

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING

11/9/2020

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

Documents Used At Meeting:

- [Survey Data Presentation](#)
- [High School Presentation](#)
- [Draft FY 2021-22 Budget Presentation](#)
- [Final Draft of New Superintendents Goals](#) (for discussion and approval)
- [Revised Restraint Policy](#) (for discussion, but not yet for approval)
- [Draft SY 2021-22 Calendar](#) (for discussion, but not yet for approval)
- Meeting minutes from [10/5](#), [10/13](#), and [10/26](#) (for discussion and approval)

Call to order & Opening Business

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order at 7:02 PM by Mr. John Henry, Chair. Participating were Ms. Anita Raman, Vice Chair, Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Alyson Muzila, and Ms. Rachel Stewart of the School Committee; as well as 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. They were joined by Middle School Principal John Gibbons, Assistant Principal Phil Oates, and High School Principal Paul Peri.

Mr. Henry begins by reviewing the agenda and announces that November 18 will be the first meeting held between the school committee and Student Advisory Committee. It had been on hiatus due to the pandemic. The [agenda and zoom](#) links for that public meeting will be posted online.

Mr. Henry also announces that online postings of meeting minutes should now be up to date. Additionally, he announces a one-time pilot-program using a Google Form to receive questions from the public in advance of school committee meetings, and will be used for the Q&A later in the meeting.

One change to that process is that those asking questions will be expected to give their name and street address. Ms. Raman adds that some of the questions and their answers will be posted online in the future. These will be available through the Minutes, meeting summaries, and the FAQ page.

Mr. Henry then asks parents to reflect on what the district has accomplished in recent months, noting that Weston was among the first few districts to begin the year with a hybrid model that allows for at least two days of in person instruction for students of all age groups. Mr. Henry adds that Weston also remains one of the only school districts in Massachusetts offering in-person learning for five days per week to all Pre K-5 students who are enrolled in the hybrid model (as opposed to the Remote Learning Academy). While we can learn a tremendous

amount from peer districts, Mr. Henry explains that he does not want Weston to overlook all of the accomplishments that Weston Public Schools' faculty, staff, students and the broader community have achieved with hybrid and remote learning.

Superintendent's reports

Next, Dr. Connolly gives a report, starting with the announcement that musical instruments that fall in the "wind" category are on track to be approved by the Board of Health. She also reports that the fall athletics season was a big success thanks to student athletes, staff and spectators. Athletics Director McGrath is proud that the Weston community took safety protocols seriously.

Dr. Connolly details the winning record of teams including field hockey, golf, soccer, cross country and more, commending several teams and individuals for some of their specific achievements. She shares progress/successes of the new strength and conditioning program.

Subcommittee reports

Ms. Muzila shares that the district is officially launching an Equity committee, having secured volunteers. It will consider and promote equity within Weston schools, including but not limited to issues of cultural proficiency and anti-racism. Director of Advancement Amy Kelly and Dr. Connolly will help coordinate it.

Ms. Raman shares that the Medical committee (medical advisory board) continues to explore and consider testing options. She reports that they are close to finalizing specific testing options and hope to recommend one by the end of the year.

Ms. Stewart shares that the Special Education Parent Advisory Council has a meeting coming up on 11/23 at 9 AM which is open to the public. She adds that SEPAC is a resource for families interested in special education matters, and encourages interested families to attend.

Ms. Jenkins shares that the METCO support group for specials and extracurriculars seems to be going well. They are being proactive and working with the district to help students participate and keep them engaged. Additionally, the Friend of Weston METCO group will be having a 6:30 P.M. Zoom meeting, tomorrow Tuesday (11/10) open to the public. There will also be a joint PTO meeting next Thursday (11/19) with BWMPO at 7 P.M., which is open to the public, and will feature some special guests who will speak about the new Equity committee. The BWMPO is also currently running a [fundraiser selling treats that are available for order online](#), and the funds raised will go towards scholarships and other initiatives in support of graduating METCO seniors.

Mr. Henry adds that school committee members will have an opportunity to attend IDEA training developed by EDCO, and asks Ms. Muzila to share more details. Dr. Connolly clarifies that the same training is required for all faculty in the district. Ms. Muzila adds that the initiative focuses on cultural proficiency as a foundation for broader equity work. The committee agrees to schedule the time for the training offline.

Ms. Jenkins asks for clarification on the official name of Equity committee, inquiring if *Diversity and Inclusion* are also included or not. Ms. Muzila suggests Amy Kelly can speak better to that, but agrees it is an important question. Mr. Henry suggests discussing it at their next meeting.

