

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING - February 23 2021

Documents Used At Meeting

- [Superintendent's Presentation on Pandemic Response and In-Person Learning](#)
- [EDCO Dissolution Letter](#)
- [Town Report](#)
- [WEEFC Grants](#)

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; and Student Rep Ms. Bereket, and student guest speakers Mr. Icke, Ms. Kirk, Mr. Korbin, Mr. Wu, and Mr. Li.

Mr. Henry reviews the agenda, explaining elements specific to this meeting, which will include discussion of pandemic response and the hybrid model, public comment, budget discussions, and more. Mr. Henry also takes a few minutes to share his perspectives on ongoing challenges. His comments include responses to communications received from local community members.

Superintendent's Report (03:30)

Dr. Connolly congratulates students for various achievements, including WHS students who were recognized for their excellence in various forms of writing by earning Scholastic Regional Writing Awards: Mackenzie Morong, Eunice Lee, Natalie Rassiger, Ivanka SooHoo, and Natalie Zhang all received recognition for their creative writing abilities.

She also congratulates Jackie Liu for her "Prudential Spirit of Community Award" for her outstanding volunteer work! She also congratulates six super sophomores who earned *Rotary Youth Leadership Awards*: Nicholas Cross, CC Curley, Madison Jenkins, Ella Kim, Theo Luu, and Natalie Rassiger. She also encourages community members to [watch the music videos shared by the Music Department](#).

She also speaks to the success of the athletics program this Winter, who landed 5 of 9 league titles. She also recognizes how livestreaming has made these events open to the community. She also celebrates Coach Mary O'Brien being named the National Northeast Sectional Golf Coach of the Year by the national federation of high school sports. [Wildcat Tracks](#) is now up.

Subcommittee Reports (09:15)

Ms. Muzila discusses the [Weston Education Enrichment Fund Committee \(WEEFC\)](#), a 35 year organization supporting WPS. This year WEEFC has raised \$20,000 from 70 families so far, but need more support! 3 ways to donate include Venmo (@WEEFC-Weston), Checks payable to "Town of Weston – WEEFC" and mailed to WEEFC 89 Wellesley Street, Weston, MA 02493.

Ms. Stewart discusses [SEPAC](#), including promoting and upcoming talk with a transitions expert.

Ms. Johnson discusses [BWMPO's](#) virtual fundraiser for the John W. Hudson Scholarship Fund.

Discussion of expansion of in-person learning (13:30)

Mr. Henry invites Dr. Connolly to give an update on reopening plans and processes. [The full slide presentation is available here.](#) Dr. Connolly starts by giving a roadmap of her presentation, which includes background context, student and family survey results, and discussion of current priorities and plans to get all grade levels in person for five days per week. RLA will continue. After providing some background context she goes on to share survey results regarding hybrid learning and proposed expansion of in-person learning. She highlights how responses have helped inform planning priorities, which leads into discussion of how those priorities have helped to inform specifics of the current proposal to come in-person five days per week. She goes on to discuss implementation considerations and details involved in reopening processes. She also discusses timelines for the proposed changes, including adding lunches by April to extend the school day later into the afternoon. She also welcomes stakeholders to share feedback with her.

Committee members ask, and Dr. Connolly responds to, several clarifying questions regarding the timeline for changes, grab-and-go lunches, distancing guidelines, and more. Additionally Ms. Raman asks about pooled testing and Dr. Connolly explains that individual PCR test for all students will be replaced by pooled testing systems. [Please register students for pooled testing.](#)

Ms. Stewart and Ms. Raman also asks about transportation and busing will be impacted by the changes. Dr. Connolly responds, discussing changes in transportation distancing guidelines, and further discussion ensues. Next, Ms. Muzila emphasizes a need to consider all perspectives and support those with hesitance regarding proposed changes. She also asks about changes to special ed. services and to student schedules, and Dr. Connolly and Dr. Carter respond to her. Ms. Muzila also asks about COVID-19 testing requirements and background considerations for athletes and musicians, for whom pooled testing is mandatory in order to participate this spring. They also discuss recent, upcoming, and potential theatrical and musical student performances.

Mr. Cobb shares that he supports the proposed plans. He explains his perspective on lunch and his discomfort with having lunch in school. He shares details of conversations with local doctors and concerns about eating as high-risk behaviors. He reiterates his support for masking indoors and his discomfort with lunch. He is more open minded to lunches in the elementary school but still has concerns. He also thanks Jamy Gaynor and the Health Services team for all their work. Dr. Connolly thanks Mr. Cobb for sharing his perspective and goes on to build on his comments, including differences between lunches at the elementary schools and the secondary schools. Mr. Cobb goes on to share more about his discussions with local physicians, highlighting key takeaways from those conversations. He also discusses the role of guidance from MA D.E.S.E. On lunches, Ms. Raman adds that HS students' hesitant perspectives should not be overlooked.

