

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING  
June 29, 2020

Webinar ID:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88951300760?pwd=TmVVL3VhTnY2YksyclGZW05eVU4QT09>

I. A. Call To Order

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order at 7:02 PM by Mr. John Henry, Chair. Participating were Mrs. Danielle Black, Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Anita Raman, and Mrs. Rachel Stewart of the School Committee; Ms. Onika Jenkins METCO Representative to the School Committee; Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent; Dr. J. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; and Ms. Sheri Matthews, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations.

Also present was Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology and School Libraries and incoming Weston High School Principal Paul Peri.

Mr. Henry thanked people for their participation in the meeting and acknowledged those participating. He reviewed the agenda, referenced the remote meeting statement posted in the agenda, noted the meeting was being recorded, and indicated members of the public could email questions or comments to be addressed during the meeting to Mrs. Black at [blackd@weston.org](mailto:blackd@weston.org) or Ms. Raman at [ramana@weston.org](mailto:ramana@weston.org)

I.B. Chairman's Report – Mr. Henry indicated the anticipated need for a School Committee Executive Session meeting to be scheduled in the next few weeks for discussion of Collective Bargaining issues. He read a statement reaffirming the Committee's support of the district's initiatives to address equity, diversity, inclusion and antiracism.

Statement read by Chair John Henry:

I want to take a brief moment to reaffirm that we as a committee have supported, and I personally will work with the committee to continue to support, the district's initiatives to address equity, diversity, inclusion, access and antiracism.

We have received letters, statements, and petitions from students, alumni, faculty, and the community giving examples of racist and related incidents and structures in our schools. These communications also provide thoughts and concrete suggestions on how the district can address the important work ahead of us. First, let me say, absolutely, we hear you.

I believe that it is not the responsibility of those who have been made invisible to remind us that they are still here. I believe we must listen, learn, acknowledge, and act to create meaningful and lasting change in our district and our community.

This will be a long and often uncomfortable journey, but I have tremendous hope and confidence. Our administrative team has never been stronger, and I know the work already underway and the work to come will leverage this committee, our talented faculty, students and families to make Weston a leader among all districts in providing an open, equitable and anti-racist education.

I.C. Superintendent's Report – Dr. Connolly acknowledged the work of Ms. Laurie Melchionda, recently deceased Director of Health Services, for both the Weston Public Schools and the Town of Weston. She said Ms. Melchionda's "tireless work will long be remembered, and her loss will be greatly felt. Our hearts, thoughts and prayers are with all of those that worked and loved Laurie, particularly her family."

Dr. Connolly welcomed Mr. Paul Peri to the Weston Public Schools and indicated he will officially begin his role of Weston High School Principal on July 1. Mr. Peri expressed his excitement about joining the district.

Dr. Connolly addressed the tragic killings of Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and other events this spring that are reminders of the systemic racism that occurs in our country, communities, and schools. She acknowledged and thanked Alton Jenkins and Bella Simons for organizing the peaceful protest march in Weston, Jacqueline Liu and Casey Friedman for their letter to bring forward their concerns about issues of equity and racism, and the hundreds of alumni and current students who signed a petition calling for reform in areas of racism and equity in the Weston schools.

Dr. Connolly presented plans for moving toward equity, culturally responsive teaching, and anti-racism and affirmed that the goal is deeply embedded in our district strategic plan and not a new goal. She noted that year 3 of the district strategic plan is underway, with one of the three main goals to

“Champion a school community based on cultural competency, trust, and mutual respect.

- Embedding anti-bias practices in our curricula
- Establishing partnerships to promote development of a welcoming community for all
- Recruiting and maintaining diverse faculty and staff members
- Improving communication between schools and families”

Dr. Connolly reported the framework being used is in part informed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). She indicated the first step for educators is to build the social and emotional skills of adults to be able to teach them to our children. This includes responsive classroom training for elementary and middle school teachers and the equity and inclusivity work that has begun at the high school. She said the goal of this groundwork is to help all students to feel that they belong, are significant individuals, and who are engaged and valued members of the school community. “Once we are able to build those skills, we then move on to teach educators how to be culturally responsive educators which we have begun with a number of teachers and leaders this summer and will continue going forward. Once teachers have these skills, we will have a community that can teach cognitive, social and emotional skills so that teachers and students can be culturally responsive whether that be active anti-racists, and or be able to support all marginalized groups to reach their fullest potential.”

