

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – November 29, 2023

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, November 29, 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

Also:

Caroline Han, Director of Diversity, Equity and Belonging, METCO Academic Dean
Heath Rollins, Athletic Director

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

Chair Erin Gibbons called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

2. **Public Comment:**

Given the decision to cancel the 2024 Middle School trips – Washington, D.C., Cape Cod, and the Walden bike trip – parents and students expressed their disappointment and frustration in this decision. They voiced that there was no transparency and parents should have been given the opportunity to listen, provide input, and be a part of the decision, as they don't understand why the trips were canceled. Parents are willing to collaborate and volunteer their time to come up with a solution.

John Weintraub, 8 Trinity Place, was a student in Wayland and went on these field trips, and, as a parent, volunteered for the Walden Pond bike trip. He understands the need for change, but feels that the purpose of the recent Zoom meeting was not clear, as he thought it was an informational session. Mr. Weintraub would like to know the reasons why these trips were canceled and why the public wasn't notified about the decision-making process; he explained.

Amari Harrison, 39 York Road, reflected on her experience a few years ago of sitting in traffic while many pre-teens rode their bikes to Walden Pond. She was curious and thrilled to witness this, as she was fairly new to Wayland, but it was several years later that she learned this bike trip was a public school event and a unique sixth grade tradition. As a past volunteer on the bike trip with her son, she fully understands the administration's concerns, as she observed the beauty and the struggles of this trip. However, there was awe and happiness in the children's achievements thanks to the hard work of the staff and teachers. She asked that this process not be done in this way.

Charlie Wineman is an 8th grader who asked that this decision to cancel the field trips to be reconsidered. Students have been through many things, starting with COVID, and many are lacking in social emotional maturity. Charlie pointed out that there is opportunity to see the world outside of the classroom and asked for that opportunity again. His parents and many others will help with these trips if that's what it will take to reverse the decision.

Scott Walters, 100 Draper Road, was in Tuesday's Zoom meeting and stated that the decision went from going on the trips to not going on the trips in an instant, which in his opinion was wrong, as it sends a bad message and sets a precedent of not allowing public discussion. Mr. Walters suggested that there are many resources in town and many groups would

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welcome the opportunity to help out, adding that during Covid many parents took about 80 students to Washington, D.C.

Erin Gibbons commented that this decision does not lie within the School Committee's purview.

Barry Rothschild, 6 Rice Spring Lane, commented that he generally relies on and trusts the school administrators as they are excellent at their jobs, they know things that he does not about educating children, and he trusts what they say. What he witnessed in the Zoom meeting was just the opposite. He believes the remarks made were dishonest and he did not believe what was said, and also believes that the decision was made without input from the School Committee, the parents, and potentially from the entire middle school staff. Mr. Rothschild asked the School Committee to have a discussion under "matters not anticipated..." to find a solution to reinstate the trips.

Kathy Areed, as a former Wayland student and one who went on these trips, commented that although this decision is not within the School Committee's purview, there is a larger issue with the leadership. In her opinion, parents are feeling unsettled with the inconsistency of a long term investment given all the interim positions in the district. For many families, the cancellation of trips is a life-changing decision, and there should be a collaboration with staff and parents to find better solutions. Ms. Areed noted that if money is an issue, spending funds on day trips could be better spent on the overnight trips that offer powerful experiences. The short notice given to parents and without collaboration is unacceptable in her view.

Sofia Visoli is an 8th grader who expressed that these trips mean so much to the students as the connections made while on the trips can be very beneficial and the students will be missing out on the educational piece. The new itinerary planned in place of these overnight trips are ones that students and families can participate together, but many families might not have the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. Sofia asked that if there are other experiences planned, could the student bonding and connections be a part of the experiences.

Cathy Basrak, 84 Draper Road, commented that the students at this meeting can communicate, but not so much for the administrators. Her 8th grade daughter collected signatures during lunch periods in an effort to have the trips reinstated and or come together to come up with solutions rather than decide to cancel.

Joe Polizzotti, 16 Indian Road, was accompanied by his son Marcus and Marcus's friend Mikey. He paraphrased an email that he sent to the administrators that morning. In his opinion, the previous evening's presentation was weak and when parents asked for the data, there was a lot of talk and made no sense, as he does not understand why the trips were canceled. Mr. Polizzotti asked for the data that was referenced in the meeting, asked to know who made the decision to cancel the trips and why were parents not included in this decision. He also feels someone else, other than the newly appointed Interim Middle School principal, should have delivered this message.

Jessica Greenfield, 7 Ridgefield Road, began by saying that her comments are not directed to any public speaker, especially the students who are present. From her perspective, she has not seen from other parents an understanding of belonging, empathy, respect and trust as is the motto BERT at the Middle School as it relates to this topic. The true meaning of inclusion is thinking about those who are least represented, and she only sees privilege and entitlement from the majority.

Karen Kelly, 90 Old Connecticut Path, acknowledged the pressure that the School Committee and administrators are facing and appreciates each and every one. She noted that this is the first time according to agendas that the School Committee is discussing or addressing the cancellation of trips. Ms. Kelly does not have a middle school child, but has expertise in the field of children's mental health post-pandemic. She referred to the email sent to parents regarding the decision to cancel the trips which read, in part, that the trips were canceled because the physical and emotional safety of students is a priority. Ms. Kelly asked, "Do you want the children's to feel that our world is unsafe?" She added that the children are missing the opportunity to experience the world in which they live as has been expressed by others. This decision, in her opinion, will cause the same significant harm that closing down for Covid did and that which the professionals are trying to fix. Therefore, this is not the solution.

Caroline Higgins acknowledged the different feelings in the room and the sense of privilege, but she pointed out that the bigger issue is the lack of transparency, the way the message was communicated, and not having enough voices in the room. She understands the confidentiality piece, the seriousness of the mental health crisis, and the stress level of the staff. Ms. Higgins recommended a public forum to talk about this issue, as the district needs to heal.

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3. **Acting Superintendent Update:**

3.1 *Wayland Middle School Field Trip Update:*

David Fleishman and Betsy Gavron provided an update of the recent decision to cancel the Middle School field trips – the 8th grade Washington, D.C. trip, 7th grade Cape Cod trip, and 6th grade Walden Pond bike trip. David acknowledged the traditions in Wayland, adding that the staff feel that student experiences and enrichment around historical events are important and there is a desire to create similar opportunities and experiences outside of the classroom, as the challenges of the trips have increased. The delay in messaging was due to an effort in finding a path in such a way as to continue the trips as they happened in past years; Betsy explained. Many factors leading to this decision were discussed, such as the mental health crisis impacting kids in and out of school, as the physical, psychological and emotional safety is a priority for the students, as well as equitable access to trips for all students and the high cost. Data from the MetroWest Health Survey was provided, such as 26% of 8th grade students self-reported generalized anxiety, 13% reported depressive symptoms, and 13% reported self-injury. It was noted that field trips are largely school-based decisions, and at this time, there is a deep sense of loss by staff as a result of this decision. A discussion ensued about having a public forum for parents to provide more clarity and possibly lead to re-establishing long-standing traditions, as the School Committee meeting is not the place to address all of the parents' questions and concerns. Betsy addressed the timeline and process leading up this final decision. Finally, Betsy explained why the Walden Pond bike trip was canceled, as about one-third of students did not participate adding that there was an alternate experience.

3.2 *Belonging and Equity Update:*

David prefaced Caroline Han's presentation/update around belonging and equity, culture and curriculum, adding that Ms. Han will speak about what the district has done in the past two years to address recent events, what the district is working on now, and how the district will move forward in this regard. David added that the administration will conduct a thorough review of district policies, procedures, and protocols that will address incidents of bias and discrimination and will report back to the School Committee.

The district goal around belonging and equity is to “cultivate an inclusive culture of belonging and opportunity for all students and staff where all students feel recognized and valued as members of the Wayland School Community.” Ms. Han presented a snapshot of the ongoing work and initiatives taking place by the school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and teaching assistants. There are many affinity groups and clubs, such as affinity groups for students who are affected by antisemitism and Islamophobia. Ms. Han and Jada Williams, a middle school teacher, conducted a middle school facilitator training in response to acts of hate. In addition, a new group was formed, the WHS Jewish Student Association. They all received positive responses.