Mr. Henry invites WHS students to give their perspectives. Ms. Bereket introduces Mr. Icke, senior class President, who thanks the committee and administration for the proposed plan. He goes on to read a statement in support of re-opening. He emphasizes the mental health concerns involved in remote learning. He highlights difficulties involved in student learning. He adds that students are willing to work with the administration to facilitate it. Ms. Kirk thanks the committee and administration for hearing their concerns and responding with the proposal and

more. Mr. Wu asks for more communication to students going forward regarding the proposed changes, as does Mr. Li. Dr. Connolly clarifies some details of processes and agrees to share more information as available. Mr. Korbin, president of the class of 2023, supports the proposal.

Dr. Connolly thanks students for their perspectives and their responsibility during the pandemic. Mr. Icke asks for the district to trust the students to make the right choices to keep schools open. Ms. Kirk adds that students are willing to do what it takes to return safely. Mr. Cobb also encourages students to connect with schools leaders regarding parking with upcoming changes. Ms. Muzila thanks the students and asks Mr. Icke about addressing mental health at WHS. He responds that overall issues need to be normalized moral and made to be less isolating. She agrees. Ms. Raman echoes Ms. Muzila and also encourages adults to learn from the students.

Public Comment (1:08:00)

Ms. Angelucci praises the students' resilience and dedication, and suggests that adults have not recognized how difficult it has been for them and how hard they have worked. She also responds to Mr. Henry's comments at the beginning of the meeting and offers her view that the community and the district need to find better ways to work together and engage productively. She emphasizes communication between the district and families as top-priority for the district. Ms. Muzila offers perspective about lessons learned to help avoid similar issues in the future.

Dr. Burnett, signed a letter to the committee calling for more in person learning time and is happy with the proposed changes. She adds that she thinks there are still lunch opportunities to explore and asks about indoor eating. Dr. Connolly responds, discussing lunch considerations.

Ms. Liu asks about RLA and synchronous learning. She also asks about school psychologists. Dr. Carter responds regarding RLA, and Ms. Raman asks a follow up question he responds to. Ms. Muzila asks about mental health and Dr. Connolly responds. Dr. Connolly also goes on to add that mental health counseling and other supports are available for any/all students seeking.

Ms. Liu (unrelated to previous speaker) shares her perspective as an RLA student. She explains that to extend the full school day would mean even more zoom time for RLA students and negatively impact RLA. She emphasizes to parents that not all students will be affected equally by proposed changes. Mr. Henry thanks her for sharing her perspective.

Ms. Marinovich thanks the school committee, admin, staff, etc. She supports full days in school with lunches and encourages the district to be a leader and try to positive impact other districts. Before moving on, the committee discusses responding to written questions after the meeting.

BUDGET (1:42:00)

Mr. Henry invites comments from Finance Committee, but they will be meeting the next day and again later in the week, so Ms. Reitano agrees to discuss budgets at length during those times.

Ms. Matthews gives a big-picture overview of the proposed budget, which is around \$43 million. The initial proposal was larger, an annual increase of 2.79%. That increase has been reduced to 2.12% at the current proposal. Seeing no public comment the committee moves on to EDCO.

EDCO (1:44:30)

Mr. Henry contextualizes what has led to the committee needing to vote on the dissolution of the EDCO collaborative. Mr. Cobb asks if there would be some reason to abstain, and Mr. Henry responds that there are not really any options at this point besides voting in favor of dissolution.

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to dissolve EDCO one year after the end of the current year, which is June 30, 2022. Ms. Raman seconds and the committee votes unanimously in favor of EDCO's dissolution, with Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila and Mr. Henry all voting aye in favor.

Dr. Connolly notes that there will be other collaboratives and similar programs/resources to use.

Town Report (1:47:25)

Mr. Henry notes that he has received comments and made revisions accordingly. He suggests [this new version](#) is ready for approval to be sent to hall to include in the upcoming town report.

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve and publish the report. Ms. Muzila seconds. The committee votes unanimously in favor, with Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Henry all voting aye, approving the report.

WEEFC (1:48:20)

Dr. Carter presents five grants, totalling \$13,000. The committee also shares a WEEFC video.

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moves to approve all five grants and Ms. Raman seconds. The committee votes unanimously in favor, with Mr. Cobb, Ms. Raman, Ms. Stewart, Ms. Muzila, Mr. Henry all voting aye, approving the grants.

Warrant

Ms. Matthews presents a regular warrant for \$2,016,299.54

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

Hiring Approval (1:54:30)

Ms. Matthews presents the district's intent to hire the child of an administrator to fill a vacant learning-assistant role. She emphasizes that this prospective employee's parents would never have any supervisory responsibility for them, but still would require school committee approval. The position is only through June and is non-benefit-eligible.

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

Closing Business

Committee members respond to additional operations questions from the community written in the chat feature of the Zoom webinar. Many of these questions were answered on [March 8th](#). Ms. Muzila asks about graduation. Still looking into the possibility of having it on the town green. After some final discussion regarding questions raised in the Zoom chat, the open session ends.

Executive Session and Adjournment

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