

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – November 15, 2023

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 6:00 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building

Present:

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair
Ellen Grieco
Erin Mueller
Christina Rodrigo

Also present:

David Fleishman
Acting Superintendent

Betsy Gavron
Interim Assistant Superintendent

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Debbie Dixson
Interim Director of Student Services

1. **Welcome & Call to Order:**

Chair Erin Gibbons called the meeting to order at 6:13 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

2. **Public Comment:**

Jackie Adelson, 5 Saddle Lane, commented that the safety of all children in Wayland, particularly Jewish children, is very important at this time as they do not feel safe, heard or understood. Given the antisemitic events in the last month and two in just the last few days, she feels that antisemitism is being allowed in the community, as we must be proactive, vocal, stand against hate, and educate the children about Jewish history. Understanding that it will take additional resources, Ms. Adelson asked how the community can support the schools in this endeavor. She asked several questions around funding for trainings, programs, and guest speakers so teachers, students and the parent community can be better informed about antisemitism and Jewish history.

Allison Kates, 32 Claypit Hill Road, referred to the antisemitic events in Wayland within the past few days as an attack on her, her religion, culture, heritage, and her family. Ms. Kates referred to the graffiti and anti-racist events of last year and how quickly action was taken to hold student assemblies and protests within town because the message was that no matter our skin color, we care about each other. As an educator, she is disappointed about the lack of teaching and assemblies in the schools to help students understand the history as well as understanding the impact this all has on Jewish families. The blatant acts of hate must not be tolerated and something needs to be done.

Jonathan Smith, 10 Old Farm Circle, recited an appropriate quote from James Baldwin and commented that Wayland is not in a good place right now. Wayland has seen many hateful acts in the past two years, however, the current acts of hate and antisemitism feels different. He noted that it is important to call these recent events what they are – Antisemitism Jewish Hate, as words matter. Mr. Smith called for action, not just words, from the Central Office and school administrators. The safety of all students, faculty and staff must be a priority.

Ann Brensley, 28 Barney Hill Road, is a current Select Board member but she spoke on behalf of herself and another Select Board member, Adam Gutbezahl based on his personal position. As parents and leaders in the community, she stressed that our role is to control what we can control, shield our children from what we can, teach them how to prevent and react to hateful acts, empathize to those harmed, embrace differences, and teach them to be accountable when they make mistakes. Life in Wayland has gone unchanged for almost a year since the racially charged graffiti incident but it is now in a similar place, and not enough has been done. Ms. Brensley asked the School Committee to conduct a school focused equity audit and to ask for the funds to be put aside for this effort. Finally, she urged everyone to demand action from the School Committee, even if outcomes are not perfect.

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Jake Ryan is a 7th grader at Wayland Middle School. He commented that recently there have been several antisemitic hate crimes in this community and in the middle school. This makes him and other Jewish people in town feel unsafe and he and others in the community are concerned about what could happen if this continues. Jake quoted Ellie Wisel, a Holocaust survivor, author and a Nobel Peace Prize winner who said, “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” Jake believes that the schools have not done enough to educate the students, particularly about the Holocaust, as education is one way to stop history from repeating itself.

Ava, also a 7th grader, expressed her feelings about what has happened in the last month around antisemitism, particularly at the middle school. Ava believes that there should be more discussion, with a possible solution in mind, about Jewish history and antisemitic symbols and gestures. Ava noted that racism is bad but something was done a year ago to address racism.

Johanna Walden, 10 Richfield Road, is taking the recent antisemitic events in Wayland very personal. She wants to see much more action taken against all hateful acts going forward and in the long term. There should be Pre-K to Grade 12 education embracing everyone’s culture and identities. Everyone should be able to feel safe and can support each other in times like these. Ms. Walden also supports and encourages in participating in the school equity audit.

Jeanne thanked the students for their courage in addressing this issue.

3. **Acting Superintendent Update:**

3.1 *Policy Review: Responding to Incidents of Bias or Discrimination (out of order):*

David Fleishman informed the School Committee he would like to update Policy AC Nondiscrimination to include protocols, how we communicate, and how we educate after incidents of bias, racism, and antisemitism. He noted that it is time to shift and improve in the long term, and an updated policy will address many issues and concerns in the community, including students’ safety. David added there are affinity groups at the secondary schools in which students and staff can support each other. The administrative leadership team will bring a draft plan to the School Committee at a future meeting.

As School Committee representatives to the Human Rights, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Committee (HRDEIC), Ellen and Erin Mueller agreed with public comments that it is time for action, given the number of hateful acts in the town and in the schools and will assist in any way possible to address all concerns. And, as the Policy Subcommittee, Ellen and Erin M. will also assist in the policy update. Christina added that it is time to be proactive and to find a way to educate the students about kindness, acceptance, and belonging. A discussion ensued and consensus was that the district must be more proactive, not just reactive. It was noted that the School Committee had past discussions with the town about participating in the equity audit. The School Committee asked the public for information and ideas to move forward.

In terms of resources and programming, David recommended Jewish Family Services (JFS) of MetroWest as a great resource and one of their programs is the Active Bystander Program but available at a cost. Another outside program is Tribe Talk. He noted that Wayland educators are committed to this work, adding that WPSF gave a grant to The Children’s Way to help in this effort.

3.2 *Human Resources Staffing Update:*

David Fleishman provided an update about the Human Resources Department and staffing. The current Human Resources Manager Leslie Schofield is retiring at the end of November and Sharon Ellis, Human Resources Administrator will replace her and will take on higher legal human resources tasks. A human resources administrative assistant will work alongside Ms. Ellis. A School Committee member asked that the new HR administrator review the HR policies. Suzanne Kenney, the current HR consultant, will be on call in an as-needed basis capacity.

Ellen left the meeting at 6:55 p.m.; returned at 7:02.

3.3 *MCAS Update:*

Betsy Gavron presented the history of MCAS over the past few years. MCAS began in 1998 and continued for about 17 years, but then went to an online version. Then there was a change when the State shifted to PARC for two years, after which PARC and MCAS tests were combined. There were full tests in 2019 in ELA, Math and Science; Betsy explained. In 2020, the test was not administered due to Covid, in 2021 the testing schedule changed as well as the number of students who participated for various reasons. For the last two years, MCAS has returned to its original

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version since pre-Covid. MCAS is an untimed test, but it is a very scripted test.

The MCAS overview included data from last spring, such as key points from ELA, Math and Science assessments around proficiency and growth and subgroup performance. There will be continuing curricular considerations and implications that include the implementations of multiple interventions to address learning gaps, and realizing the importance of analyzing multiple data sources to inform instructional decisions.

The Wayland Public Schools have met all benchmarks and remains a Level 1 District. Statewide, the early elementary writing scores remain low and Wayland scores reflects this pattern. English Language Arts, Math and Science performances have rebounded since 2019. For instance, ELA scores for grade 10 are higher than pre-pandemic, and math scores have increased across all grades from 2021. However, performance and growth disparities continue for particular subgroups.

Meeting or exceeding expectations compared Wayland students to state-wide data for ELA, Math, and Science. Betsy described the percentages, noting that most data is increasing. Presented a long view from 2017 to 2023 of ELA performance and math performance over time and how scores are trending. There are significant differences/gaps in performances by race, Grades 3-8 and Grade 10. Also looked at how students with IEP's are performing. Overall ELA student growth percentage (SGP) is analyzed as well from one year to the next over a period of three different years; Betsy explained the data.

Wayland's next steps are to analyze test items with teacher teams, implement Empowering Writers and Bridges, continue culturally responsive teaching training, and progress monitoring and tiered support (SST) (academic and social emotional). In 2024, DESE is piloting an 8th grade civics test pilot next spring, as well as piloting a new version of the science for 5th and 8th grades to assess deeper learning via performance tasks focused on real life scenarios. Wayland is not a pilot district. A discussion ensued about students with disabilities and students of color performing below the state average. It was noted that the gap has not closed much over the years, and MCAS scores are only one measure. It takes about three years to assess the impact of a new program, such as the introduction of Bridges Math this year. In terms of students with disabilities, not only will the growth percentile be reviewed but there will be consideration around how they approach the test, as some will not participate. A discussion followed the presentation.

4. Administrative Matters:

4.1 Discussion and Possible Vote to Appoint Ben Downs as WHS Assistant Swim & Dive Coach as Filed by the Superintendent:

Jeanne Downs stepped out of the meeting; she returned after the vote was taken.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to appoint Ben Downs as the Wayland High School assistant swim and dive coach.

4.2 Results of the Committee's Review of Previously Released, with Redactions, Executive Session Minutes from January 2023 through May 2023 to Confirm Continued Non-Disclosure of Said Redactions, exclusive of the following Executive Session Minutes, pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, §22(g)(1): March 15, 2023 and May 10, 2023 which have been re-released with Revised Redactions:

The Chair announced the Committee's review of previously released executive session minutes with redactions from January 2023 through May 2023 to confirm continued non-disclosure of said redactions and exclusive of the following executive session minutes, March 15, 2023 and May 10, 2023, which have been re-released with revised redactions and pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, s.22(g)(1).

Erin Gibbons noted that this is required to be announced at SC meetings according to the open meeting law.

4.3 Announcement of Release with Redactions the Following Executive Session Minutes: June 7, 2023:

The Chair also announced the release of the June 7, 2023 minutes with redactions.

4.4 Announcement of Release of Previously Redacted Content of the Following Executive Session Minutes: May 24, 2023:

Lastly, the Chair announced the release of previously redacted content of the May 24, 2023 executive session minutes.

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4.5 *Review of the Division of Open Government's November 3, 2023 Determination regarding George Harris's June 6, 2023 Open Meeting Law Complaint:*

This OML complaint was originally filed on April 3, 2023 to which the School Committee responded on April 27, 2023. Jeanne referred to page three of the determination, adding that all of the minutes relative to this complaint have been appropriately reviewed and released (April 27, 2015, August 21, 2017, and December 18, 2020 to March 5, 2023).

A discussion ensued about possible overlap of the determination with other open complaints. The School Committee reviewed the draft response to be sent to the Attorney General certifying the review and appropriate release of the relative minutes. Jeanne Downs and Erin Gibbons will look at possible language to be added that references open complaints by Mr. Harris which address the same issue.

Upon a motion duly made by Christina Rodrigo, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to delegate Erin Gibbons and Jeanne Downs to work on the certification and send it to the Attorney General.

5. **Financial Matters:**

Susan Bottan reviewed the following reports with the School Committee.

5.1 *DESE Report Summary:*

The DESE report summary is required every year from each district which summarizes and details all revenue and expenditures made by the School Department or for the School Department. Susan highlighted the last three years. The report identifies trends and highlights the shifts and changes. Revenue has grown by about 5% each year, but closer to 14% over the past two years due to Medicaid reimbursement; Susan explained how the revenue is generated through the Medicaid reimbursement which ultimately goes to free cash. Revenue also increased through private grants and fees; however, Federal and state grants are decreasing. Expenditures have increased each year, particularly health care expenses and including the recent turf field project. A discussion ensued about the increases and decreases related to Medicaid reimbursements.

5.2 *FY23 End-of-Year Report:*

The district met all financial obligations year end in the amount of \$47,164,770 and closed with a balance of \$326. As requested by the Finance Committee, Susan Bottan prepared a summary of the special education out-of-district costs for tuition and transportation, including the total costs and each source of funding. A discussion ensued for purposes of clarification of the costs, as well a discussion in terms of placements for schools that are not DESE approved. Susan confirmed that the 14% tuition increase last year was for private school placement.

5.3 *FY24 Q1 Report:*

This report covers the first twelve weeks of the new fiscal year – July 1 to September 30. Susan predicted where the district might be at the end of the year, taking into consideration that many changes/situations will drive and influence the budget. She expects that the financial obligations will be met with appropriated funds of \$48,300,000, but it's possible that the special education reserve fund balance may have to be used for additional OOD expenses. The budget will be monitored very closely, and Susan added that in order to make up for the \$450,000 reduction in the budget last year a Central Office administrative position will not be replaced and two facilities positions will not be filled, as well as other district positions. Susan also included information in the report about the Circuit Breaker. Further discussion followed about the revolving funds, such as gifts to the schools. Susan noted that WayCAM has asked for support for WayCAM around public broadcasting from the Town and School Department; Susan explained. The Finance Subcommittee will discuss WayCAM support and gifts to the schools at an upcoming meeting. The next quarterly report will be presented in January.

5.4 *Support Organizations Financial Report:*

The support organizations raise funds to support the educational, athletic, and fine arts programs as well as other cultural programs. These organizations include Wayland Public Schools Foundation, Creative Arts Parents Association, the Wayland Parent Teacher Organization, The Parent Organization of The Children's Way, Boston Parent Council, Wayland Boosters Association, and Team Wayland, Inc., and last year they raised \$350,000 and they are projected to raise \$330,000 this year. The School Committee and district are so appreciative of all their efforts to support the schools.

A question was raised regarding corporate sponsorships recognition and advertising in Wayland. The policies relative to this topic will be reviewed going forward.

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5.5 Discussion of FY25 Budget Book:

Susan is working on the FY25 budget book, as well as how it will be presented in its form. Some recommendations around content were made by the Finance Committee. It will be presented to the School Committee on January 3 following the budget presentation on December 13.

5.6 Finance Subcommittee Update:

At its last meeting, the Finance Subcommittee met with the Finance Committee and discussed the FY25 budget guideline, the budget book, and the capital budget. The five-year capital plan was reduced by \$419,000 for the new items that were added, and the Student Information System was cut but has been reinstated. Additionally, the emergency generator and water heater, the sound and projection systems in the high school auditorium, and the high school cafeteria tables were also removed from the capital budget temporarily. The details and possible solutions are still being discussed. The subcommittee also discussed its regular communication with the Finance Committee, and Susan Bottan will meet with FinCom quarterly.

6. Consent Agenda:

- 6.1 Approval of Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants: There was no accounts payables warrant.
- 6.2 Approval of Minutes: November 1, 2023:

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda.

7. Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:

Ellen suggested that the School Committee discuss the town-wide equity audit at a future meeting in an effort to provide clarification as to why the School Committee did not participate.

8. Policy Matters:

- 7.1. Review and Possible Approval to Vote on Updates/Revisions to the Following:
 - a. Policy IGA and IGD
 - b. Policy IMG
 - c. Policy EFE
 - d. Policy IE and IGD

Policy Subcommittee members Ellen and Christina recently met, and they will bring those MASC policies that will either be added to the manual or those that will be eliminated altogether. MASC policies are adopted verbatim unless there is a reason not to; the language can be amended as appropriate. Policy IGA/IGD (Curriculum) and Policy IMG (Service Animals) will be replaced and/or amended. A discussion ensued in this regard. The Policy Subcommittee will make a recommendation to the School Committee in collaboration with the Acting Superintendent.

9. Executive Session:

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 8:46 p.m. for the purposes of (a) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: November 1, 2023 with the intent to withhold said minutes; (b) reviewing executive session minutes for possible release, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: June 21, 2023, July 19, 2023, August 23, 2023, September 6, 2023, September 20, 2023, and October 4, 2023; and (c) discussing the November 6, 2023 open meeting law complaint filed by George Harris, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(2). A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Erin Gibbons, Chair	X	
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco	X	
Erin Mueller	X	
Christina Rodrigo	X	

The School Committee will not be joined by any others.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will not reconvene in open session.

The administrators and the recording secretary left the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

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10. Upon a motion made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 9:35 pm. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Erin Gibbons, Chair	X	
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco	X	
Erin Mueller	X	
Christina Rodrigo	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Observers:

See attached list.

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comments
3. Spring 2023 MCAS Presentation
4. Appointment Letter for Ben Downs
5. OML Determination Letter from the Attorney General
6. Certification of OML of Determination
7. FY25 Budget Guideline Memo
8. FY23 End-of-Year (EOYR) Financial Overview
9. DESE EOYR Summary FY21 to FY23
10. EOYR Summary FY21 to FY23
11. FY24 Q1 Financial Report
12. Revised FY24 Q4 Report
13. School Support Organizations FY23 Expenditures & FY24 Budgets
14. Payroll Warrants
15. School Committee Minutes of November 1, 2023
16. MASC and WPS Policies: IGA, IGD, IMG, EFE, IE and IGD
17. Executive Session Motion