

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING

12/07/2020 at 7 P.M.

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

Documents Used At Meeting:

- [High School Report](#) (For Discussion)
- [Initial Budget Presentation](#) (For Discussion)
- Meeting Minutes (For approval)
 - [11/23](#)

Call to order & Opening Business

A meeting of the Weston School Committee is called to order by Ms. Anita Raman, Vice-chair. Participating were Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Alyson Muzila, and Ms. Rachel Stewart of the School Committee; as well as 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; and Jen Truslow, Director of Student Services; HS Principal Paul Peri, Assistant Principal Kelly Flynn, Director of Guidance Marla Schay, and Director of Athletics Mike McGrath.

Ms. Raman, presiding over the meeting, reviews the agenda. The committee will return to public comment procedures. She details the approach and process of making Zoom-public-comments.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Connolly shares that WPS plans to continue in-person learning throughout the school year as much as possible, following guidance from the Board of Health and Medical Advisory Board. She adds that the district is starting participation in the BinaxNOW coronavirus testing program, which will provide rapid-response testing for symptomatic students and employees in schools.

Dr. Connolly also shares a joyful and calming video from the Music Department, featuring Weston students playing orchestral music on string instruments. The students were recorded individually, edited together in a musical collage with synchronized audio. [Find the video here.](#)

Subcommittee Reports

Ms. Muzila does not have Equity Committee or WEEFC updates, but will at the next meeting.

Ms. Stewart shares that the [PTO](#) is putting together teacher appreciation gifts (within guidelines) and they are now soliciting gifts. They are also [recruiting members](#), and organizing a [fundraiser](#). Interested families should contact maggie.damaro11@gmail.com

Public Comment

Ms. Raman reiterates public comment guidelines. No community members submit themselves to make a public comment via Zoom Q&A function. After a brief pause to allow for submissions, the committee sees no comments and closes the comment session, and starts Major Business topics.

Discussion of Hybrid Mode and Pandemic Response

Dr. Connolly begins by thanking everyone who has been complying with public health guidelines for travel, and otherwise doing what they can to help keep the schools open as much as safely possible. She goes on to discuss the recent unexpected remote day due to inclement weather and lost power last week, as well as the remote days at the high school due to staff shortages.

Dr. Connolly also explains that, due to FERPA and HIPAA, the district is unable to publicly share confidential health information related to the pandemic. She apologizes that we are unable to share more information, explaining the confidentiality regulations. WPS would share more if we could, but anyone who is identified as a close contact to a positive case is being contact-traced. The district website features a public dashboard sharing some information families might want.

She adds that WPS is optimistic that the High School will be open for Hybrid learning Thursday. Mr. Cobb asks if there is anything WPS is changing to prevent similar issues from arising in the future. Dr. Connolly further explains the issues and what has already been done to address this, and additional possibilities the school administration is looking into to prevent faculty shortages. Mr. Cobb follows up asking about specific policy and procedural changes; Dr. Connolly then discusses classroom coverage procedures, staffing capacity issues, and mitigatory responses.

Dr. Connolly next shares that the Middle School has drafted a plan for significant changes to their schedule, which is being presented to faculty for consideration and input. After teacher input has been given and the schedule is finalized, it will be shared with the school committee and the community, but will take weeks to implement. It should be set in place in January. The committee takes a brief tangent to discuss scheduling and the agenda for the following week.

Dr. Carter speaks to recent changes in the high school schedule due to remote days, and explains why the adjustments were beneficial for students, increasing live instruction time. If the High School goes remote for an extended period again, they will use a remote schedule with full days of school, and 75 minute class periods, as opposed to the hybrid schedule used this year.

Dr. Connolly speaks to the remote schedule model, recognizing that the district and high school will work collaboratively to refine the model and implement best practices as much as possible.

Ms. Muzilla asks for clarification on when plans to switch to a remote schedule were put in place and when faculty were notified. Dr. Carter explains that faculty were given very short notice, and it was not necessarily clear to faculty that changing the schedule was part of going all-remote. He acknowledges how difficult it is for teachers. Ms. Muzilla anticipates this could be the reality again in the Spring, and asks about different steps being taken to help give students flexibility. Dr. Carter says that, if we do have to go remote again, we now understand how to do it better, and will continue applying lessons from the RLA and Hybrid model to current and future plans.