Major Business

- **Survey Results:**

Next, Dr. Connolly presents results from recent surveys of students and families and compares parent and student responses to several of the questions for middle school and high school families that are not in the RLA program.

Dr. Connolly shares takeaways from her perspective, including increasing support for high school students, and also making remote work more engaging for students of all ages. She emphasizes that the data will directly inform district improvements. Dr. Connolly then introduces middle school principal John Gibbons & vice principal Phil Oates.

- **Middle School Update and Discussion of Re-Opening:**

Principal Gibbons discusses re-opening during the pandemic. He shares that faculty are striving to provide the highest possible quality lessons for students, in person and at home. He notes that the middle school has prioritized providing students with quality feedback. Assessments have been a challenge in the hybrid model. He adds that faculty are teaching thoughtfully compact curricula, while also working hard to connect with students given a limited amount of time.

Vice Principal Oates discusses that the middle school is currently looking to expand best practices while also adopting successful learning approaches used by other districts. Mr. Oates explains that expanding in-person learning is an ongoing process, and they are working closely with key stakeholders. He then speaks to successes with initiatives on social and emotional learning, as well as discussing the reorientation of the middle school's advisory period.

Mr. Gibbons adds that safety and procedural adjustments, student movement logistics, and lunch are challenges posed by increasing the hybrid model to full days. The middle school will reopen science labs next week, and resume checkouts for books in the library. They are also increasing the quality and quantity of asynchronous work.

Mr. Cobb shares comments from parents and asks for clarification about what resources the middle school needs to get more in person learning time. Dr. Connolly responds by providing a contextual overview of the re-opening process, and what it will take to expand in person learning, and confirms that the district goal is to expand the secondary hybrid model to full days by January 4. She speaks to recent and ongoing priorities, and explains that the district continues actively adapting to new state level guidelines for in person learning and discusses resuming lunch in school. She speaks about the limited faculty capacity for increasing more time in school given the statewide teacher shortage, and emphasizes that there are also some financial constraints.

Dr. Connolly also speaks to successes with the Remote Learning Academy (RLA).

Mr. Gibbons notes that the schools may have to come to the committee for additional funding for more employees, to implement safe expansion of in-person learning. Mr. Cobb agrees that it is important to find the funding for this priority.

Ms. Stewart asks for clarification on three-foot distancing guidelines, versus six-foot guidelines. Dr. Connolly states that the district continues to follow six-foot distancing, but will have to analyze recent guidance from the state.

Ms. Stewart also asks if there is a plan to increase live streaming for middle and high school students on remote days. Dr. Carter responds, explaining that more teachers are live streaming. He notes it is an effective practice and that teachers will have support integrating into their teaching tool-kits. He states that it is better to build consensus on best practices rather than simply mandate the use of live streaming. He adds that the district is continuing to implement improvements to instruction.

Mr. Gibbons adds that mixed-group livestreams are difficult for middle schools but they continue to consider how to use that and other options.

Ms. Muzila asks about partial delivery of curricula, and assessing teacher's progress through curricula. Dr. Carter explains that the district and school leaders work with department heads and curriculum specialists to monitor teachers' progress through curricula. He states that teachers will deliver all required curricula this year.

Mr. Cobb asks about the possibility of replacing the all-remote Wednesday schedule with hybrid schedules that have some students in person for some period of time. Mr. Gibbons responds that those changes to the Wednesday schedule are being considered, among several options. Mr. Cobb encourages prioritizing the consideration of changes to Wednesday's schedule, to maximize in-person learning time as soon as is practicable. Dr. Connolly and Mr. Oates speak to some of the unique challenges involved in lesson planning and assessment with the hybrid model. Mr. Oates adds that teachers must now spend more time than they did before COVID.

Ms. Raman asks about afternoon check-ins for students with their teachers on remote days, and asks how expanding in-person learning would impact that practice. Dr. Carter explains: there is capacity in the schedule for some students to be in the schools while others check in remotely.

Ms. Muzila asks about policies or suggestions for families who are traveling for Thanksgiving or over the holidays. Ms. Stewart adds that she would like to see clear protocols for pandemic safety around travel. Dr. Connolly explains that every family needs to follow state guidelines, and Ms. Stewart suggests that the district should publish their own interpretation of state guidelines for families traveling for upcoming holidays. Dr. Connolly agrees to send out another communication before the upcoming breaks, which will [link to state guidelines for travel during the pandemic](#). Mr. Henry speaks to the current protocols and suggests refining the program for the holidays.