One example of a change to curriculum in the 5th grade after reviewing the 2018 social studies standards that focused on U.S. History, Abolition of Slavery, among others, resulted in the addition of “Changemakers in U.S. History”; Caroline explained the focus of this history lesson. The staff continues on an ongoing basis to review the curriculum. At the high school level, the course selection policies were reviewed, and the grade prerequisite and teacher recommendations were removed allowing students and parents to choose to move up a level regardless of the student's grade.

The district has continued to focus on the hiring and retention of a diverse educator workforce which remains a challenge given other districts are trying to do the same. Ms. Han works to strengthen the hiring practices, such as focus groups, training for hiring committees, and surveys. Ongoing professional development by Ms. Han continues from pre-school to 12th grade; she elaborated. In addition, the district is exploring potential partnerships, such as possible REI (racial, equity and integration) grant opportunities with METCO, Inc., Governor Healey's Hate Crimes Prevention Act grant for public schools, as well as a potential partnership with Jewish Family Services Metrowest around anti-hate programming for middle school students.

Moving forward, the idea is to develop a strategic plan to advance diversity, equity and belonging, develop comprehensive policies, procedures and protocols for addressing incidents of bias and discrimination, summer work around K-5 social studies curriculum on hate and intolerance, provide leadership opportunities for school staff to address DEB goals and initiatives, and surveys and/or focus groups on staff and student belonging.

A discussion ensued about how the School Committee can take a proactive role to support DEB efforts, including the equity audit in which the School Committee did not participate. It was noted that the cost to conduct this audit may not have been the best use of funds. Ms. Han pointed out that an equity audit might have some benefit to the district, but it can only go so far once the data is compiled, adding that a teacher's impact is much greater with

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students. Christina Rodrigo shared her thoughts after reading an equity audit and agreed that it was not a good use of funds. David noted that the community school-based meetings will resume in a few weeks during which DEB will be the focus. Erin Gibbons asked for a monthly update on DEB from Caroline Han.

Erin Gibbons left the meeting at 7:46 p.m.; returned at 7:47.

A question was posed about the responses to racial and/or anti-Semitic events in Wayland, and Betsy Gavron commented that it is very important to have a unified response within the schools across the district.

3.3 *Holocaust Education Update:*

David reported that several years ago, and before 2016, the State was concerned about civic participation by students and a crisis in democracy, so it changed the 8th grade curriculum to focus on civics. He added that 50% of 8th graders will take a civics MCAS in the spring of 2024. The three-week curriculum unit around the holocaust ended about 4 years ago for 8th graders, and in Wayland the curriculum moved to the 10th grade. However, it is also now studied in 9th grade. It follows the WWII course and focuses on antisemitism. In 8th grade civics, the focus is justice and there are books related to some history lessons in the library. Erin Gibbons asked if there was a curriculum map to understand what is taught at each grade level. Betsy noted that the work is ongoing, and the social studies curriculum leaders will make a presentation at a future meeting. DESE also provides grade level curriculum as well.

3.4 *Responding to Incidents of Bias or Discrimination and Review of Policy/Protocol*

This agenda item was covered earlier in the meeting.

3.5 *Budget Planning Update:*

David noted that the focus of the district goals will drive the budget planning, particularly the goal that will establish and refine district protocols, procedures and structures related to special education programs, staffing and services. Because the budget process is so early, he and Debbie Dixson proposed that they could provide a budget number for special education on December 13, but would provide more specific detail and costs by February 1. The goal is to provide a responsible and more accurate budget and one that meets the needs of the students.

A discussion ensued about the earlier timeline in terms of the budget process and the importance of having the detail to support the budget. Given the town code, the process and timeline will remain the same.

