

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING

10/05/2020

Zoom Link: [Westonorg.zoom.us/j/94015330088](https://westonorg.zoom.us/j/94015330088)

Documents Used At Meeting:

- [Draft School Committee Code of Ethics](#)
- [Draft Social Media Use Policy for School](#)
- [Draft 2021-22 Budget Guidelines](#)

Call to order & Opening Business

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order by Mr. John Henry, Chair. Participating were Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Alyson Muzila, Ms. Anita Raman, and Mrs. Rachel Stewart of the School Committee; Onika Jenkins, METCO Representative; Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent; Dr. J. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; and Ms. Sheri Matthews, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; and Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology and School Libraries;

Mr. Henry presented a motion for adjournment to executive session for the purpose of discussion of collective bargaining matters with the intent to return to open session.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Mr. Cobb, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn to executive session for the purpose of discussion of collective bargaining matters with the intent to return to open session with Mr. Cobb voting aye, Mrs. Stewart voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye, Ms. Muzila voting aye, and Mr. Henry voting aye.

During the executive session, no action was taken.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Mr. Cobb, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn from executive session to return to open session with Mr. Cobb voting aye, Mrs. Stewart voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye, Ms. Muzila voting aye, and Mr. Henry voting aye.

The meeting was reconvened in open session by Mr. Henry.

The minutes begin after the conclusion of the closed executive session and beginning of the open session.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Connolly begins by celebrating several successes, including foreign language learning. Other successes include progress on district equity initiatives, and integration of new technology platforms. She shares some stories about hybrid learning and outdoor classrooms.

Sub-Committee Reports and Other Business

- **Sustainability:**
 - Ms. Muzila shares about *Weston Ahead* holding a meeting (westonahead.org) to move forward with climate action initiatives
- **Equity**
 - Ms. Muzila is working with the Director of District Advancement Amy Kelly to launch a new working group to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion
- **PTO**
 - Ms. Stewart shares PTO is doing a great job, has delivered lawn signs and are working to increase support for PTO across the town
 - Ms. Raman also highlights SEPAC as a wonderful group to join, offering support to families
 - Ms. Raman shares that PTO offered to help communicate summaries of meetings
- **Medical Advisory Board:**
 - Ms. Raman shares they are looking at testing; some disappointing complications
- **Athletics**
 - Ms. Jenkins shares that METCO families are meeting with athletics department
 - METCO families working with transportation to assist families

Major Business and Re-Opening Updates

Superintendent Connolly provides updates on the re-opening process. Dr. Connolly notes that COVID response protocols and safety guidelines have been distributed and posted. Weston Board of Health, Medical Advisory Board and Jamy Gaynor are taking a leading role in meeting safety guidelines.

A survey is coming next week to students in grades 4-12 and to all parents, towards reopening.

Superintendent explains that the next big step will involve bringing students in Pre-K through 5th grade for in-person learning five days per week from approximately 8am to 12pm. Dr. Connolly discusses busing and transportation. Dr. Connolly reiterates that at the secondary level, the district does not have the space to bring all students back in while maintaining 6-foot distancing.

Assistant Superintendent Kimo Carter discusses ongoing improvements to instruction in the hybrid model. Dr. Carter discusses teacher work to reflect on experience and share best practices. Dr. Carter discusses constructive, solutions-oriented feedback from families. In response to a question from Mr. Henry, Dr. Carter discusses the schedule for K-5 once students attend 5 days per week. Ms. Stewart asks whether the planned survey will ask parents to give their plans for fall 2021 and Dr. Connolly replies that plans for next year will be addressed in a later survey. Ms. Stewart asks about increasing synchronous remote learning, and Ms. Muzila suggests setting percentage goals for the amount of live-streaming. Dr. Carter replies that the administration can talk to the teachers regarding increasing synchronous learning.

Ms. Muzila also shares another parent's suggestion to host forums for parents to discuss asynchronous learning options and opportunities, and Dr. Carter agrees to host that forum.

Mr. Cobb expresses that parents are focused on students spending more time with teachers. Mr. Henry notes that the district does not plan to use parents to supervise lunch because of the need to limit the number of different adults in the building.

Ms. Raman brings the discussion back to the new scheduling, to clarify and contextualize that 20 instructional hours per week will be a significant improvement.