Mr. Cobb asks if there is a way to compress the duration of classes and increase the frequency, expressing concern for Zoom fatigue. Dr. Carter says yes, although it may not solve the problem fully. Thinking about how to break up instruction within longer blocks might be the best solution,

but if faculty, students, and families want to make adjustments to the length of remote class periods, those can and will be considered.

Mr. Cobb also shares some positive student feedback, and highlights the importance of considering student voices. Principal Peri speaks to the aforementioned schedule changes.

Ms. Muzila asks about COVID procedures for families who have traveled, sharing that families have come to her to highlight inconsistencies between schools in terms of accommodations. Dr. Connolly explains that each age group involves different response procedures, and there was also confusion with some faculty members regarding procedures, which are being resolved. Ms. Raman clarifies that families should work with their school to follow all the procedures in place.

High School Report

Ms. Raman introduces WHS Principal Peri, who introduces Assistant Principal Flynn, Guidance Director Schay and Athletic Director McGrath. Ms. Flynn reports on attendance, behavior, and discipline. Mr. Cobb asks about reducing chronic absenteeism via outreach. Ms. Flynn shares that the HS addresses high absence rates for specific students through the instructional team.

Ms. Muzila asks for clarification about “cutting” numbers discussed in Ms. Flynn’s presentation. Ms. Flynn discusses the process for addressing the concerns, including the Compass program and Bridge program. More data will be available in the Spring. Ms. Stewart asks about changes to responses, and Principal Peri explains that he wants to learn more before making changes. It is typical for cases to be addressed on an individual basis, focusing on student support. Ms. Stewart highlights a rule that has been an issue for some students, regarding missed electives.

Director McGrath shares some numbers and highlights from last Winter. He then discusses the cancelled Spring season, sympathizing with the students, and sharing what the department did to support students and feature all the graduating senior athletes through social media and this year’s virtual Wildcat awards night. He is very proud of the coaches. He goes on to discuss the most recent Season this fall, sharing how proud he is of the entire community for an outstanding season. While some sports were not able to participate, over 260 students participated this Fall. He also speaks to the success of their safety plans, and shares achievements of some teams, awards won by Weston coaching staff, as well as sportsmanship awards from DCL and MIAA.

Mr. Cobb thanks Director McGrath before asking about accommodations for cancelled seasons, and Director McGrath speaks to the Strength and Conditioning program, and other alternatives for this Winter and Spring season. Mr. Cobb suggests letting them know if the department needs more resources. Director McGrath thanks him. He also shares that all indoor sporting events will be livestreamed, due to the league policies barring spectators from attending the indoor games. Ms. Muzila congratulates the department, and asks about transport accommodations for Boston students. Director McGrath speaks to accommodations made around transportation.

Director Schay begins by praising students and generally discussing the guidance department’s work. She details how COVID impacted juniors and seniors over the past year, with a focus on the college application process and standardized testing matters. She also discusses gap years, academic rigor, and shares that over 40 students were awarded the ‘Seal of Biliteracy’ this year.

She concludes by discussing some data from the High School report and how they are using it, before inviting questions.

Ms. Muzila asks about preparing for AP testing in the Spring, considering that some content might not be covered due to COVID. Director Schay speaks to how teachers are working with “College Board” to prepare for the tests, which will cover less content than in previous years. The tentative plan is to have in-person testing but AP tests may end up being administered remotely. Dr. Carter shares that department heads are working closely with AP teachers, who know what the essential curriculum is; they are teaching all the content, while focusing on skillbuilding and learning practices that will serve students in college. AP teachers are committed to covering all of the material in their respective classes.

Ms. Muzila asks about AP data. Ms. Schay responds, and Ms. Muzila explains her main priority is to make sure that all students have access to the various AP courses they may want to take. Some of the data has been shared with the Equity Committee. Mr. Cobb shares that he will want to circle back to some of the most important pieces in the report as they start pulling those out. Director Schay agrees that it was a lot of information to consider, detailing thought processes for what is included and how it is presented. Mr. Peri will share reports on extracurricular activities with the high school community. Ms. Raman thanks the High School team for all of their work.

Ms. Raman asks Dr. Connolly to share more details about the Middle School’s plans for a new schedule to accommodate live streaming. Dr. Connolly adds that students need to get flu-shots before December 31, unless they have a specific waiver. Ms. Muzila asks the best way to submit the documentation: drop off at school or scan it and send it to the school nurse via email.

