



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
Minutes of March 25, 2020  
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School  
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA  
The meeting was held remotely via teleconference

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.  
Meeting adjourned: 8:50 p.m.  
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Jr., Robert O'Brien, Jr., Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers and Alexandria Taylor  
Members absent: None  
Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools  
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
John Tuffy, Interim Business Manager

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*The virtual meeting was being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, Section 20. Members of the Public were able to access the meeting via live stream audio at [www.whca.tv/watch/](http://www.whca.tv/watch/) and on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.*

Chair Hayes opened the meeting and announced the School Committee was meeting in a virtual setting, remotely via teleconferencing, practicing social distancing and in accordance with the Governor's suspension of certain open meeting laws. The meeting was being recorded and broadcast live on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

*Moment of Silence*

*Pledge of Allegiance*

Chair Hayes noted that all votes will be by roll call.

**VOTE: Mr. Bois motioned; Mr. Small seconded; to take all votes by roll call vote as the public body participated remotely.**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Dawn Byers – Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor – Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed 9-0-0.**

Mr. Cullity was unable to vote due to technical difficulties.

**Meeting Minutes Approval**

*Meeting minutes of March 12, 2020*

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of March 12, 2020 as presented.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

### **Superintendent's Report**

*Response to Corona Virus Crisis/Impact on WHRSD*

Superintendent Szymaniak reported on the ongoing precautionary steps taken in response to the Corona virus pandemic and continued impact of the school closure to students, families and staff.

The Superintendent reported the district is maintaining its deep-cleaning schedule. Access to completed buildings will be restricted. The district has received over 4,000 service calls, which included over 150 requests for Chromebook loans. Parents will be emailed the process for curbside pickup of Chromebooks at the high school. The Food Services Department has been working to supply meals to families and recently shifted from grab and go pickup to a two week supply delivery to homes.

The Superintendent reported that earlier today, March 25, Governor Baker announced he was extending the order of school closures in Massachusetts through the end of April. School may not re-open sooner than May 4. Mr. Szymaniak reported he anticipates receiving additional direction from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Commissioner Jeff Riley, later this week on his expectation for virtual learning. The Superintendent reported the district has been working diligently to offer virtual learning platforms to students and is working through opportunities for some students and staff that do not have the capability to partake remotely. The Superintendent added that WGBH-TV in Boston is partnering with DESE to provide distance learning opportunities on television. Mr. Szymaniak also spoke to an inequity of parents paying for services for tuition-based preschool and kindergarten programs. He recommended the Committee approve his recommendation to suspend tuition payments and pro-rate reimbursement for paid tuitions. Mr. Szymaniak reported that staff are still delivering services remotely and will be compensated. The Superintendent stated the cost of deep cleaning services is around \$100,000. The Committee discussed resources to offset salary costs, whether through Excess and Deficiency (E&D) or savings in utilities and transportation. The Superintendent stated his main concern is the social/emotional well-being of students. The District's distance learning plan will be modified after receiving direction from DESE Commissioner Riley on March 26.

**VOTE: Mr. Howard motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted by roll call to suspend preschool and full day kindergarten tuition payments and pro-rate reimbursement to paid tuitions, as recommended by the Superintendent.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Chair Hayes commented on this unprecedented time, seeing school buildings closed and additional changes likely to follow. The Superintendent added that although buildings are closed, eventually graduation, proms and other events will be re-scheduled and held at some point in time.

*Director of Business and Finance Update*

Mr. Szymaniak reported that since the original posting of the Director of Business and Finance, he has received only three of eleven applicants with the proper certification for the position. In addition, with the changes in how business is being conducted and in light of the social distancing surrounding Coronavirus, the Superintendent recommended the Committee waive a search committee and allow the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent George Ferro, and Interim Business Manager John Tuffy, to conduct initial interviews via Zoom meetings. School Committee members available may participate in the initial zoom meetings upon notification to the Superintendent. The top two candidates would be brought to the Committee with a recommendation. The Superintendent added the interviews need to be conducted as soon as possible to maintain the current qualified candidate pool.

**VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. O'Brien seconded; voted by roll call to allow the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent George Ferro, and Interim Business Manager John Tuffy, to conduct initial interviews for the position of Director of Business and Finance, as discussed.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

*Warrant Signatory*

The Superintendent requested the Committee consider temporarily appointing one warrant signatory configuration during the COVID-19 crisis and state of emergency (*under MA General Law, Sec. 16A Chapter 71 and House Bill 271*). Mr. Szymaniak recommended Chair Hayes be the appointed warrant signatory.