Mr. Henry noted that other districts are considering going remote after Thanksgiving, but the new state guidelines would discourage that. Ms. Muzila asks about teachers' considerations for travel, and Dr. Connolly explains that the same policies and protocols apply to faculty and staff that apply to families. Ms. Raman notes that she supports going all remote the week after Thanksgiving, as a precautionary measure that buys time for thorough testing before resuming in-person learning in December. Mr. Henry recognizes the benefits of that, but also asks if it is better to just bring students in for that time, as safely as practicable. Ms. Stewart supports going all remote for that one week, recognizing that holiday gatherings exacerbate the spread of the pandemic, and encouraging erring on the side of caution. Dr. Connolly shares other thoughts from the medical advisory board on the subject, including concerns about secondary effects.

Ms. Stewart asks about the response rate to the behavior contract sent out to families. Dr. Connolly shares that 233 families signed on, out of ~1400. Ms. Stewart suggests resending that out to families. Mr. Cobb expresses concerns about going all-remote for that week, although he recognizes appeals of the idea. He anticipates that a remote week could give people a perceived pass to travel or socialize, potentially increasing transmission. Ms. Raman says testing guidance would help, and also adds that Canadian Thanksgiving recently led to increased COVID-19 infection rates there.

Ms. Muzila adds that the district should focus more on making curricula as accessible as possible, to give families flexibility, asking: if students stay home while waiting for a test, how can schools support them? Ms. Muzila notes that teachers' unique needs should also be accommodated. Mr. Henry suggests the committee continue to consider these matters, keeping options open.

- **High School Update**

Principal Peri presents his entry plan at Weston High School. He shares that it feels like a new beginning for him, coming from another district he had been with for over two decades. He praises assistant principal Kelly Flynn, and thanks others supporting his entry to Weston.

Principal Peri shares his goals for his first year, including improving communication, increasing school spirit and student voice, boosting student enrollment and employee morale, and supporting students' self-care. He then details his communications practices, discussing forums and webinars upcoming for the high school. He also details initiatives by faculty and staff and his work with student leaders.

Ms. Jenkins asks when the next school council meeting is, and principal Peri responds it will be next week, but the time has not been finalized. Mr. Cobb praises Principal Peri, and then asks him to share some of his perspective on WHS students. Principal Peri details a range of things that he has appreciated and admired about students.

Ms. Raman asks Principal Peri what is on his short list of goals for the rest of this current year. He shares that, although so much of their work this year has been reactive in nature, he wants to focus on and prioritize student wants and needs. Students are sharing difficulties with their workloads, and his response is that the school needs to prioritize taking care of these students.

The school must recognize the unique challenges of these times, and will try to be responsive to student perspectives, and work towards addressing those concerns more proactively going forward. Ms. Muzila and Ms. Stewart both thank Principal Peri for his great work so far, and Dr. Connolly echoes the committee's praise of his first year, noting that there has been a positive change in the energy of the school. She adds that he has been a real asset to the district team.

- **Preliminary Budget for FY 2021-22; Contextualizing Budgeting to Contingencies**

Mr. Henry introduces Assistant Superintendent for finance and operations Sheri Matthews, who presents on the budget process for the next fiscal year, FY 2021-22. She presents two budget scenarios: one scenario assumes a continuing COVID impact, while the second assumes a more normalized year.

Ms. Matthews details the budget for operating both the RLA and the hybrid models, noting that there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what will be needed next year. She shares what she anticipates may change, such as increased labor costs for key positions. Mr. Henry contextualizes what the budget process has looked like in the past and discusses this year's COVID-contingency-based two-scenario approach, which are preliminary starting points from which the budget will be refined. The process considers data and community perspectives.

Ms. Stewart asks if parents will be surveyed about their enrollment intentions for next year; Dr. Connolly explains that this has not been done in the past, but will be considered this year. She speaks to other upcoming surveys, before discussing other considerations for budgeting.

Mr. Cobb points to differences in budgeting for different types of full time employees. Mr. Henry notes that the town's budget summit is scheduled for November 23rd.

- **Discussion and Approval of Revised Superintendent's Goals**

Mr. Henry explains that Superintendent Connolly added a goal related to social and emotional learning.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the committee votes unanimously to approve the goals. Mr. Cobb votes aye, Ms. Stewart votes aye, Ms. Raman votes aye, Ms. Muzila votes aye, and Mr. Henry votes aye.

- **Discussion of Revised Restraint Policy**

Mr. Henry explains revisions to the policy required by changes in state law and suggested by counsel, adding that under these updates, there would be almost no situation that warrants use of force to restrain students. Ms. Muzila encourages other stakeholders such as SEPAC to be fully consulted on the changes in policies. Ms. Raman agrees that more parent feedback may be helpful, but notes that the changes are law-specific, so there is not as much room for changes as some other policies that can change.