FY 2021-22 Budget Discussion

Ms. Raman introduces Mr. Cobb to speak to the budgeting process. He discusses Assistant Superintendent Sheri Matthew’s initial presentation on the budget, and speaks to past years. He suggests taking a “pause” to discuss the current year (2020-21) before discussing the next year (2021-22). Ms. Matthews shares that she has published a Powerpoint online with these details.

Ms. Raman thanks Ms. Matthews for her hard work securing grants, which has kept the district funded enough that they have not had to ask the town for additional funding. Mr. Cobb agrees, and speaks to considerations for how to move forward with the budgeting process for next year. He also encourages the administration to identify larger changes to the budget that they would like to make and reminds the committee that longer budget hearings will be held in late January.

Ms. Matthews clarifies that the hearings are scheduled for January 25 and 28 at 4 PM via Zoom. Another will be during the school committee meeting Monday February 8 at 7 PM. She adds other details, and Mr. Cobb also adds additional details, and asks to hear other considerations. Ms. Matthews explains various uncertainties make it hard to project exact numbers at this stage. Ms. Raman asks about a parent survey about enrollment and Case House will put one out soon.

Ms. Stewart mentions the vaccine may have a determinative impact on which budget scenario will be used. Ms. Muzila anticipates most public budgeting questions will come in January and

February when, and asks if there are ways to get community members engaged sooner with the budgeting process. Assistant Superintendent Matthews is open to discussing any line item, but explains that most of the budget is salary driven and has fixed funding levels. Ms. Muzila points to an example of a budgeting matter that families might be interested in. Mr. Cobb shares that he thinks parents often have valuable feedback on programmatic elements, such as more or less funding for a particular service; although other budgeting issues are often less accessible. He also responds to Ms. Muzila's example, agreeing it is important to implement ideas like that, and builds on her example with others. He discusses other opportunities for public feedback.

Ms. Muzila again asks about the best opportunity for public participation, and Ms. Matthews says the budget hearings are the best forum. Ms. Stewart speaks to transportation cuts that did not save significant amounts of money but did significantly disrupt service. She adds that she is interested in longer-term planning for staffing needs to proactively address future considerations such as lower student enrollment. Mr. Cobb asks about specific reductions she would focus on. Ms. Stewart clarifies her main point is that creativity and vision are important in future planning, and speaks to some specifics, which Dr. Connolly agrees with and already started to address.

Discussion of Appointments to the Town of Weston Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee

Mr. Cobb introduces and contextualizes the deliberation, explaining that they do not need to approve tonight, and the select board is expected to approve them tomorrow. Mr. Cobb speaks about the candidates and their backgrounds and their interests in the committee. He shares his perspective on the various candidacies, explaining that one of the three withdrew. Ms. Muzila expresses support for including one, who is a member of the council on aging on the committee, and Ms. Raman and Ms. Stewart agree with her. The committee seems to reach a consensus.

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to identify Shirley Small-Rougeau as the committee's choice for the open seat to the recreation master plan steering committee, with the caveat that the other candidate would also be appropriate. Ms. Raman seconds the motion. Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, and Ms. Raman voting aye in favor.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve the minutes from 11/23/2020. Ms. Raman seconds the motion to approve. The committee votes unanimously to approve the minutes with Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb and Ms. Raman all voting aye in favor.

Approval of Warrant

Assistant Superintendent Sheri Matthews introduces a regular warrant for \$1,250,512.82

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve the warrant. Ms. Stewart seconds the motion, and the committee votes unanimously to approve the warrant, with Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb and Ms. Raman all voting aye in favor of approving the warrant.

Next, the committee briefly discusses the meeting calendar. Mr. Cobb recognizes people are busy this time of year. Ms. Stewart speaks to other upcoming items to include on the agenda, and the committee comes to the agreement along with Dr. Connolly to meet next week, 12/14.

The committee also discusses public comment and Q&A, deliberating on the approach to take next week. Ms. Raman reiterates that the intention is for comment, and not back and forth Q&A. Ms. Muzila raises the idea of having a school-committee meeting specific to the high school, which could include back and forth. Mr. Cobb suggests holding this as a school-based forum, rather than an official school committee meeting featuring the members. Ms. Raman agrees, and Dr. Connolly also agrees that she and Principal Peri could work together to set that up.

Adjournment

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to adjourn. Ms. Raman seconds the motion to adjourn, and the committee votes unanimously to adjourn with Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, and Ms. Raman all voting aye in favor of adjournment.