



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting Minutes of November 18, 2020
Regular School Committee Meeting
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 6:00 p.m.
Meeting adjourned: 8:12 p.m.
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers, Hillary Kniffen and David Forth, Jr.
Members absent: None
Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Director of Business and Finance

Chair Hayes called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The meeting was being recorded and broadcast live. All votes will be by roll call vote. Mr. Small was participating remotely.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll call vote for attendance was taken. All members were present.

Chair Hayes announced the next School Committee meeting agenda will have designated time limits for each agenda item in an effort to prioritize discussion and facilitate the meeting in timely fashion.

Chair Hayes took the agenda out of order.

New Business

Member Town Municipal Representative for Collective Bargaining

Chair Hayes reported that Lisa Green, the Town of Whitman Interim Town Administrator, was appointed by the Town of Whitman Board of Selectmen as the municipal representative to the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District for collective bargaining. Hanson Board of Selectmen Chair, Kenny Mitchell, and Hanson Town Administrator, John Stanbrook, were present at the meeting and endorsed the appointment of Lisa Green as the municipal representative for the towns. Chair Hayes stated Ms. Green would have a seat at the table during negotiations.

Unfinished Business

State Investigation Status

Mr. Szymaniak reported in response to his request to David Forth to provide the name of the person he spoke to in the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), Mr. Forth only provided an 800 telephone number for the OIG Fraud Hotline Investigation Unit. No other information or documentation has been received from Mr. Forth as follow up to the November 4 School Committee discussions on an alleged state investigation into the school district and two member towns. Mr. Forth reported he contacted the Office of the Inspector General to determine what information he could discuss with the Committee and is waiting for a return call from the OIG. The

Superintendent discussed the impact this controversial matter may have on potential candidates seeking employment with the district, particularly for anticipate administration openings. The Committee deliberated that the statutory method of assessment may be the context of the alleged investigation but there is no credible information to verify this. Mr. Szymaniak reported the district is incurring costs in the matter as a result of communication with Attorney Waugh.

Public Comment

Chair Hayes read aloud the WHRSD Public Comment Policy BEDH. Two attendees joined the ZOOM meeting for Public Comment, but had no comment. Chair Hayes permitted an additional five minutes for public comment and then closed public comment.

Student Advisory Report

The Student Representative will report at the next meeting on December 16, 2020.

Meeting Minutes Approval

School Committee meeting minutes of October 21, 2020

VOTE: Mr. Scriven motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of October 21, 2020, as presented.

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. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously

School Committee meeting minutes of November 4, 2020

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of November 4, 2020, as presented.

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. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried.

Superintendent's Report

John and Abigail Adams Scholarship – Dr. Christopher Jones

High School Principal, Dr. Chris Jones, presented information on John and Abigail Adams Scholarships.

The high school recognized 75 seniors awarded scholarships. The Adams scholars qualify for tuition waivers at MA public colleges and universities.

Financial Literacy Planning & Implementation Grant - C. Jones

High School Principal, Dr. Christopher Jones, announced the Financial Literacy Planning & Implementation Grant was awarded to the high school in the amount of \$10,000. The grant provides high school students one semester of a personal finance course.

Elementary and Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent, George Ferro, updated the Committee on Elementary and Curriculum, one of the district's goals to utilize pre and post assessments at three benchmark points during the year to measure growth in math and ELA for students in K-8. The district is utilizing iReady for math diagnostic assessments and Houghton Mifflin for ELA diagnostic assessments. The assessments are established in three tiers by grade level, by deficits and more significant deficits. This will allow teachers to place students on a path to determine remediation needs, while students continue to learn. Mr. Ferro reported that 94% of students completed the math iReady assessment last year and are considered in Tier 1 at grade level. Preliminary growth reports for elementary ELA revealed 38.9% of students reading below grade level, 54% at grade level and 6.2% above grade level. This is the first time the district has a baseline for and can now test intermittently to see growth with live data with these two programs.

2020 MASC/MASS Joint Conference - Dawn Byers

Dawn Byers reported on the MASC/MASS Joint Conference annual meeting held November 7, 2020. Over 143 school committee members from Massachusetts participated in online meeting to take action on ten proposed MASC Resolutions. Ms. Byers reported the following five resolutions were approved unanimously by the delegates.

Resolution 2: State Funding for COVID

Resolution 3: Anti-racism Resolution

Resolution 6: Retention of Medicaid Revenue

Resolution 8: Membership of a School Committee Member on the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

Resolution 9: Equity for LGBTQ Students and Staff

Ms. Byers reported the remaining resolutions were tabled for more in-depth discussion and eventually passed.