Ms. Stewart then asks about the process for how teachers will be trained on the changes. Mr. Henry notes that the policy stipulates all staff will be trained annually. Dr. Connolly adds that the district already has training plans in place.

The committee then discusses review of policies through an equity lens. Mr. Henry notes that as the committee reviews their policies, they will apply several lenses including equity.

- **Discussion of School Calendar**

Mr. Henry details the proposed calendar before the committee and highlights key elements such as vacation days and setting the first day of school in September. He notes this assumes a schedule not impacted by COVID. Mr. Cobb suggests the high school might anticipate certain weekends where students are likely to be absent while visiting colleges.

Question and Answer Period

Mr. Henry begins by reading questions submitted before the meeting through a new google form, which is being used as a pilot program.

- -Beth Clymer: What is the current labor agreement with kindergarten teachers? Full workday or partial workday... Has the school considered offering optional small group or 1 on 1 zoom sessions for kindergartens in the afternoon hours to improve social connections among the class and with the teacher and to provide more one on one learning for the kids?
 - Dr. Carter responds that Kindergarten teachers work a full day. In-school classes are very different at this age. Adding remote time for our youngest learners after they have had a morning of school is not in the best interest of most students.
- -Beth Clymer: What is the timeline to get elementary grades back to full day in person instruction in line with current state guidelines?
 - First step is to work with Weston Board of Health on implementing new guidance safely. Sticking with six-foot distancing, we can work towards extending school days. If we are doing less than six feet of distancing, we'll consider other options.
 - Governor's press conference Friday afternoon was news we are still processing.
- -Pu Yang: Will Weston schools have pooled testing like in Wellesley? Do we have to keep windows open, as temperature is going down.
 - Dr. Connolly explains they are working with the Medical Advisory Board and town Board of Health to set up testing, and making progress. Pooled testing is one option that we can consider once we have figured out more extensive testing too.
 - We will open windows as long as it makes sense, but need to keep people safe. We still do not want to compromise our HVAC system or make people too cold.
- -Yingkun Claire Huang: Is it possible to do self-collecting method to test covid for our school community?

- Dr. Connolly shares that over 90% are willing to be tested at home if that is the best option. We are hoping to get test access for everybody in the community.
- -Heather Lawlor: When will we see the plan outlining details for H.S. and MS students return to more in school days/hours?
 - Dr. Connolly shares that she will be meeting with the teachers union to discuss that this coming week, and hopes to have a complete plan to share as soon as possible. Whatever plan we come up with has to be negotiated with the union.
- -Matt Shulkin: Now that the state has changed their guidance for in-school learning for all students, what are the hurdles to having K-12 back in school 5 days a week for a full day? Understanding that different schools face different challenges, it would be nice to know what the hurdles are for each school.... what can parents help do to expedite finding solutions. If lunch remains an issue for K-5, can parents moderate lunchtime? A lot of us are confused on the issue of lunch being the hurdle between half and full days. It doesn't reconcile with the fact that students are having snack-time currently. Can't the processes in place for snack be applied to lunchtime as well? If not, are there other creative solutions we can come up with?
 - Dr. Carter speaks to some of the hurdles involved, and explains that this is also a public health and medical decision for the board of health, not just a matter of education. We need to work with teachers to make sure they feel safe at work. Also need to address transportation, PPE, custodial, and other logistical issues. There are also some teachers currently teaching remotely due to medical issues, and those teachers need to be accommodated. This is a collaborative process. Dr. Carter explains that we can work with teachers to come up with creative ways to make lunch work. Ms. Raman points out that there is a specific reason that the district wants to minimize outside adults entering the building, for pandemic safety. Dr. Connolly notes that she appreciates parents' interest in volunteering.
- -Louise Carter: On Sept 4th, there were 52 newly posted teacher/staff jobs in the District. How many teachers & staff, by school, chose not to return? Those not returning, what number are on paid or unpaid leave? What # or % of teachers that chose not to return are eligible to come back next year? Are the new hires permanent or temporary? How many HS classes were impacted either by total # of sections cut or not offered at all in 2020-2021 due to lack of teacher availability? What is the overall financial impact to the District budget this year based on the new hires and teachers not returning to live teaching? How does this differ from the 2020-2021 budget this past spring?
 - Some of this was addressed by Ms. Matthews' presentation. Dr. Connolly explains that some employees needed to take leaves for health issues, or are teaching from home. The district also needed to hire more teachers to bring more students in person for more time. Dr. Connolly adds that some employees did take one year unpaid leave from the district.

