

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING

1/28/2021 at 7 P.M.

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

Full Recording: [Weston.vod.castus.tv/vod/](https://weston.vod.castus.tv/vod/) (Find timestamps for each section in parentheses)

Documents Used At Meeting:

- Meeting Minutes (for approval)
 - [1/11](#)
 - [1/25](#)

Call to order & Opening Business (01:05)

A meeting of the Weston School Committee is called to order by Mr. John Henry, Chair. Participating were Ms. Anita Raman, Vice-chair, Mr. Alex Cobb, Ms. Alyson Muzila and Ms. Rachel Stewart* (only attended at end) 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 METCO Director La Toya Rivers; and Elementary School Principals Jennifer Faber, Erin Maguire, and Daniel Green; and Members of the Budget Sub-Committee Lisa Reitano, Bharath Venkataraman, and Lisa Schwallie. Mr. Henry, presiding over the meeting, reviews the agenda. The public comment period will be moved to the end of the meeting, and this meeting will focus exclusively on budget discussions.

Superintendent's Report (03:30)

Dr. Connolly shares updates from around the district. She discusses MCAS, the new Middle School schedule, Laptops, the Strategic Planning Process, and highlights that WHS Senior Mimi Gotbetter recently published a collection of poetry called *home*. She also highlights student music achievements and promotes the MS production of "you're a good man charlie brown."

Discussion of FY 2021-22 Budget: (08:30)

Mr. Henry invites the elementary school Principals to present together on their budgets for the next fiscal year. They each discuss enrollment, sectioning and class sizes by grades, and more. They each go on to discuss staffing and instructional considerations that can impact budgeting.

Their presentation also included stories and details regarding budget priorities like coverage by school-based substitute teachers. Mr. Henry asks about building subs, and Ms. Raman asks a follow up question after the principals respond to Mr. Henry. Dr. Connolly adds additional details. Ms. Reitano asks questions about amounts, and measuring success or setting goals for the building-sub program. Ms. Matthews responds and Ms. Reitano asks for cost-comparisons between past approaches and the proposal of one building sub per school next year. Mr. Henry adds details. Ms. Maguire explains how measuring student success demonstrates the utility of school-based subs. Ms. Faber adds that their schools have already collected data about this. Mr. Green discusses his building-based subs for the year, and praises the quality of their work.

Dr. Carter adds that school-based subs are more safe from a public-health perspective, as it is a way to minimize the number of unvaccinated adults entering the school building. Mr. Henry adds

other benefits. Ms. Reitano asks additional questions, raising concerns for high school subjects. Dr. Carter emphasizes additional benefits of school-based substitutes. Ms. Reitano asks for more clarification on differences from last year regarding exact numbers of full time employees. She also raises questions regarding Title I Funding and long-term planning for cuts to total staff. She goes on to ask about Field School class sizes. Ms. Matthews responds to multiple points raised and Dr. Connolly adds only explaining uncertainties and how they impact WPS planning. Dr. Connolly also discusses vaccinations and planning for RLA next year, emphasizing the need to remain flexible in planning, given uncertainties. Mr. Henry adds that the district will continue to monitor this throughout the budgeting process. Ms. Matthews discusses Title I funding for FY22, and Ms. Reitano asks some follow-up questions, to which Dr. Connolly and Dr. Carter respond.

Ms. Raman asks about enrollment planning deadlines. Mr. Henry discusses various deadlines and key questions. Mr. Venkataraman asks about kindergarten assignments to which Ms. Matthews responds. Ms. Schwallie asks about alternative options to which Mr. Henry and Ms. Matthews respond. Mr. Venkataraman and Ms. Reitano ask brief clarification questions.

Director of Technology and Libraries McCanne discusses budget considerations for next year, highlighting his main lines of thinking and key questions. He discusses his earlier budget memo and invites questions. Mr. Venkataraman asks about Chromebooks; Dr. McCanne responds and they continue discussing costs and benefits involved. Dr. McCanne also explains a possible fee for families to get access to computers they can end up keeping, which can be a fiscal win-win for schools and families. Ms. Muzila raises concerns about expecting families to pay for devices they cannot opt out of. She asks additional questions about decision points in the budget memo he referenced before, focusing on flexibility. Dr. McCanne responds, elaborating on processes. Ms. Muzila asks if there is a role for community members to help with technology in the strategic plan. Dr. McCanne and Dr. Carter respond and discuss balancing pieces of planning processes.

