



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of September 30, 2020
School Committee Meeting
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 6:03 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 9:03 p.m.

Members present: Christopher Scriven, Michael Jones (left at 8:57 p.m.), Daniel Cullity (arrived at 6:34 p.m.), Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers, Hillary Kniffen, David Forth, Jr. and Fred Small (participated remotely).

Members absent: Robert Hayes

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Director of Business and Finance

Chair Hayes was not present. In his place, Vice Chair, Chris Scriven, chaired the meeting.

Mr. Scriven called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Mr. Scriven announced this evening's meeting is being recorded and broadcast live via WHCA-TV cable TV and website.

Mr. Scriven announced that Mr. Small would be participating remotely and all votes will be by Roll Call.

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Roll call for attendance

Dan Cullity and Bob Hayes were not present for roll call.

Meeting Minutes Approval

August 6, 2020

VOTE: Ms. Byers motioned; Mr. Forth seconded; by roll call voted to approve the meeting minutes of August 6, 2020 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

September 9, 2020

Ms. Byers recommended an amendment to Page 3 to Strike “high school” and replace with “In alignment with the Memorandum of Understanding with WHEA, the Committee discussed excluding bandanas in the face covering policy EBCFA” to clarify bandanas are excluded as a face covering district-wide, not just at the high school.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Forth seconded; by roll call voted to amend the meeting minutes of September 9, 2020, on page 3 to Strike “high school” and replace with “In alignment with the Memorandum of Understanding with WHEA, the Committee discussed excluding bandanas in the face covering policy EBCFA” as discussed. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

VOTE: Mr. Bois motioned; Ms. Byers seconded; by roll call voted to approve the meeting minutes of September 9, 2020, as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

September 15, 2020

Mr. Forth recommended tabling the meeting minutes of September 15, 2020 in order to amend page 2 to correct the name George Coffey to Christopher George and, to include Mr. Forth’s discussion on the 2014 District Review and other statements he made during the meeting. Mr. Forth will furnish an amendment to the minutes via email to the Office of the Superintendent, to be included in the amended minutes for approval at the next meeting.

VOTE: Mr. Forth motioned; Ms. Byers seconded; by roll call voted to table approval of the meeting minutes of September 15, 2020, as discussed. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Scriven took the agenda out of order for presentation purposes.

Superintendent’s Report

FY2020 budget report and close out line item transfers – John Tuffy

The Director of Business and Finance presented the close out of FY2020 budget report and line item transfers.

Line Item Transfers Close Out FY2020

Mr. Tuffy noted that the transfer amounts are between different line items. This is done so that none of the budget lines are in negative numbers. This does not increase or decrease the final budget or change spending and the transfers do not impact the bottom line.

VOTE: Mr. Howard motioned; Mr. Forth seconded; by roll call voted to approve the June 30, 2020 Final Close Out FY2020 line item transfers, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Close out of FY2020

Mr. Tuffy presented the End of Year Budget Expenditures and Revenue reports. He noted that 98.6% of the expenditures budget was spent and 98.4% of the revenue budget was collected. In addition, the Committee has received the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) report from the MA Division of Local Services (DLS). Mr. Tuffy discussed the anticipated revenue shortfall that occurred when the district discontinued collection of preschool and kindergarten tuitions and reimbursed prepaid amounts due to the closure of school in March 2020. The total tuition amount reimbursed was \$294,000. A portion of the savings realized for non-mandated transportation costs were returned to the member towns in the amount of \$113,000.

Mr. Tuffy reported the amount of Excess and Deficiency or "E&D" as of July 1, 2020 for Whitman-Hanson is \$609,182. This is slightly higher than the previous year of \$605,000. The \$609,182 includes the use of \$350,000 in this year's budget (FY2021). Mr. Tuffy reported for the first time in a number of years, the district is adding to the E&D line. Comments from the Committee included that, although a modest amount of E&D is in the balance, the account is still very low and not nearly the 5% or \$2.7 million, a total amount the district could have in E&D by law. The Committee discussed insuring there is some level of stabilization in the E&D account. Mr. Tuffy provided a history of the E&D account balances. In 2015 the E&D balance was \$1.4 million, in 2016, E&D balance was 1.3 million, in 2017 it was \$1.2 million, and in 2020 it was \$605,000. Mr. Tuffy noted a slow erosion of E&D balance, but for valid funding reasons, as the years went on. The Committee talked briefly about replenishing E&D to the maximum amount of E&D as a best practice in anticipation of a one-time expenditure or capital projects. Mr. Tuffy spoke to the Standard & Poor's (S&P) recent bond rating downgrade. The review of credits was based on a number of things, including fund balances decreasing over time as well as dependency on state funding and a number of outstanding debts. The separate OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) account was discussed briefly noting modest amounts were initially contributed, but there have been no contributions in recent years.