Dr. Connolly shared steps taken in the past two years, including the hiring of Ms. Amy Kelly as Director of District Advancement: Belonging, significance and engagement; training staff and implementing the State of Washington model for the evaluation of bias content in instructional materials as recommended by DESE; and training all K-8 faculty and most staff in Responsive Classroom practices as well as bus drivers, lunch aides and others that interact with students. She reported that nearly 30 high school teachers have been trained in equity and inclusivity by attending a three-day workshop led by Ms. Kelly, with a goal for all high school teachers to be trained by the end of next year and more than half by the summer. Dr. Connolly mentioned the middle school advisory program that emphasizes equity and community and noted that specific advisories addressed racism, anti-Semitism, and teaching about hate symbols.

Dr. Connolly said teachers have been encouraged to take EDCO’s IDEAS 1 course: Anti-Racist School Practices to Support the Success of All Students - or an equivalent this summer, noting that teachers are expected to take such a course within their first three years of Weston employment. Dr. Connolly reported a number of teachers and administrators completed the course this spring and that veteran teacher are encouraged to take a refresher course, perhaps at a more advanced level. She said there will be a Culturally Responsive Teaching Leadership Workshop, where school-based teams will plan their professional development around culturally responsive teaching practices and a reading list that will be provided to faculty and staff to engage in some directed readings around issues of race and racism this summer and fall.

Dr. Connolly said that in planning for the future, the district must think about anti-racism and anti-biased structures, systems, and community. She announced that a task force, comprised of students, parents, community members, educators, administrators, and school committee members, will be formed to undertake the next steps, address proposals we received, and create a “move-toward-anti-racist-practices” goal with specific action items to be considered in our next District Strategic Plan. This taskforce will meet in the Fall and generate a course of action by November or December. Dr. Connolly said the district will continue its work on equity, inclusivity, and culturally responsive teaching and thanked the community for the thoughtful actions, letters and petitions. “We are looking forward to the work ahead.”

I.D. Subcommittee Reports –none presented.

II.A. Guidelines and Planning for Reopening in the Fall

Dr. Connolly informed the Committee that DESE guidelines emphasize that districts must have three plans for reopening schools in September, a plan for on-line learning, a hybrid model, and a plan with students back in schools full time. She noted that remaining flexible is important at this time and indicated a model for full reopening plan stipulates that all students in grades 2-12 wear mask unless special circumstances, students to remain in their classes most of the day, students will remain in clusters as much as possible, outdoor learning spaces used, snacks and lunch in classrooms, and modified music and theater. Dr. Connolly said that all meetings will take place via videoconference and at the high school, there will be no open campus, assigned study halls for underclassmen, parking limited to seniors to start the year with carpooling encouraged. She informed the Committee that community forums have been planned early in July: July 7 for elementary, July 8 for Middle School, July 9 for High School, and July 14 for Student Services, all 4-5PM via zoom. Dr. Connolly also indicated that additional surveys would be sent out and that the reopening information is subject to change, moving forward. The Committee discussed. Some discussion occurred regarding survey results. Dr. Connolly indicated that 68% of parents responded that their students would return, with 25% not sure at this time and that 76% of parents said they would drive their students to school. Dr. Carter reported on preliminary results from recent parent survey providing feedback on School from Home. He said he could provide a more thorough presentation to School Committee and include survey results from students and teacher surveys as well.

Much discussion took place regarding transportation, school schedules, athletics, health concerns, PPE supplies, and technology. Dr. Connolly indicated they await further guidance from DESE before making decisions. Ms. Matthews reported she is working with Town Manager Leon Garamond regarding the CARES grant and other grant opportunities to help with supplies needed. Mr. Cobb suggested the PTO could help and there may be other resources within the Town for assistance. Dr. Connolly said a more detailed plan for reopening would be presented on July 20. No action taken.