Resolution 1: MCAS and High Stakes Testing.

Resolution 4: Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Municipal Elections.

Resolution 5: Increased Federal Support and Stimulus Funding for Public K-12 Education - with an amendment passed.

Resolution 7: Attempts by US Department of Education to Direct Public Funding to Private Schools.

Resolution 10: Monitoring of Attendance of Students during the Pandemic.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the district is working to connect with Dr. Kalise Wornum, a Keynote speaker at the Joint Conference, for professional development opportunities for Whitman-Hanson on how to achieve equity in schools. The District also has an online tool through Simple K12 with webinar offerings on equity and inclusion as an alternate resource.

North River Collaborative Report

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Committee is required to vote to appoint the Superintendent to the North River Collaborative Board of Directors annually.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to appoint Superintendent Jeffrey Szymaniak to the North River Collaborative Board of Directors for the 2020-21 School Year.

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. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

COVID Update

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the number of positive COVID tests and quarantined Whitman-Hanson staff and students since the last School Committee meeting. In the current hybrid model, this year twenty-two students and three staff have tested positive and 122 students and 36 staff have been quarantined as close contacts. A travel advisory was sent to staff and families in anticipation of the upcoming Thanksgiving recess. The district will not enforce a travel mandate, but is providing as much information as possible to mitigate the spread of Coronavirus.

The Superintendent reported on the number of students and teachers in the full remote model by grade. Currently 521 students are full remote. The Superintendent expressed sustainability concerns if more parents choose to go full remote if the district were to go back to in person learning model.

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the October 1 Enrollment certified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Total enrollment is 3,583 with 38 out-of-district students, bringing the total enrollment to 3,621. Compared to last year, homeschooling has increased from 33 to 96 students this year.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Coronavirus transmissions seemingly occur outside of school. Mr. Szymaniak reported that Governor Baker has recently communicated that schools are expected to be full in-person and has adjusted the metric for Coronavirus cases in Massachusetts. Mr. Szymaniak read an excerpt from Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) Executive Director, Tom Scott, who drafted a letter to the Governor regarding the concerns of Superintendents across Massachusetts with returning to full in-person learning.

“During the past several days, many superintendents have expressed concerns with the Governor’s press conference on Friday, November 6th, when he set expectations that schools in communities designated as grey, green or yellow return student learning fully, in person, if feasible.

Clearly, the words “if feasible” are key to any possible return of in person options.

Based on the guidance provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the decision of the Administration to have each school district determine its return to school plan, the better part of Spring, and Summer, were spent by local districts to develop plans, negotiate agreements with local unions, and abide by the health and safety protocols.

While superintendents have been strong advocates for as much in school learning as possible, there are several realities which require the Governor’s help before many months of planning can be altered.

1. Convincing evidence that less than 6’ of distance is safe. We need medical experts to explicitly coalesce around safe distancing which allows for increased student capacity in classrooms.
2. School bus transportation must allow for significantly larger student bus capacity. We are limited right now with bus availability and the significant costs to expand bus usage.
3. Help with collective bargaining provisions since there is no way to make unilateral changes in previous agreements with local unions. Superintendents have already negotiated extensively on return to school plans.

M.A.S.S. and Superintendents across Massachusetts would welcome any statewide efforts to address these issues, that are beyond a local community’s power to impact. With that assistance and support, we look forward to the time when more in-school learning is both feasible and achievable.”

“Thomas Scott, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, said superintendents are trying the best they can to educate students in person, but there are many competing factors, including demands from teachers unions, staffing shortages, limited finances, and facility improvements, particularly with ventilation systems. He said the new rules and the overhaul metrics will likely be helpful down the road, but in the short term they could create some problems.” “Mass. school districts’ plans vary widely on key practices for pandemic-era education, review finds.”

Mr. Szymaniak agreed with the three points made in the letter on safety in distancing three or six feet, transportation regulations and collective bargaining provisions. Another key issue is the logistics of moving all of the furniture from thirteen storage containers back into the school buildings. Student transportation and the number of buses in use were discussed. Mr. Ferro noted that in a regional school district, all students attending school must have a bus seat for transportation purposes whether the use it or not. Mr. Szymaniak will poll parents again regarding use of transportation. The Superintendent will re-establish the COVID-Team to bring recommendations to the full Committee on whether to go back to full in person learning. The Superintendent will send a reminder to families regarding the mandate on flu shots for all students by December 31.