Ms. Raman asks about students bringing their own devices and Dr. McCanne explains that for instructional purposes, classrooms and learning run smoother if students have the same device as each other, that their teacher is familiar with. Ms. Muzila asks about alternatives to Google Classroom, to which Dr. McCanne responds. He discusses processes of considering a change.

Mr. Cobb asks about larger, long term technology-spending projects. Dr. McCanne discusses the timelines for plans. Mr. Cobb asks about purchase orders and suggests moving on certain capital spending plans, to which Dr. McCanne agrees. Mr. Cobb adds additional considerations to which Mr. Venkataraman responds, and they discuss the planning for those considerations.

Ms. Matthews presents the Central Office budget, which is predominantly salary obligations. Mr. Venkataraman asks about collaboration with the town, and Ms. Matthews responds. There are no other questions, and Ms. Matthews introduces La Toya Rivers to present on METCO. Ms. Rivers reviews data from the METCO program, and discusses challenges and successes this year. Ms. Matthews shares more financial information regarding Weston's METCO program.

Ms. Matthews goes on to discuss Grants including but not limited to WEEFC Grants and Revolving Funds for the district. Mr. Henry asks a follow up questions to which Ms. Matthews responds. Ms. Reitano asks about METCO funding and what each of the school liaisons do. Ms. Rivers responds to Ms. Reitano's questions, and Dr. Connolly shares additional information. Ms.

Reitano asks clarifying questions to which Dr. Connolly responds, explaining various staff roles and the broader program. Hearing no other questions, Mr. Henry concludes the meeting period.

Community Discussion (1:22:20)

Mr. Henry invites members of the public to share their perspectives and ask budget questions.

Andre Manguikian asks a question about per-pupil spending, enrollment, and increased staff budgets. Mr. Henry responds to concerns raised, explaining that contractual obligations to pay staff account for almost all of the increased spending. This spending is different from discretionary spending. Mr. Manguikian asks about union contract negotiations and his comparisons to other districts. Mr. Henry again responds, and Mr. Manguikian disputes some of Mr. Henry's claims, and asks follow up questions, emphasizing test scores and school rankings. Mr. Henry again responds and he points to other measures of student achievement and district improvements over recent years.

Mr. Manguikian again emphasizes declining enrollment, and asks about enrollment changes and their impacts on the budget. Mr. Henry discusses enrollment projections and key budget implications. He also discusses comparisons between Weston and other districts. Mr. Cobb also discusses comparisons to other districts, emphasizing hidden costs in other districts, in their debt services. Mr. Manguikian raises concerns about Weston's high tax rates, debt services, and comments made by committee members. Mr. Henry asks for specific recommendations. After continued debate, the committee moves on from this section of the comment period, inviting on the next commenter.

John Sallay gives comments regarding per-pupil expenditure, and offers to share findings with Mr. Cobb regarding certain aforementioned calculations. Mr. Sallay also questions the logic of building-based substitutes, and raises concerns about discrepancies between the proposed budget's executive summary, elementary enrollment, and some granular details of the budget. He also raises concerns about maintaining COVID-era staffing levels after the pandemic ends. Mr. Henry responds to his questions regarding building-based substitutes, and other concerns.

Mr. Cobb shares additional considerations, including thoughts on how vaccines fit in planning. He also discusses re-enrollment of students who left for homeschooling or private schools during the pandemic. Mr. Venkataraman suggests discussion points for upcoming meetings.

Approval of Minutes (1:58:00)

MOTION: Ms. Raman moves to approve the minutes from 1/11/2021 and 1/25/2020. Ms. Muzila seconds the motion to approve. The committee votes to approve the minutes with Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman and Mr. Henry all voting aye in favor.

Assistant Superintendent Sheri Matthews introduces a regular warrant for \$301,146.06

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve. Ms. Raman seconds and the committee approves with Ms. Muzila, Mr. Henry, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart and Ms. Raman all voting aye.

Adjournment (2:02:12)

Before adjournment, Mr. Henry gives an announcement regarding an upcoming EDCO meeting. Ms. Muzila and Ms. Raman are both interested in attending the meeting.

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