThink is concluding their report from their enrollment study and will present their findings at the September 27 meeting.

**Transportation** - Ms. Mahr stated 171 Hunnewell students opted in to ride the bus and district wide, just over 1,000 students registered for the bus. She added there is still availability on buses if those who have not yet registered wished to do so, though there are limited seats remaining on high school routes.

**Staffing** - Ms. Visco stated it was and continues to be a very busy hiring season. The District welcomed 44 new professional staff at orientation and approximately 44 new hourly staff members have been hired since mid July. Labor trends continue to be challenging but she noted Wellesley is in good shape with only three professional staff positions to fill. She added there are still 66 open hourly staff positions and recruitment is ongoing.

The Committee inquired about how hiring challenges are impacting students and special education programs as well as what may be driving higher than projected enrollment. Dr. Bernklow stated they have been able to redeploy special education staff to support students by alleviating them of some other duties. Ms. Visco added that newly hired staff are being moved through the onboarding process as quickly as possible and Ms. Mahr added the newly budgeted permanent substitute positions are being filled and utilized. Regarding enrollment, Ms. Mahr stated the District is seeing more larger families moving in, which is impacting multiple grades.

#### **FACILITIES PROJECTS UPDATES**

Ms. Mirick stated projects have been ongoing throughout the summer. At Hunnewell, immediately after school closed in June everything was moved out and placed at host schools, in storage, or donated. The District worked with ReUse Network to send 481 pieces of furniture and other items to charities. Current work at the site includes prepping for foundations and working on sewer and drainage. Planning is being done for a groundbreaking ceremony, which will occur some time in the next month to six weeks.

Regarding Hardy, Ms. Martin stated the project is moving through the permitting process. She noted the Planning Board and Design Review Board have offered helpful suggestions and discussion points. The next step will be moving the application forward to ZBA in preparation for actual construction set to begin February or March.

#### **COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

Dr. Lussier stated the District has been discussing ways to continue to improve efforts around public engagement and communication. He stated they will be issuing a Request for Quotes (RFQ) to engage in an external partnership with a public engagement communications firm. Additionally, the District is recommending a new internal position for a Coordinator Community Engagement. This position will work to operationalize a robust district public outreach and engagement strategy; coordinate activities that advance internal and external stakeholder relations and partnership opportunities; provide technical and creative assistance to the District; manage media relations for the Administration and School Committee; and help coordinate crisis planning and communications.

Ms. Mahr described a second new position the District is proposing be added, Accounting Coordinator - School Records Officer and Payroll. She explained the person in the position would respond to public records requests, which can be quite complex and require working with legal counsel in a timely manner. While this position would not necessitate a 1.0 FTE, there are additional needs in the Business Office, specifically in Payroll. She added that the Wellesley Educators Association (WEA) is supportive of the decision.

In discussion with the Committee, it was noted that while it is not typical to add positions during the year, it is important to address these needs. Ms. Mahr explained there are carried over grant funds, which gives some flexibility in the budget. Additionally, as there are currently 66 positions open in the District, each day those are not filled represents savings in the budget. She added the current view of the budget is on target and that these positions are feasible to cover. The Committee will vote on the positions at their next meeting.

#### **SCHOOL COMMITTEE CALENDAR REVIEW**

Ms. Eizenberg stated the Committee will be having some in-person meetings this year, noting the general plan is to conduct the first meeting of each month in person, the first of which will be the next meeting, September 13, which will take place in the Juliani Room. The public can participate in Public Comment in person or via Zoom, or watch the meeting from home via Wellesley Media. She stated the Committee is looking to strike a balance for the public and staff.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

At approximately 8:43 pm, Ms. Eizenberg entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Ms. Martin; SECONDED: Ms. Mirick; ROLL CALL: Ms. Eizenberg – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Mack - Yes.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Mack  
Secretary

#### **Documents and Exhibits Used:**

STAR Academy Cover Letter  
STAR Academy Application Review  
School Committee Policy LBC  
SY22-23 School Opening Updates  
Job Description: Accounting Coordinator - RAO and Payroll  
Job Description: Coordinator for Community Engagement