- Ms. Muzila follows up to ask if the guidance seminar class will be held, because she had heard otherwise. Dr. Connolly believed that the class would be held.

- -Louise Carter: Regarding hybrid model at the HS: The FAQ posted on Facebook by Alyson Muzilla stated it is teacher choice whether they use live stream teaching or not. Why is this not standardized for all students, all classes, given we have the technology? Pre-covid, students received 335 live teaching minutes per academic class in an 8-day cycle. Today, hybrid students are receiving 183 live teaching minutes per academic class in 10 days. How are teachers making up the gap in content coverage this academic year? Given students will take AP & Subject tests in the spring, they likely will be ill prepared for testing, and significantly behind in critical course material. Live streaming would allow Cohort A & B to cover twice the material live streaming. Yet it's not happening. Why not?
 - Dr. Carter reiterates that Weston is not requiring live streaming for all teachers, although teachers are being encouraged to expand the practice and being given support to do so. However, doubling live-stream time does not mean that learning is being doubled; rather, each of the elements of the hybrid model work together. We want to use live streaming most effectively because it is a powerful tool, but we also need to allow teachers to use it effectively in the context of their classes.
 - Mr. Cobb suggests looking at student survey data around live streaming for both the middle and high schools. His two students find the asynchronous work more effective than Zoom for some things. Although he has been a proponent for more live streaming in some cases, he appreciates that there is a lot of nuance involved in all of this; and so he prefers nuanced to universal or blanket policies.

- -Kathy Davidoff: Regarding COVID/Health Decision Making: Who is Weston Public School District/SC using as a Health Advisory Board for health related decision making and policy related to COVID? What metrics are the District using to determine when or if students will go full remote learning?
 - Dr. Connolly explains that the district is working with the [medical advisory board](#) and the town board of health, and clarifies each of their roles in the deliberations.

- -Beth Cohen King: Has been any pushback from the WEA as the numbers in MA are rising steadily to remain 5 days 1/2 for K-5, even though Governor Baker has urged that schools stay open and we only deal with specific clusters if we get them? Is the magic infection rate still 5% or 3 weeks in a row of red per DESE? And has DESE updated their formula yet to account for smaller towns?
 - The Governor's guidance does have provisions that account for smaller towns. Dr. Connolly shares some of her perspective as a former teacher, and expresses some concern about safety. Some people are more naturally concerned because of their health and the health of their loved ones. She would not use the term pushback, but rather it has been a process where we're working together.

- -Robin Ewald: Has WHS considered full days every other week as some other local schools have successfully implemented?
 - Dr. Carter states that the district considered many hybrid models and will stay with the current model.

- -Linda Angelucci: Is there a plan for extending the current 4-hour in person day at the High School? If so, what is the plan and when will it be implemented? What are the specific guidelines that must be met to warrant a school closure and conversely, school opening? Would the School Committee consider making live stream learning (on remote days) mandatory as opposed to being at the discretion of each teacher? Would increase the amount of material being taught, decrease the amount of material that students have to teach themselves & decrease the pressure on teachers to prepare multiple lesson formats.
 - Mr. Henry points out that most or all of this has already been answered.

Mr. Henry recognizes that the time for Q+A has expired, but suggests working with the admin team to respond to questions that have been asked during the meeting they have not had time to answer. Ms. Stewart points out that many of the questions were already answered, and this has been a long meeting, so she points to it as an opportunity to save time.

Approval of appointments

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the committee votes unanimously to approve the following appointments: Jim Polando and Walter Chaffee to the Permanent Building Committee, and Trevor MacDonald to the Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee.

Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Mr. Henry all vote aye.

Approval of minutes

MOTION: ___ Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the committee votes unanimously to approve minutes from all three meetings in October 2020. Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Mr. Henry all vote aye.

Approval of warrant

MOTION: ___ Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the committee votes unanimously to approve a warrant for \$1,741,578.19. Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Mr. Henry all vote aye.

Scholarship Donation

Ms. Matthews shares that the family Trust of Helen Z. Zola named the Weston Public Schools as a beneficiary of her trust. Funds will go to scholarships based on need for Weston residents. The funds were transferred last friday (\$296,429.64) that will last until the money is depleted.

Mr. Cobb asks for specific language about which students are eligible; Ms. Matthews will follow up with that.

MOTION: __ Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Ms. Raman, the committee votes unanimously to accept the funds with the given terms. Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Mr. Henry all vote aye.

Adjournment

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