Mr. Henry states that there will be no Q+A period this meeting, but that the administration is working on publishing answers to FAQs. Next Q+A 10/13/2020.

Residency Concerns Regarding Remote Learning Academy (RLA)

Mr. Henry shares that some families who, for different reasons, may no longer be residing in Weston, remain enrolled in RLA. During these unprecedented times, families have complex situations that complicate our basic policies. Superintendent Connolly explains that we do not want to add undue anxiety and issues to families in the school community, so it would be beneficial to consider making per-case exceptions to residency requirements during the COVID pandemic, for students who are already enrolled in RLA. Superintendent Connolly supports making some in-context exceptions for current RLA families, and asks committee members to consider this.

Committee members ask for further explanation of specific issues: Ms. Muzila asks about the specific status of the families being considered. Superintendent explains that it is not students who are seeking to enroll in RLA as brand new to the district, but people who do own a home in Weston and pay property taxes here, but are not currently residing in Weston. Many of these families relocated due to the pandemic, but have been enrolled in RLA since the beginning, and fully intend to return to residing in Weston full-time during or after the pandemic. Superintendent says it is a small number of families, and committee members express support for allowing enrolled students to remain enrolled in RLA through the end of the academic year. Ms. Muzila expresses support for keeping RLA students in school throughout the year, within these bounds.

Ms. Raman asks for clarification on how long this would be for. Superintendent Connolly says she was thinking it would apply for the duration of the pandemic. Ms. Raman raises the point that the district is asking for flexibility from families, and it should provide flexibility back. Ms. Stewart clarifies that this would only apply to families who do currently own homes in the town.

Mr. Henry suggests this allowance of case-by-case exemptions should extend through the end of the school year, at which time it can be revisited. Mr. Cobb emphasizes supporting students.

MOTION: Mr. Henry Makes a motion to approve Dr. Connolly being allowed to make some limited exceptions to residency requirement policy through the end of the school year for families with students currently enrolled in RLA, who are current Weston property owners; to be revisited for the next year. Ms. Raman seconds the

motion to approve. Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, and Mr. Henry all vote aye, approving the motion to allow for residency policy exceptions.

Superintendent's Goals

Superintendent presents goals for district improvement, which all connect to the strategic plan. Goals focus on district improvement, professional development, and student learning. Specifics include but are not limited to:

- Reviewing the district strategic plan and making additions and changes as necessary;
- Navigating the unique challenges and uncertainties of budget process with transparency;
- Creating a working group to address cultural responsiveness and antiracism;
- Improving administrative leadership and management, supporting new school leaders
- Improving district-wide communications;
- Professional development, social and emotional learning, culturally responsive teaching;
- Public health safety and district-wide COVID testing;
- Formative and summative assessments to identify and close gaps in student learning

Superintendent's presentation of goals is followed by a brief period of Committee questions.

Ms. Muzila asks Superintendent Connolly about the MASC administrative training, and Superintendent Connolly speaks to her experience with that training and other resources.

Ms Stewart asks about the process of developing and finalizing the district goals. Mr. Henry summarizes the process. Ms. Muzila encourages connecting these goals to the strategic plan.

Policy Revisions (one hour and one minute into meeting)

Mr. Henry explains that last meeting the committee reviewed these policies, and at this meeting they will adopt and final changes before voting to approve all the changes made to their policies.

- Code of Ethics for School Committee Members
 - No additional comments. Committee members all agree to sign the final copies.

MOTION: Approval of new policy for the Code of Ethics for School Committee Members
_____ Ms. Raman moves to approve. Ms. Muzila seconds the motion. Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, Ms. Stewart, Mr. Cobb and Mr. Henry all vote aye, approving the policy.

To review the new School Committee Code of Ethics policy, please see [Appendix A](#).

- Social Media Use by School Committee Members
 - Ms. Muzila/ Mr. Cobb suggest a minor change, with no additional comments.

MOTION: Approval of new policy for social media use by School Committee Members
_____ Ms. Stewart moves to approve. Mr. Cobb seconds the motion. Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, and Mr. Henry all vote aye, approving the policy.

To review the new School Committee social media policy, please see [Appendix B](#).

- Budget guidelines
 - Mr. Henry explains that they added the word innovation. No additional comments.