Ms. Byers discussed concerns with providing additional reading books for students, rather than having so much screen time use or audio books. She noted the supply budget line items on the expenditures report. Mr. Szymaniak clarified the supply line items (instructional) are different line items than library instructional materials line items and discussed how those funds are used. Mr. Szymaniak spoke to instructional line items which have not shifted since 2010, and suggested the Committee look at those line items for additional book circulation and other instructional supplies for students in the upcoming budget. Mr. Ferro briefly discussed the cost effectiveness of purchasing books online at Amazon versus purchasing Permabond textbooks at a higher cost of around \$1,300 for a classroom set. Ms. Byers recommended if there is available budget in the Middle School instructional supplies line item at year end, that it go towards purchasing reading book supplies for students.

Superintendent's Goals/Self-Assessment Discussion

The Committee received a self-assessment summary from Superintendent Szymaniak for the 2019-2020 school year. He recommended the Committee contribute in preparing the Superintendent's goals for the 2020-21 school year, and not necessarily just budget/finance goals. The Superintendent's goals include a student learning goal, a

professional practice goal and at least two district improvement goals. Mr. Szymaniak opened up the conversation to the Committee to participate in determining two district improvement goals.

The Committee collectively offered the following:

- Collaboration across grade levels
- More outdoor educational learning opportunities
- Global learning
- Cost-free full day kindergarten
- Adjust start times for schools (healthy later start times at the high school)
- Properly replenish personnel position (F/T) in Business Office
- Maintain technology plan and replacement plan
- Practical use in High School for TECCA classes - sell advertising
- Provide 1:1 devices for all students
- Implement foreign language at the elementary level
- Implement Chapter 74 programs not available at Vocational school, ie, Nursing
- Diversity/equity/social justice training and curriculum - (Mr. Ferro spoke to this and noted the District participates in ExSEL coalition through the Rennie Center – Whitman-Hanson is one of 22 districts in their 4th year of CASEL now transformative SEL (social emotional learning), a shared responsibility of self-management, how do we identify and do this as a culture and the need to critically look at what we need and teach it to end up in a place of justice.)
- Enrollment increase
- Hold harmless
- Mental health
- Education equity
- Special education technology improvements
- Public transparency
- Create student oriented policies
- Robust community engagement initiatives
- Community to understand why we are doing some things with increased meaning
- Pandemic changing things – what does education look like in twenty years – have a vision for the future of education
- Delivery of education – how can we be different, not just better
- Facilities plans - more transparency with town officials and keeping the plan current
- Culture between district and community be kind, empathetic and inclusive
- Create the best environment for students in school and on sports fields
- Community engagement via town hall sessions (difficult during COVID)
- Provide more information to the Community (transparency at every level)

Mr. Szymaniak agreed with the comments and stated many of the responses are initiatives currently being discussed in central administration. One of the Superintendent's current goals for professional practice is the diversity/equity/social justice training and curriculum. Mr. Szymaniak requested the Committee be collaborative, supportive and united with the Superintendent on the chosen goals/initiatives during budget discussions and communicate why there is a particular need. The Superintendent communicated that goals should be attainable, measurable and can be benchmarked. The Superintendent will review all ideas and prepare two or three goals from the list. Mr. Szymaniak added that the success of the Whitman Middle School Feasibility Study project is also a goal and needs the support of the Committee in working with MSBA. Mr. Szymaniak agreed that community engagement and input would be welcome on how parents want to see the district move forward in the next five years.

