

## MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING

2/8/2021 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:

- [WEEFC Mid-Year Report](#)
- [Superintendent's Presentation on Pandemic Response and In-Person Learning](#)
- [Updated Budget Presentation](#)
- [Memo to Committee Re: EDCO Collaborative](#)
- [Meeting Minutes](#) (11/18/20 and 1/28/20)

### Call to order & Opening Business

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 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; METCO Representative Keitrice Johnson; WEEFC (role) Kate Dickie; and Members of the Town Finance Sub-Committee Lisa Reitano, Bharath Venkataraman, and Lisa Schwallie.

Mr. Henry reviews the lengthy agenda, explaining elements specific to this meeting, which will be both a budget hearing, and a school committee meeting with extended public comment time. He also speaks directly to community members regarding WPS's ongoing pandemic response.

### Superintendent's Report (05:15)

Dr. Connolly shares updates from around the district. 17 WHS students made all-state for band, orchestra and chorus. Congrats to Benjamin, Ella, Elizabeth, Max, Trevor, Caleb, Jonathan, Roy, Erin, Eric, Thomas, Aurik, Madeline, Chloe, and both Alexanders. Weston swim teams are doing incredibly well. Dr. Connolly adds that she will have more info to share in a few minutes.

### Subcommittee Reports: (07:10)

- Ms. Stewart announces multiple upcoming PTO and SEPAC events and opportunities.
- Ms. Muzila discusses sustainability and new plastics recycling initiatives. [More info here.](#)
- Ms. Muzila also reports: the DEI committee is running and starting to dig into the work.
- Ms. Raman adds that Weston PTO is now accepting board nominations. [More info here.](#)

### Discussion of WEEFC (10:00)

Ms. Dickie, Weston Education Enrichment Fund Committee Director, introduces their work. She explains that as a standing subcommittee of the school committee they fundraise for the district. Their work benefits all students across the district, from arts and instruction to air purifiers and more. WEEFC helps set the district apart by bringing in a broader array of classroom resources.

Ms Dickie discusses how this year has been a big transition period. She discusses changes to the board membership, WEEFC priorities from this past year and how the pandemic impacted them such as air purifiers. WEEFC continues to review and approve a wide range of grants. There is a current deficit of ~\$42,000 for the year. [WEEFC needs your help to raise those funds](#), through the “Star-Awards” program and other ongoing fundraising campaigns from WEEFC. Ms. Dickie also discusses grants written over the past year, highlighting details. After a few more minutes she completes her presentation and invites questions and comments from members. Ms. Muzila reiterates that families can now give donations through venmo, among other ways. Committee members thanks Ms. Dickie for her presentation.

#### Discussion of Pandemic Response, Hybrid Learning, Expansion of In-Person Learning (20:56)

Dr. Connolly presents proposed changes for the Hybrid model. The proposal involves bringing students for more time per week in person. (Please note this proposal was revised later in the month and the revised proposal was presented on [2/23](#). That proposal is the current proposal.)

She discusses background that led into where the district is at now with hybrid learning, which leads into discussion of recent adjustments and current priorities. She reviews new public health data and discusses testing options for students. Her presentation also discusses vaccinations. Her presentation touches on experiences of students and teachers in classrooms, with pictures. She goes on to discuss key considerations and hurdles to get over towards broader reopening, introducing Dr. Carter to review specific considerations for elementary and secondary schools.

Dr. Carter also discusses continuation and further expansion of public health/safety protocols, and Wednesday schedules. He also discusses the timeline for moving forward with changes. Dr. Connolly discusses the role of the Board of Health in testing and contact tracing efforts. (Again, please note that the proposal was updated and the [2/23](#) proposal is the current version.)

Mr. Henry asks about surveys, and Dr. Connolly explains upcoming surveys. Ms. Raman asks for more details on the questions, which Dr. Connolly provides. Ms. Stewart asks about timeline estimates for the survey and upcoming change, and Dr. Connolly responds. Ms. Raman asks about Wednesdays and Dr. Connolly explains the proposal is to go to full day Wednesdays.

Mr. Cobb asks about vaccination timelines. Dr. Connolly explains that WPS is prepared to start vaccinating educators as soon as the district has the vaccines. She adds that educators have recently been deprioritized by the state government, pushing the teacher vaccination timelines back until the first of two doses coming at the end of March or early April, defying expectations. Mr. Cobb expresses willingness to write letters expressing the committee’s support for getting educators vaccinated sooner, recognizing that other districts have engaged in similar efforts.

Ms. Muzila asks about to-go lunches and Dr. Connolly responds, explaining considerations that go into indoor and outdoor lunches and current plans for grab and go lunches. She also asks a follow up question about scheduling and after school activities, to which Dr. Carter responds.

Ms. Raman asks about social and emotional support for secondary students and how students’ wellbeing is kept-track of. Dr. Connolly discusses mental health and wellness responses for a range of students, and monitoring of student wellness, and parent outreach around monitoring.

Ms. Stewart asks about data from Panorama surveys and how it is used. Dr. Carter responds, discussing Panorama and other data points and how they are used.

Mr. Cobb asks questions about COVID-19 testing data, and expresses concerns about participation rates being low. He asks about increasing student-testing participation rates. Dr. Connolly responds to his questions and provides additional information on the testing program. Ms. Raman notes how efficient the current system is for students. Ms. Muzila emphasizes that more COVID-19 testing will help WPS bring students in safely for more time learning in person. Parents should see increasing the participation rates in the testing program as a major priority, and should register their students for testing in they have not already registered each student. Ms. Muzila encourages families to make WEEFC donations and register for testing. Mr. Cobb agrees and suggests additional steps that could be taken to improve COVID testing processes.

#### Public Comment (1:03:00)

Mr. Henry clarifies some proposal details and then invites public comment from the community.

Community member Dr. Kathleen Mortimer gives public comment regarding COVID-19 testing and her membership on the WPS Medical Advisory Board. She supports expanded COVID-19 testing, including pooled testing in classes. Committee members go on to engage in discussion. Ms. Stewart asks about the Medical Advisory Board and Dr. Connolly responds. Ms. Muzila shares additional perspectives on current discussions, and encourages prioritizing flexibility to maximize the rates of students participating in testing. Ms. Stewart supports testing in classes.

Community member Dr. Angela Finch reads a letter supporting more in-person learning without waiting for vaccines. She believes it can be done safely, acknowledging that there is not zero-risk, but arguing that the benefits of more in-person learning as she sees them outweigh the risks as she sees them. She insists that teachers and students should feel safe in schools with current safety protocols. Community member Andy Pettinato echoes her sentiments and emphasizes mental health considerations.

Community member Ms. Tricia Liu asks if the different health measures, including testing in school, are sufficient to bring about a full-day schedule safely. She also expresses support for more in person learning.

Community member Mr. Adam Scully-Power asks about obstacles to having students in-person every Wednesday. He expresses skepticism about not being able to overcome these obstacles, and he asks for clarification.

WHS Student Mr. Kyle Mortimer expresses dissatisfaction with synchronous live streaming. He says teachers are stuck designing multiple lesson plans to execute at the same time. He suggests changes to the high school schedule, and asks why the middle school schedule differs from the high school. He suggests extending the length of the high school day to be the same time as the middle school. He asks administrators for more urgency to bring students in person.

Community member Ms. Louise Carter discusses two studies that seem to support expansion of in person learning. She says schools should not wait for vaccines to bring students in for more time in schools.

Community member Ms. Linda Angelucci asks about how vaccinations will impact decisions to return. Mr. Henry explains that the current plan is to start doing lunch and expand to full days, but not to reduce distancing guidelines in the near future. Ms. Angelucci also asks about negotiations with WEA and Mr. Henry provides context. Additional negotiating sessions will occur in the near future. She emphasizes the pain students have been feeling and calls for more urgent reopening.

Community member Mr. Jeff Cassider asks about answering raised questions that he feels have not been answered and Mr. Henry responds by discussing plans to get the information out. Ms. Muzila agrees on the need to get more information out to the community.

Ms. Muzila also reads a letter from students of the class of 2021 sharing their perspectives. Mr. Henry thanks her for sharing the letter and promotes an upcoming open meeting with students.

Ms. Stewart suggests answering written questions that have not yet been answered. Mr. Henry then reads and responds to each question. He adds that there are several questions raised that touch on past questions that have been responded to, and he does not read all of those fully.

#### Budget Presentation and Hearing (1:54:30)

Dr. Connolly presents updates to the school. She starts by giving context and background on the budget process, and discusses overarching factors that help to guide the budgeting process. She discusses enrollment trends and projections, noting that enrollment has declined over past years and has declined further this year. The budget assumes widespread distribution of an effective vaccine and the conclusion of additional costs associated with COVID-19 responses. Dr. Connolly also discusses costs for Full Time Employee, facilities maintenance and upgrades, past expenditure growth rates, and more. She discusses how survey data factors into budget projections and upcoming surveys. She also discusses finances covered in the town budgets. She invites questions from members of the school committee and finance committee.

Ms. Reitano asks about Field school class sizes and Dr. Connolly responds. They continue discussing more data that would be helpful. Ms. Raman asks a clarifying question. Mr. Venkataraman asks about money returned to the town and Mr. Cobb clarifies the numbers and what they mean in context. Ms. Schwallie asks about changes to Full Time Employee totals and Ms. Matthews responds. She asks a follow up question about grants and Dr. Connolly responds. She and Ms. Reitano ask about the need for in-school substitutes and expresses skepticism. Ms. Reitano explains her opposition, based on her dislike of adding more full time employees. Ms. Muzila responds and expresses her support, as does Ms. Raman and Ms. Johnson. Dr. Carter responds and clarifies the benefits of including them for a year to evaluate their impacts.

Mr. Cobb suggests that Mr. Henry clarifies the budget process timeline and get committee member perspectives on the budget. Ms. Muzila explains that she trusts and supports the budget but expresses frustration with the budget process overall. She suggests that there may be more room for community engagement within the budgeting process because it is not fully accessible. Mr. Henry responds discussing community engagement in the process. She clarifies her point about the process for broader community engagement regarding making broader cuts

to the budget. Ms. Stewart then shares her perspective on the budget process and planning for the future, emphasizing certain difficulties of this past and coming years. Ms. Stewart adds that she generally supports the new budget as proposed. Mr. Cobb agrees and responds, then Ms. Raman shares her perspective, emphasizing the importance of upcoming contract negotiations. She points to reduction of proposed increases from above 2.7% down to 2.12% as a good sign.

Next, Ms. Matthews responds to questions from Ms. Reitano regarding full time employees and grant funding, and questions from Mr. Venkataraman. Then Dr. McCanne responds to questions from Mr. Venkataraman including brief discussions regarding security cameras and AP tests. Mr. Cobb follows up adding more context, bringing the discussion to an end. Ms. Stewart notes that Mr. John Sallay would like to give public comment.

Mr. Sallay joins to share comments. He shares concerns about long term budget increases. Mr. Henry responds. Ms. Muzila asks about budgeting approaches and Mr. Henry responds to her. Mr. Sallay shares final thoughts. Seeing no comments, Mr. Henry closes the comment session.

#### EDCO Collaborative Dissolution (2:49:40)

Mr. Henry then discusses the EDCO Collaborative and the regrettable need for it to dissolve. Ms. Raman agrees and build on his comments. Mr. Henry asks Dr. Connolly to talk about EDCO and she explains the district does not currently have EDCO students. She also discusses viable alternatives. Ms. Muzila agrees with Mr. Henry and Ms. Raman. Mr. Henry discusses potential steps needed to dissolve the collaborative, and then introduces the following motion:

MOTION: Mr. Henry moves to instruct the Superintendent, Weston's EDCO representative, to vote to dissolve the EDCO collaborative when given the opportunity, with the caveat that if circumstances materially change, the question will be brought back before the committee. Mr. Cobb seconds the motion and it passes unanimously, Mr. Henry, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Ms. Stewart all voting in favor.

#### Approval of Minutes (2:57:45)

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve meeting minutes from 11/8/20 and 1/28/2021, with The caveat that a correction be made with regard to attendance from 1/28/2021. Ms. Muzila seconds the motion and it passes unanimously, with Mr. Henry, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Muzila, and Ms. Stewart all voting in favor.

Assistant Superintendent Sheri Matthews introduces a regular warrant for \$1,703,803.41

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

#### Executive Session and Adjournment

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to move to executive session without intention to return to open Session, for the purpose of discussion of collective bargaining. the committee approves with Ms. Muzila, Mr. Henry, Mr. Cobb, Ms. Stewart and Ms. Raman all voting aye.