MOTION: Approval of minor changes to language in budget guidelines
 Ms. Stewart moves to approve. Ms. Raman seconds the motion. Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, and Mr. Henry all vote aye, approving changes.

To review the new budget guideline policy language, please see [Appendix C](#).

Approval of Minutes

- Mr. Henry explains that they made some typo-like changes to some recent meetings.
 - No additional comments

MOTION: Approval of minutes
 Ms. Raman moves to approve the minutes. Ms. Muzila seconds the motion. Mr. Cobb, Ms. Muzila, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Raman, and Mr. Henry vote aye, approving the minutes.

Business Actions

- No warrants, no other business actions

Other Business, Audience Questions

Ms. Muzila suggests responding to additional questions and comments from the audience.

Dr. Kimo Carter agrees that surveying and interviewing teachers will be helpful to get more info.

Mr. Henry responds to the suggestion for the committee to break up discussion by age cohort, agreeing. Mr. Cobb emphasizes that school leaders and back to school nights will help with it.

Mr. Henry responds to a question about the exact language of residency requirement policies; he is not exactly sure and will follow up with the details, but he summarizes the basic elements.

Dr. Kimo Carter clarifies details of elementary school schedules and use of their in-person time, and explains that they have a team working on it.

Mr. Henry explains that they are meeting with W.E.A. (teachers union) to come to a formal agreement about reopening the elementary schools for five days a week in person learning.

Mr. Cobb makes a motion to adjourn. Ms. Raman seconds the motion. Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, Ms. Stewart, Mr. Cobb, and Mr. Henry all vote aye, approving the motion to adjourn the meeting.

Appendix A - SCHOOL COMMITTEE CODE OF ETHICS

(As Drafted by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees)

The acceptance of a code of ethics implies the understanding of the basic organization of School Committees under the Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The oath of office of a School Committee member binds the individual member to adherence to those state laws which apply to School Committees, since School Committees are agencies of the state.

This code of ethics delineates three areas of responsibility of School Committee members in addition to that implied above:

1. Community responsibility
2. Responsibility to school administration
3. Relationships to fellow Committee members

A School Committee member in their relations with their community should:

1. Realize that their primary responsibility is to the children.
2. Recognize that their basic function is to be policy making and not administrative.
3. Remember that they are one of a team and must abide by, and carry out, all Committee decisions once they are made.
4. Be well informed concerning the duties of a Committee member on both a local and state level.
5. Remember that they represent the entire community at all times.
6. Accept the office as a Committee member as means of unselfish service with no intent to "play politics," in any sense of the word, or to benefit personally from their Committee activities.

A School Committee member in their relations with their school administration should:

1. Endeavor to establish sound, clearly defined policies which will direct and support the administration.
2. Recognize and support the administrative chain of command and refuse to act on complaints as an individual outside the administration.
3. Give the chief administrator full responsibility for discharging their professional duties and hold them responsible for acceptable results.
4. Refer all complaints to the administrative staff for solution and only discuss them at Committee meetings if such solutions fail.

A School Committee in their relations with their fellow Committee members should:

1. Recognize that action at official meetings is binding and that they alone cannot bind the Committee outside of such meetings.
2. Realize that they should not make statements or promises of how they will vote on matters that will come before the Committee.
3. Uphold the intent of executive sessions and respect the privileged communications that exist in executive sessions.
4. Not withhold pertinent information on school matters or personnel problems, either from members of their own Committee or from members of other Committees who may be seeking help or information on school problems

5. Make decisions only after all facts on a question have been presented and discussed.

Appendix B - SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

As elected public officials, School Committee members shall exercise caution when communicating between and among themselves via electronic messaging services including but not limited to electronic mail communications, Internet web forums and social media. Under the Open Meeting Law, deliberation by a quorum (three out of five) members constitutes a meeting. Deliberation is defined as movement towards a decision including but not limited to the sharing of an opinion regarding business over which the committee has supervision, control or jurisdiction. A quorum may be arrived at sequentially using electronic messaging without knowledge and intent by the author. School Committee members should use electronic messaging, between and among members only for housekeeping purposes such as requesting or communicating agenda items, meeting times, meeting dates or to share information for which no action or response is required. Electronic messaging should not be used amongst a quorum of the school committee (which quorum may be arrived at directly or by serial communication) to discuss committee matters that require public discussion under the Open Meeting Law. School Committee members are to be aware that under the public records law, electronic messages between public officials may be considered public records and are to act accordingly. Members should take the same precautions when posting on any private social media sites and always keep in mind the School Committee policy and Code of Ethics. Recognizing that it may be difficult to determine whether communication constitutes deliberation under the Open Meeting Law, the Attorney General's office cautions public bodies on the use of Facebook and other social media. When a School Committee member uses social media to communicate about the school district, they should:

1. Clarify that they are communicating as an individual member of the committee, and not an official district spokesperson;
2. Avoid deliberating school district business with a quorum of the committee;
3. If appropriate, and using reasonable efforts, direct complaints or concerns presented online to the appropriate administrator;
4. Avoid posting content that indicates they have already formed an opinion on any pending matters;
5. Post only content that the district has already released through the proper channels to the public;
6. When attempting to restate what happened at a previous meeting, clarify that the posting is not an official record of the committee meeting and be sure to share only information from the open portions of the meeting;
7. Use best efforts to always conduct themselves online in a respectful manner that reflects well on the district;
8. Avoid posting information that has not been made public by the district at an open meeting or otherwise electronically distributed by the district to the public, and never post anonymously about school business;
9. If appropriate, immediately report harassing or defamatory communications to the superintendent if they involve school officials, staff, students or district business;
10. Retain electronic records-including their own posts and content others post to their account-when required to do so by the public records law;
11. Immediately report to the superintendent any potential breach if they lose control of a district-issued or personal electronic device on which confidential district records could be accessed; and
12. Comply with the district's acceptable use policy when using district-issued devices or technology resources, including district Internet access on a personal device.

Appendix C - Weston Public Schools 2021-2022 Budget Guidelines

We are fortunate to live in a town that both demands and supports an excellent school system. The School Administration and the School Committee are dedicated to providing the best possible academic, social and emotional education for our students in a fiscally responsible manner. Uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the 2021-2022 school year make the budget development process especially difficult, and the budget must maintain flexibility to address a number of possible scenarios. The following general guidelines are meant to assist the School Administration in preparing the budget for fiscal year 2022.

These guidelines reflect the Town's desire to maintain the overall strength of the school system by supporting the implementation of the Strategic Plan while recognizing continuing local and general economic challenges.

Preserve Excellence in Curriculum and Instruction

Execution of the Strategic Plan requires that we provide adequate resources and funding for major initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased both the cost and complexity of delivering instruction. Planning for Fiscal Year 2022 must consider the likely on-going impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and at the same time provide continued support for our curriculum as well as the need to meet state and federal mandates for student support. At the core of our efforts will be preserving the quality of our programs and services that enable all students to reach high standards and expectations, as measured through data driven assessments, in addition to meeting the state and federal benchmarks established for standardized test scores for all students. This goal must be achieved regardless of the status of the pandemic.

Maintain a Safe and Secure Environment and Infrastructure

The budget should continue to support safe, secure and educationally sound school environments, with the emphasis on addressing the expected disruption and additional requirements of delivering safe instruction during a pandemic. We should continue to collaborate with the Town to achieve economies of scale in the maintenance and operation of our facilities and grounds, as well as in addressing health and safety protocols. We should continue routine maintenance of our facilities, regular building reviews and the multi-year capital project plan. Technology efforts should continue to focus on adequate network capacity, reliability and system security, particularly if remote learning is expected to remain a significant component of curriculum delivery. We will continue to work closely with the Weston Police and Fire Departments and the Board of Health regarding safety and security.

Maintain the Rate of Budget Change at a Responsible Level

The School Administration must continue its sensitivity to the Town's short and long-term financial constraints, including the tax burden of budgetary decisions and the uncertainty of state and federal funds. Staffing levels should be regularly assessed to be sure that they reflect changes in enrollment levels. Budget planning must also consider class size constraints that may be caused by a continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Variations from the minimum class size policy will require the approval of the Superintendent and the School Committee. The School Administration has given primary consideration to supporting program enhancements with offsetting budget reductions. While the School Committee continues to stress the importance of fiscal responsibility, the primary consideration should be given to providing students with the tools and resources they need to succeed at a high level, even in a pandemic.