The Committee continued dialogue on ways to engage and involve the community, bringing more inclusion, diversity and equity to the district and, the possibility of bringing different educational resources under Chapter

74, that are not currently offered at the vocational school. Mr. Tuffy explained how Chapter 74 works for vocational programs and that they are typically expensive to run with the cost of equipment and liability/risk factors. Mr. Szymaniak spoke to high school internships, noting there are some challenges of businesses accepting high school interns and not letting students travel to far away to participate. Mr. Ferro spoke to curriculum and education as a goal this year. K-8 Students, for the first formalized time, will have interim assessments in ELA and math three times through the school year to gauge and assess student growth. The district is currently using Into Reading, iReady math and an expanded offering called IXL, centralizing curriculum at the lower levels and expanding to the middle schools with online components. This pandemic has changed how we do things. The assessments will also assess where students are at their grade level and remediate as necessary.

Mr. Scriven took the agenda out of order for presentation purposes for Athletic Director's proposal.

Old Business

Athletic Director Bob Rodgers transportation waiver and athletic user fee proposal during COVID-19 pandemic
Athletic Director, Bob Rodgers, presented proposals to waive current student athlete transportation to games and meets amendment to the athletic user fee schedule during COVID-19.

Student Athlete Transportation Waiver

Mr. Rodgers presented alternate transportation waivers for parents to sign off on, should they determine the child (student athlete) will not ride the bus to and from a Whitman-Hanson sport event. Mr. Rodgers explained some parents are not comfortable having their child ride the bus. He spoke to limited transportation availability with First Student during COVID. The waivers will be in effect for the 2020-21 school year during the COVID pandemic.

The parent can sign off on all three provisions or whichever they prefer, as follows.

Provision 1: child drive themselves to and from any athletic event

Provision 2: child drive with another parent to any athletic event

Provision 3: child drive with another student driver to any athletic event

VOTE: Ms. Byers motioned; Mr. Forth seconded; by roll call voted to approve student athlete transportation waiver proposal, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Student Athlete User Fees Proposal

Mr. Rodgers noted that typically, user fees are non-refundable. Refunds are not granted if a student leaves a team for any reason. However, this year, is the school district needs to cancel a sport season due to COVID-19, pro-rated refunds will be granted as follows in two week increments:

- 1) If the season is shut down in the first 2 weeks - grant 80% refund
- 2) If the season is shut down in the first 4 weeks - grant 60% refund
- 3) If the season is shut down in the first 6 weeks - grant 40% refund
- 4) If the season is shut down in the first 8 weeks - grant 20% refund

User fees are not policy but are listed in the student handbook. This would be an addendum to the High School student handbook. Mr. Rodgers noted parents have been notified of the addendum pending the approval of the Committee.

VOTE: Mr. Forth motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; by roll call voted to approve proposed student athlete user fee refund schedule for the 2020-21 school year during the COVID pandemic, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Rodgers reported the Patriot League currently allows only two parents per student to attend a sport event. The restriction is part of the Governor's Phase in approach during COVID Phase 3 Step 1. The Patriot League coaches will be meeting on October 1 to discuss and vote on social distancing and spectator adjustment plans at games, under the Governor's Phase 3 step 2 during COVID.

Strategic Plan

The Superintendent presented the draft 2020-2023 WHRSD Strategic Plan. The school leadership team worked on this last spring and voted to approve the draft in June. The Superintendent is seeking input from the Committee so that the leadership team can enhance the Plan and develop outcomes. Mr. Szymaniak noted the four Hallmarks of Success in the Strategic Plan are Excellence in Social Emotional Learning (ExSEL), a PK-12 System of Teaching and Learning, Safe and Secure Environments (Operations) and Community Engagement. Please look at this as a three year visionary plan, develop action steps and then he can report out to School Committee. The Superintendent anticipates the Committee approving the Plan at an upcoming meeting and aligning his goals with the Plan. The Committee discussed how to engage the community. The parent advisory committees can help 'get the word out', maybe in smaller sessions during COVID, driving consistent messages out through social media, coffee hours or Q&A via email. Also members can contribute by writing articles for the local Express newspaper. The utilizing of social media and staying engaged through that avenue with the community was discussed. Mr. Forth noted MASC also encourages that type of communication. Using social media with informative and transparent information was discussed and referring parents with detailed individual questions to the school administrators in the district. The Committee focused back on the Strategic Plan discussion and had continued dialogue on what does student success look like and firming up core values. There was a brief discussion on establishing uniform school start times. Ms. Byers advocated for later high school start times and suggested looking into the science of healthier start times and to hear from additional stakeholders, both parents and students. Mr. Szymaniak appreciated the feedback, will look to receive the Committee input over the next few weeks in order to establish and finalize the Strategic Plan and include in his goals.