II.B. School Year 2020-2021 School Lunch Prices, Rental and Tuition Fees

Mrs. Matthews presented proposed rental rates and fees for 2020-2021. Mr. Cobb asked if consideration had been given to additional cleaning costs which might be incurred when outside groups use the facilities. Ms. Matthews agreed to have Gary Jarowski review the fee proposals and will request Committee approval of the rates at the next meeting. No action taken.

II.C. MS/HS Sectioning/Class Discussion and Approval of Classes Under 15 Students

This item tabled until next meeting.

II.D. Superintendent Evaluation

- Mr. Henry discussed the process undertaken, including an evaluation form and written comments from School Committee members. He shared a compilation of written comments and indicated a summative evaluation had been delivered to Dr. Connolly. Mr. Henry indicated the review was positive and ranked Proficient across all four categories (Leadership, Academic, Budget and Communication). He said Dr. Connolly is doing exceptional work and has taken great strides forward this year, that she is a strong, effective superintendent who makes decisions based on

what is best for students and has assembled a good administrative team. Superintendent Evaluation Documents include the [Combined Summative](#) and [Consolidated Comments](#).

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Mrs. Black, the School Committee unanimously to accept the Superintendent Evaluation report, with Mr. Henry voting aye, Mrs. Black voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye, Mrs. Stewart voting aye, and Mr. Cobb voting aye.

II.E. EDCO Update and Discussion

The Committee discussed continued participation in EDCO. Mr. Henry expressed his concern in remaining part of the collaborative at this time due to its financial mismanagement and length of time it took them to discern the situation. He reported that legal counsel has indicated that EDCO must be notified by July 1, one year in advance, of a member's intent to withdraw the following year and that notice can be rescinded during the year. Mr. Henry recommended Weston's withdrawal from EDCO with opportunity to revisit during the year. Dr. Connolly reviewed many of the positive programs provided by EDCO and said she is hopeful they will turn things around so that Weston can remain a member. The Committee discussed. Mrs. Black said she finds EDCO's malfeasance and lack of oversight disturbing. Mrs. Stewart indicated her preference would be to support EDCO and the programs and benefits provided to the district. It was noted by Mr. Cobb that the July 1 deadline necessitates a vote at this time.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Mrs. Black, the School Committee voted 4-1, with Mrs. Stewart voting against, to provide notice to EDCO of Weston's intent to withdraw from the EDCO Collaborative effective July 1 2021, unless the Committee is provided with information warranting reconsideration and rescinds its vote by November 2020, with Mr. Cobb voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye, Mrs. Black voting aye, Mr. Henry voting aye, and Mrs. Stewart voting nay.

The Committee asked that Dr. Connolly so notify EDCO of its vote of intent to withdraw, clarifying that it is the School Committee and not the administration's decision and that the decision will be revisited if documented information provided warrants reconsideration.

II.F. Facility Projects Update

Mr. Cobb reported that the FinCom is not in support of the proposed warrant article to fund a feasibility study for the High School/Middle School complex without a further study of enrollment trends. Mrs. Black requested the administration continue to get data points on enrollment, noting that the October 1 report may look different this year if some students remain at home.

III.A. Approval of Minutes of June 15 2020

Mrs. Stewart requested language changes in the draft minutes regarding the Student Services Report. Mr. Henry asked that she provide in writing her recommended changes. He tabled approval of minutes until the next meeting. No action taken.

III.B. Business Actions –  
Certificate of Warrant

Ms. Matthews presented a Certificate of the Secretary, approval of warrants for payment.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrant for payment of \$1,974,824.88 by the Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, with Ms. Raman voting aye, Mrs. Stewart voting aye, Mr. Cobb voting aye, Mrs. Black voting aye, and Mr. Henry voting aye.

IV. Adjournment

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Ms. Raman, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:34 PM, with Mr. Henry voting aye, Mrs. Black

voting aye, Mr. Cobb Voting aye, Mrs. Stewart voting aye, and Ms. Raman voting aye.

Documents used by Committee:

- [School Year 2020-2021 School Lunch Prices, Rental and Tuition Fees](#)
- Superintendent Evaluation Documents:
  - [Combined Summative](#)
  - [Consolidated Comments](#)

Recording of Meeting provided by Weston Media: