

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Special Meeting – June 3, 2020

A Special Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, June 3, 2020, at 12:00 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present and participating remotely were:

Jeanne Downs, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Nate Buffum
Kim Reichelt
Kathie Steinberg

Also participating remotely:

Arthur Unobskey
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Richard Whitehead
Director of Student Services

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Also:

Lea Anderson, Board of Selectmen

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 12:03 p.m. The meeting was recorded by WayCAM and was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and according to the revised open meeting law that allows remote participation. A roll call was taken:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Jeanne thanked the 33 Middle School staff volunteers who delivered gift bags and lawn signs to every 8th graders' home this past weekend.

Ellen clarified that for those people who wanted to make a public comment about the WHS GPA, they should do so at this time, as the School Committee is not scheduled during this meeting to discuss the matter. Kim asked if it could be raised under "Matters not Anticipated by the Chair," given the public's response.

1. Comments & Written Statements from the Public:

Mark Foreman of Three Ponds Road, Wayland is a parent of a junior and 8th grader, adding that his 8th grader enjoyed the package that was delivered to their home on Saturday morning. Mr. Foreman commented on the GPA decision and the college admission process in terms of early college recruiting, particularly for his high school junior. He urged that the juniors have the choice to include their junior grades in the GPA, adding the rationale behind his request and that colleges will have received an imperfect evaluation criteria. He also noted that peer town schools have a more student-friendly GPA calculation methodology for this year; thus, the juniors will be at a disadvantage in the admissions process. Mr. Foreman asked that students and families make the decision in this regard.

Jeanne read a public comment from Ilana and James Nunn regarding the WHS GPA proposal and who are parents of sophomore and junior students. To discard the grades would be demotivating for the students, particularly those who have worked so hard this year both in and out of school. They referred to the online SAT process as being less than satisfactory and which puts the students at another disadvantage. Mr. and Mrs. Nunn are wondering why other districts have considered the State's guidance in this regard and why Wayland High School has not which, in their opinion, is penalizing

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the students and affecting their morale. They believe that the students should be given a choice and asked for a reconsideration.

Jeanne read a public comment from Jim Medeiros regarding the WHS GPA proposal. He asked that the discussion be reopened and that the School Committee provide the parents and students to provide input in this regard. Mr. Medeiros noted that Lexington's and Weston's approach included State guidelines and that students typically do better in the second half of the year. By not including grades in this year's GPA, it could affect the National Honor Society and college merit scholarships and puts Wayland's students at a disadvantage.

Jeanne read a public comment from Hey-Sung Han regarding the WHS GPA proposal. She noted that other towns have made decisions in this regard according to the State's guidelines, adding that Wayland seems to be the only district taking the approach not to include second semester grades in the GPA. As a tutor of many WHS students, many students have worked hard to improve on their GPA and, although lesser grades don't count negatively, stronger grades are being disregarded. Ms. Han asked that Wayland adopt the same policy and Lexington and Weston, as students are at a disadvantage from those in other districts and are not being acknowledged for their hard work and efforts, particularly for their mid-year average. She asked that this decision be reconsidered.

Jeanne read a public comment from Jill Neuman regarding the WHS GPA proposal. Although she has supported most decisions over the past fourteen years, she is disappointed in the lack of transparency and communication during this process, as well as the lack of parental input and the consideration of DESE guidance. In her opinion, the decision not to include second semester grades in the GPA does not take into account what is equitable for all students, adding that Wayland should align with the decisions of surrounding towns. Ms. Neuman asked the School Committee to reconsider this decision.

Jeanne read a public comment from Gina Dallin about the GPA proposal. She is the mother of a sophomore and, in her opinion, the School Committee has not chosen to represent Wayland students wisely, as students have worked hard and their grades are not being counted and is going against Wayland's high standards. Parents were not included and DESE's recommendations were not taken into consideration, unlike other towns who are taking an approach that works for all students.

Jeanne read a public comment from Orla Daunt about her concerns regarding the GPA decision for this school year. This decision not to include grades in the GPA will be de-motivating for students, including her child, and is not in line with DESE's guidance or other surrounding towns. Ms. Daunt asked the School Committee to reconsider and review the decisions that Weston, Wellesley and Lexington reached on behalf of their students.

Trystan O'Leary, 91 Claypit Hill Road, asked that the GPA proposal and other related documents be put on the website. She asked if the School Committee had DESE's guidance available when the Committee reached its decision.

Jeanne responded that the School Committee did not have the actual document from DESE, but the information was included in the WHS presentation in terms of the grading flexibility, having the students' best interests in mind, and decisions made by other districts.

Kim announced that she had other public comments to read, one being from Trystan O'Leary, which she won't read given she called. Kim does not feel that the Committee had the guidance and, although there were many links in the document, the link with DESE information was not included. If she had known about DESE's guidance, her approach may have been different. Ellen agreed with Kim.

Jeff Sklar, Brooks Road, noted that he did not hear or see any mention of DESE's recommendation during the two School Committee meetings in which the Committee discussed the GPA proposal. He said a statement was made by Ms. Mizoguchi that half of the third quarter had gone by; however, Mr. Sklar said that two-thirds of the third quarter had gone by and, from a math perspective, the quarter should have been "rounded" up to include the third quarter. He said there are other options available, given that students tend to do better in the second half of the year. He cited some issues surrounding the mid-term exams and students' grades which, he believes, is another reason to include Q3 grades. Mr. Sklar encouraged the School Committee to look at both sides of this issue and to inform the community.

Kim read a statement from Shari and Kevin Pletta of 102 Glezen Lane. As parents of a WHS junior, they are concerned and disappointed about the decision to not count the 2019-2020 grades as part of students' GPA, as there has been a disservice to the juniors and that the decision was made based on incomplete data. Given that other peer districts have

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taken a different approach, they are concerned about the equity for all students and asked the School Committee to consider all feedback from families, reconsider its decision, and to give juniors the option of including their first semester grades in the GPAs.

Kim read another statement from Wayland resident Bill Cossart. Mr. Cossart urged the School Committee to change its decision not to include this year's grades in the students' GPAs. This decision differs from peer towns who offered different solutions or choices which puts the juniors in a better light, adding that Wayland's decision was based on last year's junior class performance. He noted that for those seniors who apply for early decision, their transcript will be judged on the first three years, thus, removing one-third of their performance and shifting to pass/fail. Mr. Cossart asked that the future WHS graduates be placed on a level playing field and not to put the colleges in a position that would shift to a special interpretation of transcripts.

Kim Reichelt made the following public comment as a Wayland resident and a School Committee member. Thirteen families have reached out the School Committee over the past two days. During the process to review the GPA proposal and upon voting, she did not consider DESE's recommendation, the potential impact on athletic scholarships and the National Honor Society, nor did she know about Weston's, Needham's, and Dover's approach regarding this issue although a list of towns were provided. To not include a junior GPA, would weigh the grades down. While many colleges recalculate GPA's, there are some that do not. Given that the teachers and administrators were unanimous in this decision, this could have swayed her decision and noted that the School Committee's vote was unanimous as well, even though she and Ellen expressed concerns. Kim believes the School Committee should look further into this decision. Kim apologized that she did not do her job well enough and that she voted in favor of the proposal. Since then, her reservations have become stronger and requested that this topic is reopened and discussed now or in "Matters not Anticipated."

Jeanne Downs made the following public comment. The decision by the School Committee regarding the GPA proposal was picked up by the media before it could be communicated by the district. Jeanne apologized to the families, adding that a communication should have been sent sooner rather than later, as the conversation could have had a more productive outcome.

Ellen Grieco made the following public comment and noted that she agreed with much of what Kim Reichelt said and views this issue as an evolving process. There were some elements that she did not think about at the time, given that the district is operating in real time and are dealing with issues that have never come up before. Ellen was swayed by the unanimous opinion of the high school administration and department heads, and believes the School Committee should discuss this issue again, given that the input and points made from parents were not a part of the previous discussions. This decision impacts the junior class disproportionately, every child at the high school as well as every family in the Wayland Public Schools. People move to Wayland to access a high-quality high school education and a high-quality social emotional learning education.

Edna Vasilovsky supports the various comments made previously and felt somewhat blindsided by the decision. She commented that the process was not collaborative or transparent and will have a significant impact on the students. Ms. Vasilovsky also supports the idea of letting families choose what is best for them given the current situation. In addition, she supported Mr. Sklar's comments about grading, particularly for the math students, and noted that her son's mid-year exam grade was not in line with his quarter grades which he was not happy about.

Nate Buffum commented that there is always a willingness to continue to have discussions, particularly when situations evolve. If the School Committee feels the need for further discussion, he feels that the high school leadership should be involved and suggested that this matter be postponed until next week.

The School Committee discussed this process and the members agreed to invite the high school leadership to participate in another discussion on June 10th to review the reactions to the decision and suggested changes, if any, to the proposal.

Kathie Steinberg commented that the School Committee is making several decisions in short time spans with limited information and changing guidance, particularly as it relates to reopening in September. At the time of the GPA presentation, most districts had not made a final decision. She suggested that it may become necessary for the Committee to figure out how it will navigate its need to make decisions moving forward and at the same consider much of the available information.

Jackie Johnson, Plain Road, commented that there was significant emotion and reasonable response by the student body regarding the GPA decision. Given that the School Committee did not have DESE's guidance, it was limited given the lack

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of information at the time and there is reason for the School Committee to reconsider its decision based on the vital information available now. Ms. Johnson feels that this decision to take away two-thirds of the third quarter has devastated the students and is not beneficial to the students' wellbeing.

Robin Sklar, Brooks Road, is pleased that this decision will be revisited. However, given all of the parent/public comments, she is dismayed that the School Committee is not willing to change its decision even when, in her opinion, the decision was wrong for many reasons. Ms. Sklar commented that the decision about the return of math tests should probably be righted as well. The Committee must look out for the benefit of the students and families, not just the administration.

Finally, Jeanne commented that she takes issue with comments that information was kept from the School Committee purposely or that the easy way out was taken. Every person who works in this district has the best interest of the kids in mind, and the GPA decision was not made lightly.

2. Discuss COVID-19 Response:

- Presentation of Progress Report on Fall Learning Plan:

Arthur thanked Parry and Susan and all those who are participating in the Teaching & Learning Group and the Operations Group. This presentation is an update and a more detailed framework for further planning will be presented on June 17th.

The objective of the working groups is to collaborate with teachers, administrators, town officials and the community to develop a framework for September that balances health and safety with the best possible educational experience for students both in-person and remotely. The Commissioner of Education communicated that much of what he will provide in mid-June will possibly be classified as a mandate. There is a possibility, although nothing is definite, that his recommendation could be a hybrid model whereas half of the students would be in the building one week while the other half is at home doing remote learning and then it would rotate the second week.

Parry thanked those with whom he is working in this group and updated the School Committee on the status of the work done by the Teaching and Learning Group. The priorities that guide the group's work are 1) maximizing student academic engagement and progress, 2) social-emotional engagement and support, and 3) health and safety of all students and staff. In addition, equity and access in terms of devices, Internet connections, and compromised health conditions are being considered. Decisions must also be made depending on operational and financial viability. Parry reviewed the questions that have been answered by the group and sorted in different tiers, such as how many students are allowed in the buildings at one time, how to support struggling students, staff childcare issues, and what will remote instruction look like in the fall. As a member of this group, Ellen complimented Parry for his role and work in this regard.

Susan thanked the members of the Operations Group who are working to develop a safe and operational plan, as well as a financially viable plan to support all students. The responses to the categorized questions will rely upon Federal and State guidelines, industry best practices, experiences and successes of other school districts, and the expertise of the professionals and their networks on this team. Those categories are health and safety, facilities, movement to and from buildings, and movement throughout the day in these buildings. The School Committee and Town officials will make the final decision based on the information available and recommendations presented by the Operations Group. As a member, Kathie thanked Susan for her guidance in this thoughtful process. Kathie raised the issue of bus transportation in terms of the process. This could be addressed in a joint meeting with the Teaching and Learning Group and Parry added that contractual obligations will also be a consideration.

Based on input from parents regarding more synchronous learning and the grading process, Jeanne asked that these topics are considered in the fall planning. Ellen also requested that given the different learning process since the shutdown, that the delivery of curriculum is tracked in terms of what was delivered vs. what was not delivered. Kim suggested that students be given the opportunity to work on some things during the summer. Kathie expressed her appreciation for the teachers' efforts and commitment during this difficult time, including what will be asked of them in the fall as noted by Ellen. Kathie added that whatever model is decided upon, it has to be sustainable for the parents, students, and teachers.

Susan responded to the questions about the State guidance that was provided regarding summer programs and camps.

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- Phase Two Remote Learning:
 - *Update of Implementation:* This topic was addressed in the previous discussions.
 - *Discussion of Current and Future Feedback Process:*
 Arthur updated the School Committee regarding the surveys sent to teachers and parents.
- Discussion of Full Day Kindergarten for Fall:
 Many parents have asked for time in making a decision to commit to Full-Day Kindergarten until such time that a plan for reopening has been reached. Families will know their school assignment by the end of this week, but will be given more time to consider their commitment to Full-Day Kindergarten.
- Next Steps: This topic was addressed in previous discussions.

3. **Financial Matters:**

- Loker Roof Update:
 The article to fund the Loker roof will be voted at the Annual Town Meeting which will most likely be in the fall; thus, the project will not take place this summer but in the summer of 2021. In order to move forward with the project, it must pass at the voting polls next Tuesday which will provide the exempt debt funding. It is believed that the funding by the MSBA will still be available despite the delay of the vote. A discussion ensued regarding messaging to the public.

4. **Discussion of Superintendent Search Process:**

Jeanne updated the School Committee on its most recent search process in 2016 facilitated by NESDEC. A discussion following regarding the timeline moving forward. Jeanne will reach out to NESDEC, MASC, Future Management Systems, Ray & Associates, and Hazard, Young, Altea & Associates.

5. **Consent Agenda:**

- Approval of Minutes: May 20, 2020

Upon a motion duly made by Kathie Steinberg, seconded by Nate Buffum, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the minutes of May 20, 2020 on the Consent Agenda. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

6. **Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

Kim raised the idea of having a weekly virtual gathering to provide an avenue for the public to be heard on many different topics. It would be called “Coffee with Kim.” She also suggested that the School Committee develop a Facebook page on which they can provide information for the community. A discussion ensued in this regard. It was confirmed that information regarding School Committee meetings is posted on All Schools News, the WPS website, and the Town website. This topic will be added to a future agenda.

7. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 1:42 p.m. for the purposes of a) discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Wayland Teachers Association (WTA), as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; and b) approving the following Executive Session Minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 22: May 6, 2020 and May 20, 2020. The School Committee will not come back into open session, but will adjourn in Executive Session. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	

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Nate Buffum	X
Kim Reichelt	X
Kathie Steinberg	X

The School Committee will be joined by Arthur Unobskey, Superintendent of Schools, Parry Graham, Assistant Superintendent, and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session.

8. Adjournment from Executive Session:

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 2:09 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Special Session Minutes of May 20, 2020
3. Executive Session Motion