Community Engagement Focus Discussion

Mr. Howard prepared an overview of a Community Engagement Focus and led the Committee in a roundtable like discussion to define engagement, what does that look like in 2020 (COVID) and what is the School Committee's role in promoting community engagement. The purpose of the outline was to facilitate discussion about opportunities to provide additional data and factual information to the residents of both towns to help build the understanding of what WHRSD presently does and could do relating to the education of the students of the District.

Assess Present State:

- How do you feel the engagement is between the WHRSD (including SC) and the citizens of Whitman and Hanson? (*Strong, weak, in the middle, explain*)

A number of Committee responses fell between weak; in the middle and that there is room for improvement. The Committee talked about ensuring they provide facts and information to the public, finding different ways to

engage through small group settings or town hall forums, and delivering clear messages in a unified manner to educate the community on the goings on in the district.

- How effective do you think our SC Meetings are in building engagement with the citizens of Whitman and Hanson

The Committee discussed how ineffective school committee meetings are for community engagement, particularly in the time of the COVID pandemic.

Future State Consideration:

- What are some ways (your top 3) that you think we could better engage with the citizens of Whitman and Hanson?

Responses included the following:

- Establish a Community relations Subcommittee (Hold meetings in different locations although may be difficult to broadcast)
- Establish Public committee at all meetings
 - Mr. Szymaniak spoke to the public comment discussion. Public comment is not intended to open comment during the entire meeting. It is intended to offer citizens an opportunity to express their opinion on issues of School Committee business. Mr. Szymaniak will include Public comment as an agenda item for the next meeting.
- Establish Liaisons with school PTO's , School Committee attend PTO meetings and student liaisons to school officials
- Hold Pop up meeting at coffee shops or have PTO attend school committee meetings
- Appoint a social media point person
 - Mr. Szymaniak reminded the Committee that the district does have a public relations firm in place to handle press releases, etc.
- Shorter and more efficient meetings
- Develop a more organized formal Q&A with specific detail
- School committee be out in and visible in the community
- Utilize the Smartboard during meetings to post the handouts School Committee as discusses each agenda item
- Utilize the local newspaper for more communication
- Utilize WHCA-TV to produce information shows
- Utilize Facebook to share information
- Encourage parents to participate in school and sport events and with the principals
- Attend fundraisers and PAC/PTO events to engage parents
- Review the district website, create an info email and assign a staff member to monitor
- Have public comment at the beginning of each meeting and if the subject is not on agenda, place on next meeting agenda
- Have School Committee members participate in walkthroughs with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent during the school day and on special occasions and events
- Be more courageous with listening and responding to outreach – find a way to get to the people

The Committee circled back to discussing the use of social media for community engagement. There was an understanding that the goal be communications and messages of transparency, consistency and even a centralized platform. The Committee discussed avoiding getting into debates on social media. Ms. Byers cited WHRSD Policy KA and found it relative to the social media initiative. Individual members discussed what they post on their social media platform. It was suggested to develop a best practice for social media use.

The Committee then reverted to additional discussion on how to resurrect public comment during COVID-19 restrictions. Technology must play a bigger role in order to move in a direction to receive and respond to public

comment. Utilizing a ZOOM meeting platform and allowing for chat or funnel questions to the Board was discussed. It was suggested to streamline public comment and create or update a policy to bring clarification on how to facilitate public comment at meetings. It was the consensus of the Committee to have public comment at the beginning of the School Committee agenda.

Mr. Szymaniak announced the next meeting will be held on October 21 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; roll call voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda and memo for September 30, 2020
- Meeting minutes of August 6, September 9 and September 15, 2020
- Athletics proposals; transportation waiver and amended user fee policy
- FY2020 Line Item Transfers for final close out
- End of Year FY2020 Budget Reports
- 2020-2023 WHRSD Strategic Plan
- Engagement Focus – Thoughts for Discussion
- Superintendent's Self-Assessment