Budget Report - John Tuffy

Mr. Tuffy presented the October YTD encumbrances and revenue reports. The spend rate is at the same level as last year. Overall spending is slightly less than last year. Mr. Tuffy reported utilities are higher than budgeted due to changes in requirements due to COVID. The nurse supply lines have also increased for the same reason as well as increased use of medical supplies. Mr. Tuffy reported unemployment claims are paid in full by the district. Mr. Tuffy reported the state is being overwhelmed with a significant number of fraudulent claims in many school districts. Mr. Szymaniak reported 49 fraudulent claims have been received by Whitman-Hanson to date.

Mr. Tuffy discussed revenue resources and comparisons this year versus last year. The state funds nearly 50% of the school budget. To date, the state budget has not been confirmed. However, it is anticipated Chapter 70 funding will decrease by \$110,000 if the House Ways & Means budget matches the Senate budget proposal. Transportation reimbursement is expected to decrease by \$157,000. Mr. Tuffy reported the Superintendent is working with the member towns for reimbursement under the CARES act through Plymouth County. Chromebooks are the largest expense. Other eligible expenses are PPE, cleaning supplies, necessary modifications to HVAC to meet requirements and expectation for air quality changes, and support changes in technology software and hardware needs. The District has \$513,000 in anticipated expenses that have been encumbered to submit for reimbursement.

Mr. Szymaniak reminded the School Committee of the meeting invite from Whitman Finance Committee on December 15 at 7:00 PM. Mr. Szymaniak noted that FY22 budget information will first be shared with the School Committee before being presented elsewhere. The Superintendent and Committee members discussed the role of a liaison from the town finance committees. The Superintendent will follow up with the town of Hanson to inquire if they plan to appoint a liaison from their Finance Committee as well.

Unfinished Business

Installation of solar powered light at Indian Head School by SSVVA

Chair Hayes reported that the Committee previously approved a donation of a solar powered light for Indian Head School from the South Shore Veteran’s Assistance (SSVA). Chair Hayes read the thank you letter into the minutes.

“On behalf of the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District and School Committee Members, I am writing to thank South Shore Veteran’s Assistance (SSVA) for the generous donation to the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District.

At their meeting on September 9, 2020, the Whitman-Hanson Regional School Committee voted to accept the donation of a solar powered light for the flagpole at the Indian Head Elementary School so that the flag can be flown in the evening outside of Memorial Hall,

I would like acknowledge not only the recent solar light installation, but also the new American flag for the flag pole. We were proud to learn this was accomplished just in time for Veteran's Day.

Many thanks for the generous donation to the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District.”

Subcommittee Reports

Pilgrim Area Collaborative Report

Mr. Bois reported the PAC Board met on November 5. Updates included the annual audit was performed an approved auditor for next fiscal year. Mr. Bois reported reconciled tuition from member towns provided \$5,952 back to Whitman-Hanson. Mr. Bois also reported \$72,000 was earmarked for the Pilgrim Area Collaborative OPEB account.

Facilities Subcommittee

Mr. Small reported the subcommittee has not met since September. The Subcommittee did receive updated capital project matrices. Mr. Szymaniak reported the matrices will be updated quarterly and shared with the full Committee as well as the member towns.

Policy Subcommittee

There was nothing new to report.

Insurance Subcommittee

Mr. Small recommended scheduling a meeting for December 2, 2020 via zoom at 5:00 PM. An agenda and posting will be processed.

Negotiations Subcommittee

Mr. Szymaniak reported that many school districts are looking to extend current expiring collective bargaining agreements for one year due to COVID. This may be a likely discussion for Whitman-Hanson Regional School District and Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA). The WHEA letter of intent, to enter into negotiations, has been received.

Regional Agreement Subcommittee

There was nothing new to report.

Legislative Update

Mr. Small reported that the funding earmarks submitted by State Representative Allyson Sullivan for \$800,000 to complete the Duval School roof repair project and \$500,000 to implement tuition-free full day kindergarten were not accepted. Mr. Small recommended sending representative Sullivan a thank you letter for her effort.

Adjournment:

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda and memo for November 18, 2020
- WHRSD Policy BEDH - Public Comment
- WHRSD Policy BEGD - Minutes
- Meeting minutes of October 21, 2020
- Meeting minutes of November 4, 2020
- Report from MASC's 75th annual meeting
- Copies of notification to Town Administrators to select one municipal official to represents both member towns in the process of collective bargaining
- SSVA donation thank you letter
- Additional Handouts
 - Photos of school logistics, spacing during COVID
 - Listing of Warrants signed