4. **Administrative Matters:**

4.1 *Announcement of Release with Redactions the Following Executive Session Minutes: June 21, 2023, July 19, 2023, August 23, 2023, September 6, 2023, September 20, 2023, October 4, 2023:*

The Chair also announced the release of the following minutes with redactions, June 21, 2023, July 19, 2023, August 23, 2023, September 6, 2023, September 20, 2023, and October 4, 2023:

4.2 *Review and Discuss Acting Superintendent FY24 Goals and Indicators:*

Jeanne Downs and Erin Mueller met with David to discuss the evaluation process which is completed by June 30, 2024. David will present three to five goals with one from each category, including action items and indicators. He will focus on curriculum, school culture and climate, recruitment and hiring. The School Committee reviewed the DESE rubric that includes four standards with different elements for each standard. David explained each category, adding that he may add Diversity, Equity, Belonging to his goals. The School Committee made some recommendations regarding David's goals. Jeanne added that the administrators will be surveyed as well as part of the evaluation process. David will provide strategic items and measurements at the December 13 meeting.

4.3 *Discussion and Possible Appointment of Jacqueline Espiritusanto-Vega to the Wayland Housing Partnership:*

Erin Gibbons provided some background for Ms. Espiritusanto-Vega who was recommended by Housing Partnership member Mary Antes. Ms. Espiritusanto-Vega has lived in Wayland for about 21 years and two of her four children currently attend Wayland Public Schools and two are graduates. She has worked in low-income housing for about 26 years as well as SMOC, a non-profit agency, in Framingham. She also worked at the Waltham Housing Authority. Currently, Ms. Espiritusanto-Vega works full-time for the Framingham Housing Authority and part-time at the Southborough Housing Authority. She also serves on the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust representing the Housing Partnership.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to appoint Jacqueline Espiritusanto-Vega to represent the School Committee on the Wayland Housing

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Partnership.

5. **Financial Matters:**

5.1 *Review of Director of Finance’s November 20, 2023 Presentation to Town Finance Committee:*

At the request of the Finance Committee, Susan Bottan recently presented the School Department’s Q1 financial report to the FinCom and answered all of the members’ questions. A discussion ensued about the benefit of these presentations. Susan will present to the FinCom on a quarterly basis moving forward.

5.2 *High School Hockey Funding Proposal Presentation by Athletic Director Heath Rollins (out of order before the Budget Planning Update):*

Heath Rollins provided the back story and history of the hockey program in Wayland going back to the late 80’s and early 90’s. When the funding was removed from the operating budget, the Wayland Hockey Association was created in an effort to support the team through fundraising and charging an athletic fee for the players to offset what couldn’t be raised. Fast forward about 30 years and the process is changing because fundraising is becoming increasingly difficult. The Athletic Advisory Committee (AAC) was formed to review handbooks as well as all athletic and funding issues. It is made up of Heath, a School Committee member, a principal, two coaches, and four students. Fifteen boys skate with the Watertown team and eight girls skate with the Weston team. At this time, the AAC prioritized the hockey funding and are proposing to integrate \$15,000 per year for the next four years into the high school hockey budget. The majority of the funds, about \$60,000, goes towards ice time, but includes transportation, coaches, game officials, and miscellaneous equipment. Other unfunded sports include sailing and crew. The Wayland/Weston Crew funding will remain status quo, and the sailing athletic fee per student of \$600 does cover all expenses. A discussion ensued in this regard and Heath answered the School Committee’s questions.

The School Committee will take Heath’s proposal under consideration when planning the FY25 budget.

6. **Consent Agenda:**

6.1 Approval of Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants:

- Wayland Public Schools Accounts Payables Warrant dated November 29, 2023 in the amount of \$978,848.69.

6.2 Approval of Minutes: November 15, 2023:

Jeanne Downs recommended adding content to section 4.5 around the discussion of the OML complaint.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda without the November 15, 2023 minutes.

7. **Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

None.

8. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 9:07 p.m. for the purposes of (a) conducting strategy with respect to central office administration non-union personnel (Assistant Superintendent and Director of Student Services) as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(2); (b) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: November 15, 2023 with the intent to withhold said minutes;. 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 be joined by David Fleishman, Acting Superintendent and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

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

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9. Upon a motion made by Erin Mueller, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn at 9:55 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. Diversity, Equity & Belonging Presentation/Update
3. Rubric for Acting Superintendent Evaluation
4. Resume for Jacqueline Espiritusanto-Vega
5. Athletic Advisory Committee Hockey Funding Proposal
6. Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants
7. School Committee Minutes of November 15, 2023
8. Executive Session Motion