**VOTE: Mrs. Taylor motioned; Mr. O'Brien seconded; voted by roll call temporarily appoint Robert Hayes as the one warrant signatory for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School Committee, as discussed.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

The Superintendent noted an alternate warrant signatory should also be appointed and recommended Vice Chair Christopher Scriven.

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to temporarily appoint Christopher Scriven as the alternate warrant signatory for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School Committee, as discussed.**

**Robert Hayes – Yes**

**Dawn Byers – Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Michael Jones – Yes**

**Steve Bois – Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor – Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Robert O’Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

*Annual Town Meeting Date Changes – Hanson June 15 (tentative)*

The Superintendent reported that the Town of Hanson voted to move their annual town meeting date from May 4 to June 15, 2020. At this time, the Town of Whitman has not made any changes to its’ current annual town meeting date of May 4, 2020. The Committee discussed school committee member term expiration dates but were uncertain of the end of a term based on the impact resulting in town meeting and election date changes. The Superintendent will look into member terms. The Hanson Town Election date was changed from May 16, 2020 to June 27, 2020. The Town of Whitman Election Date remains May 16, 2020.

**Old Business**

*Whitman Middle School SOI update*

Chair Hayes announced the Town of Whitman voted to fund a feasibility study in the amount \$850,000 for the Whitman Middle School under the submitted Statement of Interest (SOI).

*Regional Agreement Amendment Committee update*

Chair Hayes reported on the status of the new Regional Agreement (RA) Amendment Committee and towns’ votes to appoint citizens-at-large. Bruce Young was appointed for the town of Hanson and Christopher George was appointed for the town of Whitman. Chair Hayes added the situation is still very fluid and was unsure how the RA Amendment Committee would be meeting at this time.

*Student Opportunity Act (SOA) 2020-2023*

Mr. Ferro reported on the development of four areas of commitment under the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) provided in the handout. Mr. Ferro described the four areas of commitment developed in the narrative plan to close opportunity and achievement gaps among student subgroups. Mr. Ferro reported that the Whitman Hanson Regional School District is not eligible to receive state funding under the Student Opportunity Act.

**Commitment 1: Focusing on Student Subgroups**

English learners and students with disabilities are not experiencing the same level of MCAS outcomes and graduation rates as their peers.

**Commitment 2: Using Evidence- Based Programs to Close Achievement Gaps**

Adopt strategies that focus on meeting the needs of our diverse student groups.

*Research Based Early Literacy Programs –*

We have piloted and will be selecting the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series, Into Reading K-6. In addition, the district has invested in the Orton-Gillingham Sunday System Program and Training, a multi-sensory method for reading intervention to quickly identify and intervene with struggling readers.

<b>FY21 budget item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Foundation Category</b>
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	\$384,286.77	Instructional Materials

Sunday Level 1 kits	\$9,850.50	Instructional Materials
Sunday PD training	\$2,750.00	Professional Development
Evidence- based program identified by DESE		Research based early literacy programs
SOA Program Categories		E, F and G (PD, curriculum & early ed. program)

Facilities Improvement to create healthy and safe school environments- Re-designing a new Student Support Center that will combine the guidance suite with the special education department.

<b>FY21 budget item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Foundation Category</b>
Facilities Improvement	\$35,000	Facilities
Evidence- based program identified by DESE		Creating a healthy and safe school environment
SOA Program Categories		J (Other as determined by the Commissioner)

### **Commitment 3: Monitoring Success with Outcome Metrics and Targets**

#### **Commitment 4: Engaging all families**

In addition to ongoing PTO meetings, school council meetings and monthly Special Education Advisory Council meetings, the district is committed to increased family engagement strategies and certification of focus group of parents/guardians including PTO presidents from each school, focus group of educators, special education parent advisory council, EL parents and the local teachers union.

Mr. Ferro reported the original deadline for the vote of the School Committee and DESE submission was April 1, 2020. Although the deadline date was moved up, Mr. Ferro recommended the Committee vote this evening so the plan may be submitted now. The plan also initiates part of the Strategic Plan which will be brought to the Committee at a later date. There was a brief discussion regarding financial impact in accommodating the plan, should the district develop consequential budget issues next school year. Mr. Ferro commented that the plan will be submitted as presented, with the likely ability to process any changes or amendments, accordingly, with DESE.

