



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting Minutes of January 13, 2021
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: 8:30 p.m.
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small (participated remotely), 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

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. The meeting will be recorded and members of the public are able to access the meeting via live stream audio at 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, and was being recorded and broadcast live on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call for Attendance

Mr. Small participated remotely. All votes were taken by roll call.

Public Comment

Sarah Wall, Whitman resident, parent of two children at the Conley School and new substitute teacher for Whitman-Hanson Regional School District commented on the current hourly wage for substitute teaching staff. Ms. Wall indicated that, although her experience as a substitute has been positive, the low wages impact the lack of a strong substitute pool, the inequity in pay while enduring health risks during the pandemic and place additional stress on staff needing coverage. Ms. Wall urged the Committee consider a substitute wage increase.

In line for public comment were Shannon Carron and Nicole Walsh; however, were unable to comment due to connectivity issues.

Meeting Minutes Approval

December 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of December 16, 2020, as presented.

Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Cullity – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Forth - abstained
Mr. Hayes - Yes
The motion carried 9-0-1.

Student Advisory Report

Chair Hayes introduced Student Council Representative, Anna Flynn, as the new Student Council Representative to the School Committee. Ms. Flynn reported the hybrid learning model has been challenging in terms of focus and understanding materials while managing Wi-Fi connectivity, Google Meets issues and distractions in the home while learning remotely. Student Council activities have helped ease some of the stress students and staff are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the new learning models. Key Club recently held a successful food drive. Ms. Flynn noted that holding special events and clubs virtually is another challenge and not the preferred of the student body, although scheduling some of the high school club meetings later in the evening works well for many students. Ms. Flynn wanted the Committee to be aware of the challenges facing students in these unprecedented times during the pandemic.

Superintendent's Report

COVID Update

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the number of positive COVID tests and quarantined staff and students since the holiday recess. Since the return from break, the district had 7 staff, 2 coaches and 41 students test positive. In addition, 35 staff and approximately 163 students are in some phase of quarantine. The quarantines include both girls' varsity and JV basketball, girls' varsity hockey, 7th and 8th grade Hanson girls' youth travel basketball and 8th grade Hanson boys youth travel basketball. Lastly, four sub-separate special education classes have been quarantined. Mr. Szymaniak reported the district is not experiencing much transmission through student body in classes. Of note, the high school level went into fully remote learning mode temporarily due to staffing and substitute coverage issues. On January 12, high school students resumed the cohort learning module. Athletic Director, Bob Rodgers, discussed the impact of COVID to the athletics program and the challenge of maintaining athletic schedules this winter. Mr. Rodgers been an advocate to the to the Patriot League officials to continue allowing practice and move games to the second fall season on March 22. Mr. Rodgers reported some surrounding districts (Silver Lake Regional and Marshfield) have gone fully remote and are not participating in sports. The three WH varsity sports being played currently are boys' basketball, boys' hockey, and girls' hockey. The good news is Whitman-Hanson is currently undefeated. All varsity team games will be streamed live and on twitter. Mr. Rodgers reported at the Athletic Directors meeting, they discussed the priority for teams to play against Patriot League teams; however, they may decide to play local teams outside of the Patriot League bubble because several teams are not participating in sports (teams shut down temporarily due to COVID). Mr. Rodgers stated he is not in favor of playing teams outside the Patriot League. Mr. Rodgers shared that athletes with COVID symptoms or that are close contacts are referred to the district's lead nurse.

Mr. Szymaniak discussed pooled testing in response to Governor Baker's announcement on January 8 that weekly COVID-19 pooled testing will be available within the next month to schools. Pooled testing involves mixing several test samples together in a "batch" or "pool," and then testing the pooled sample with a PCR test for detection of SARS-CoV-2. If a pooled test result is negative, then all individuals within that pool are presumed negative and may continue to remain in school. If a pooled test result is positive, then everyone in the pool is given an individual diagnostic antigen test. Once positive individuals are identified, they must follow isolation guidance. Students, teachers, and staff that were close contacts of the positive case must quarantine according to current requirements. The district is investigating the possibility of pooled testing but the process may be too

expensive and cumbersome for the district's medical staff. It is likely Whitman-Hanson will not move forward with pooled testing due to these concerns. The Superintendent reported he will complete the survey from the state. The Superintendent added he is in contact with the company Whitman Fire uses to purchase rapid COVID tests that will be available to staff, as needed. This process may reduce the number of staff requiring quarantine. ESSER and CARES Act funds may cover some of the costs of the test kits. The Committee discussed the cost of implementing pooled testing. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will assume the cost of the first six weeks of pooled testing (materials) only, not staff to administer the tests. After that period of time, school districts are responsible for the cost of all materials/test kits. It was reported the cost to implement pooled testing may be close to \$20,000 and not affordable for many school districts. After continued discussion, the Superintendent suggested sending a letter to DESE Commissioner Riley, Governor Baker and the MA Department of Health, on behalf of the Committee, regarding the cost of COVID-19 pooled testing and advocate for equal access for the cost of testing in all districts beyond the initial six-week test expenses.

Mr. Szymaniak discussed a rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. He reported the vaccine may be available in February and March for Whitman-Hanson staff. The Superintendent is working with both Fire Chiefs and Boards of Health on this initiative.

Mr. Szymaniak reported that the based on the data submitted to DESE in November for Student Learning Time (SLT), the district received preliminary clearance and met the SLT standards of hybrid learning was 36 hours of synchronous learning over two weeks. The Superintendent read a portion of the communication notification from DESE aloud. The DESE SLT survey was for four grade levels (Grades 1, 4, 7 and 10). Mr. Szymaniak noted that the district is responsible for ensuring that SLT requirements are met across all grades served for the appropriate instructional model. After a review of all grade SLT's to meet 35 hours of live instruction over two academic weeks, the district will need to adjust the elementary Wednesday schedule to add an additional hour of "live" instruction to meet the standard. In addition, at the middle schools, grades 6-8, the district has proposed two options to either live stream or add 1.5 hours of "live" instruction on remote Wednesdays to meet the standard. These options are currently being discussed with WHEA. Should the middle schools move to live stream, the district has earmarked laptops for middle school staff. Mr. Ferro noted that Chromebooks are not ideal for live stream instruction. Mr. Ferro reported on the delivery schedule of 390 laptops and process for inventorying, tagging and configuring the new laptops for staff use in school and remotely.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he sent a recent communication to staff about the prospect of students return to in-person learning in early spring around April 1. The Superintendent reported he is working on a plan for the return of students to school this academic school year, as long as it is done safely. The Superintendent cited inconsistencies in guidance from DESE in changing and modifying requirements during the pandemic. The Superintendent reiterated his concerns regarding the logistics of bringing back all students for in-person learning. There is also a maintenance aspect of students returning in terms of moving furniture back into the classrooms and reconfiguring rooms for social distancing. Other logistical concerns include maintaining social distancing practices of 6 feet, the current restrictions limiting student transportation and the coordination of offering the COVID vaccine to all staff as soon as possible. There was continued discussion on creating a well thought-out and safe plan for re-entry. The Superintendent noted that April is not a confirmed re-entry date at this time.

Strategic Plan

The Superintendent presented the final 2020-2023 Strategic Plan for approval. Mr. Szymaniak reported the latest revisions reflect the addition of "outcomes" for FY2021. Mr. Szymaniak indicated the document is subject to change/updates based upon the students return to in-person learning. Mr. Ferro noted the Strategic Plan was developed with the leadership team on March 11, 2020 and updates since that time represent realistic and tangible outcomes for FY2021. Changes may be made in subsequent years of the plan, as needed. Mr. Ferro noted the Strategic Plan is a three-year plan with flexibility whether the calendar year or school year ending in 2023.

The Committee discussed the importance of a strategic plan document in terms of a roadmap where the district is going and that is in alignment with the school district budget. It was noted that tuition-free universal full day kindergarten was not listed as an outcome any longer. Mr. Ferro noted that previous attempts to implement

universal full day kindergarten have been unsuccessful and unlikely to happen during the COVID pandemic. The previously drafted Strategic Plan listed outcomes for the entire three-year plan which included universal full day kindergarten. The outcomes listed in the presented Plan are just for FY2021. The Committee discussed tuition-free universal full day kindergarten as an outcome that may not be a tangible option at this time; however, is still in the Plan as a strategic initiative. Mr. Ferro will amend the Plan to include universal full day kindergarten under the section where it was inadvertently omitted under strategic initiatives. Ms. Byers suggested future continued discussion regarding full day kindergarten as an initiative going forward.

VOTE: Ms. Byers motioned; Mr. Jones seconded; voted by roll call to amend the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan to include Universal Full Day Kindergarten under Strategic Objectives section 2.4, as discussed.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to adopt the 2020-2023 WHRSD Strategic Plan, as amended.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Curriculum Assessment

Mr. Ferro presented the iReady ELA and math curriculum diagnostic report per the Committee's request for more detailed information. Mr. Ferro indicated the diagnostic is in the middle of its' second testing window which ends on January 15. The district's goal is to complete an internal comparison of how students performed in the initial assessment and then at the midpoint. To preserve the integrity of staff and the students test results for remediation purposes, detailed data may be limited to administration. Mr. Ferro will report out to the Committee at that time. Mr. Ferro reported on MCAS testing windows released by DESE. Mr. Szymaniak reported the high school is developing a schedule based on the DESE assessment schedule.

North River Collaborative Report

The Superintendent provided a copy of the FY2020 North River Collaborative Report to the Committee.

Budget Report/Discussion

Mr. Tuffy presented the YTD December encumbrances and revenue reports. Expenses continue on same trend as previously discussed. Mr. Tuffy reported he will be presenting line item transfers for the Committee's approval before the current school year ends. Mr. Tuffy reported the state has provided final FY2021 and confirmed Chapter 70 funding and transportation aide will be less than anticipated. Interest earnings are also less this year. There is also good news to report as those deficits may be supplemented with ESSER funds. In addition, the

CARES act deadline has been extended through next December. To date, Whitman-Hanson has submitted \$866,000 in reimbursements through Plymouth County. Mr. Tuffy spoke to the earmarked funding initiated by Senator Brady and Representative Cutler this year which will now come to fruition. The district has the rest of this year to spend those earmarked funds.

Annual Budget Presentation and Public Hearing February 24, 2021

Mr. Szymaniak reported the annual public hearing and budget presentation meeting next month will focus on projected student regression and insuring services for students are implemented. The Superintendent would prefer an in-person presentation and public hearing meeting; however, due to current COVID restrictions, attendance is limited to 25 people.

Recent events in Washington D.C.

The Superintendent referred to the recent incident at U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C. on January 6 when protestors were unlawfully able to gain entrance the Capitol building. Based on recommendations from the president of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), Wendy Price, and Whitman-Hanson employee, the school district prepared information to share with students about violence, helped students with questions and provided talking points to staff.

The following statement was introduced by Mr. Scriven in response to recent historic events at the U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C.

“I think it is particularly important for our committee to address this as we are a democratically elected group charged with overseeing public education in our community. As we are all aware, public education is one of the fundamental institutions of our democratic society which requires factual information to function effectively. Given that misinformation has been employed in a violent attempt to undermine our democratic process, I believe it is our responsibility to ensure our district’s response is and has been factual and clear. I’d like to remind our committee of our district’s mission statement. “The Whitman Hanson Regional School District is committed to providing each student with a high-quality education that promotes student success and responsible citizenship.” A high-quality education necessitates factual information. Responsible citizenship necessitates an understanding of and a commitment to facts, our country and our democratic process (which includes our 3 equal branches of government). We are living in a time in our country where our citizens and even our elected officials are fearful for themselves and their families if they tell the truth. I believe we ought to recognize this and communicate to our dedicated staff of educators that we support their efforts to be factual in their response to the violent attacks on our democracy at the United States Capital building last Wednesday. We have an opportunity to demonstrate a core value of our strategic plan to act as an example to our students and staff in their efforts to engage in a high-quality education and responsible citizenship. I would like to make a motion for our committee to condemn any persons who are found to be involved in the seditious and treasonous actions against our democracy leading up to and on that fateful day last Wednesday, January 6th 2021.”

VOTE: Mr. Scriven motioned; Ms. Kniffen seconded; voted by roll call to condemn any persons who are found to be involved in the seditious and treasonous actions against our democracy leading up to and on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., as discussed.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

The Committee discussed students receiving support about challenging current issues both at home and at school. Supporting teachers through professional development was discussed. Mr. Ferro reported one of the goals in the

ExSel staff professional development is equity, inclusion and diversity. Follow up with having Dr. Kalise Wornum present to staff for cultural proficiency and implicit bias was addressed and the district is not having Dr. Wornum present due to scheduling conflicts and cost. Staff will utilize the built-in professional development platform with Simple K12 on the upcoming staff professional development day on February 3. Simple K12 also tracks the staff professional development history.

The Superintendent briefly spoke to understanding the role of the School Committee and asked that members request information through the Chair. Also, if planning to attend a school-based meeting, to inform the principal if they will be in attending, as a courtesy. It was noted the Committee recently participated in a workshop with MASC on their roles and responsibilities.

The Committee scheduled an executive session meeting for January 20 at 6:00 p.m. The executive session will be to discuss the Whitman water invoice and the Superintendent's contract.

Unfinished Business

Hanson Budget Liaison

The Superintendent reported Kevin Sullivan was appointed as the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District budget liaison by the Hanson Board of Selectmen.

New Business

Donations and Gift Acceptance

Chromebook Donations

The school district received two Chromebook donations over the last week. Mr. Justin Evans of Whitman and Mr. Fred Small of Whitman both donated an HP Chromebook to the district.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to accept the donation of two Chromebooks; donated by Fred Small and Justin Evans.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Stop & Shop Donation

Chair Hayes read an email from Emilie Devito, Coordinator Charitable Giving for the Whitman Stop & Shop. Ms. Devito notified the school district that Stop & Shop would like to donate \$1,000 in Stop & Shop gift cards to the school district to assist in efforts to support students during these difficult times, as part of Stop & Shop's Grand Re-Opening of the Whitman store on January 15.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to accept the donation of \$1,000 in gift cards for needy families from the Stop & Shop Supermarket Company in Whitman, MA.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

There was a brief discussion around providing the gift cards to the food pantries rather than directly to families; however, school administration is knowledgeable on families in need and will pass the gift cards on to families directly.

Hanson Rod & Gun Club Donation

The Hanson Rod & Gun Club donated \$5,000 in order to provide supplemental financial support to families in the school district that are in need.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to accept the donation of \$5,000 from the Hanson Rod & Gun Club in Hanson, MA to financially support families in need.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Forth - Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Substitute Pay Rates

The Superintendent presented a proposal to increase daily substitute pay rates based on conversations since last year with regard to low pay and maintaining a healthy substitute base with qualified candidates. Rate comparisons with other school district substitute rates were also analyzed. It was noted that the current daily substitute rates do not meet the current state minimum wage of \$13.50.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted by roll call to increase daily substitute pay rates for daily substitute teachers and paraprofessionals as follows: \$100 per day for non-licensed daily substitute teachers; \$110 per day for licensed daily substitute teachers; and \$81 per day (\$13.50 per hour) for daily substitute paraprofessionals, as presented.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Municipal Representative Role – Collective Bargaining

The Superintendent will contact the towns regarding the status of the Municipal Representative for Collective Bargaining to determine if any changes may be necessary to the currently appointed representative, Lisa Green.

Subcommittee Reports

Whitman Middle School Building Committee

Mr. Small reported enrollment projections between the district and MSBA projections differed. Mr. Ferro reported he has contacted the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) for additional enrollment projection data for the town of Whitman, to be factored into projection data. The Committee discussed the data

points and methodology used by MSBA for enrollment projections. MSBA's student enrollment forecast for a grade 5-8 middle school was 600. Due to the recent and current residential construction in the town of Whitman, the district projections were relatively higher. Administration is reviewing additional data and working with MSBA to determine an agreeable enrollment projection for the middle school project.

Pilgrim Area Collaborative Report

Mr. Bois reported the next meeting is scheduled for February 4, 2021.

Facilities Subcommittee

There was nothing new to report.

Policy Subcommittee

Ms. Byers reported the next meeting is scheduled for January 25 at 4:30 p.m.

Insurance Subcommittee

There was nothing new to report.

Negotiations Subcommittee

Mr. Jones anticipates a meeting will be scheduled soon.

Regional Agreement Subcommittee

There was nothing new to report.

Adjournment:

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – 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 January 13, 2021
- Meeting minutes of December 16, 2020
- Strategic Plan 2020-2023
- North River Collaborative FY2020 Annual Report
- iReady curriculum diagnostic report
- YTD Budget Expenditures and Revenue reports
- CARES Fund memo
- Stop & Shop donation email from Emilie Devito
- Donation letter to Hanson Rod and Gun Club
- Substitute pay rate proposal