**VOTE: Mr. Bois motioned; Mr. O'Brien seconded; voted by roll call to approve the four Student Opportunity Commitments for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District, as presented.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

#### *FY2021 Budget and Local Assessment*

Chair Hayes reported he received emails and phone calls urging the Committee not vote on the school budget this evening because the public could not physically attend the meeting and may not be able to voice more comments. The deadline for the Committee to vote on an operating budget is April 30. Superintendent Szymaniak recommended voting on the operating budget and notifying the towns within 30 days prior to town meeting and by April 4 to be in accordance with deadlines discussed with the Town Administrator in Whitman and its current town meeting date of May 4. Although Town of Hanson moved their town meeting date to June 15 and if Whitman changes their date, there may be some flexibility. Superintendent Szymaniak will consult with legal regarding any new legislation that may impact deadlines for voting the school budget.

Chair Hayes reminded the Committee of new influences impacting budget discussed earlier in the meeting. \$100,000 is earmarked to be taken from E&D to cover costs related to the Coronavirus crisis response and the Committee voted to approve pro-rated tuition reimbursements for preschool and full day kindergarten.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Committee requested a scenario of the impact of a “level-funded” budget. A level-funded operating budget or, reduction in the proposed, recommended FY21 level service budget of \$2.59 million, would result in 37 staff cuts. In addition, having to pay Unemployment Insurance (UI) translates that number from 37 to 44 in staff reductions. Also, a proposed budget reduction of \$1.3 million to the proposed FY21 recommended budget would be the loss of 20 staff members or 26 staff cuts with UI payments. The Superintendent stated he hopes he does not have to do that as it would impact every school and how the district teaches children.

Hanson School Committee members maintained they would like more information of any compromise made between the two towns of a strategy to fund the school district local assessments prior to voting affirmative on the operating budget and assessments.

Mr. Small commented on the obvious dissemination of the school district under a level funded budget and the need to come up with an overall budget figure for the towns to determine how it is funded, not the School Committee. Mrs. Byers commented on focusing on the Committee’s charge as elected officials of the School Committee, and as the voice of the students, that it is up to the Committee to set an educationally sound budget. Again, Mrs. Byers suggested revisiting athletic user fees and implementing parking fees at the high school as new revenue sources. Mrs. Byers requested adding those items to a future school committee agenda for further discussion. Lastly, Mrs. Byers called on both towns to review their own budget expenses and money spent on non-mandated bussing for potential revenue/savings.

The Committee continued deliberation on setting the budget and the towns working together to compromise and find a solution to fund the local assessments. However, the town officials have not shared what they have discussed to date. Hanson School Committee members believed knowing the towns’ strategy, or position, would help in voting on the school district operating budget. Several Whitman School Committee members recalled that at previous school committee meetings, the towns’ officials stated they wanted the FY2021 school budget figure from the School Committee because they could not move forward without a School Committee vote on the operational budget and local assessments.

Chair Hayes reported the Superintendent provided two budget scenarios for level service for FY2021 for the Committee’s consideration; FY2021 recommended level service budget at \$55,040,238 and, the FY2021 recommended budget with four additional teachers to address class size would be \$55,320,238.

The Committee discussed delaying a vote on the FY21 school budget for one week, whereas during that time, the Superintendent will contact each town administrator for answers on the town’s strategy for a financial compromise.

Chair Hayes scheduled a tentative School Committee meeting for April 1, 2020 to continue the budget discussion.

Chair Hayes reported he had received a text message from Hanson Board of Selectmen Chair, Laura Kemmett who wrote “There is nothing to find out and they haven’t made any progress and have been dealing with the (Coronavirus) pandemic since their last meeting.” Mr. Howard suggested only holding a meeting if there is new information from the towns on a compromise to be reported at the school committee meeting next week. The Superintendent recommended voting a budget by April 4, which is thirty days prior to annual town meeting in Whitman. The Superintendent will also confirm what the very last date is that the School Committee could vote on the FY2021 operating budget.

*Adjournment*

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mrs. Taylor seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.**

**Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes**

**Christopher Scriven – Yes**

**Fred Small - Yes**

**Daniel Cullity -Yes**

**Alexandria Taylor - Yes**

**Steve Bois - Yes**

**Michael Jones - Yes**

**Christopher Howard - Yes**

**Dawn Byers - Yes**

**Robert Hayes - Yes**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

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*Signature of School Committee Secretary*

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for March 25, 2020
- Meeting minutes of March 12, 2020
- Governor Baker Executive Order suspending certain provisions of OML 3-12-2020
- House Bill H271, General Law Part I, Title XII, Chap. 71
- Proposed Budget scenarios and assessment calculations worksheet (forthcoming)
- Student Opportunity Plan 2020-2023 requirements
- Gov. Baker Exec Order HD4974 to An Act further address Challenges faced by Municipalities
- Legal response from Andy Waugh
- Operating Budget and Assessment worksheet (updated w/Hanson HVAC assessment)
- Voting language – 3 Votes (one each on local assessment and one to certify budget)