

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – February 28, 2024

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, February 28, 2024, at 6:00 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building

Present:

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair
Ellen Grieco (absent)
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 & Belonging, METCO Academic Dean
Cristina Sandza-Donovan, Loker Asst. Principal & EL Coordinator
Chitra Mills, WMS Social Studies & French teacher, 6th Gr. House Leader
Sean Gass, WHS Asst. Principal
Suzanne Kenny, Human Resources Consultant

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

Chair Erin Gibbons called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

2. **Public Comment:**

There was no public comment.

3. **Acting Superintendent Update:**

3.1 *District Goal Update – Part one: “Creating Belonging in our Schools” (Part one of a two-part presentation) Caroline, Director of Diversity, Equity & Belonging and the Wayland Public Schools Team Members:*

David introduced the theme of the goal presentation noting that diversity, equity and belonging (DEB) is a complicated topic in the current environment. When students feel connected in school, they perform better academically and have a better attendance record. Students’ social and emotional wellbeing is also better. There are three parts to DEB: what happens in the classroom curriculum, what goes on outside the classroom around student programming (special events, advisories, and outside speakers) and identifying the structures in place to address these issues. Professional development for staff is also important, and will be addressed at a later time. This presentation, part one, will focus on what is being done to support belonging within the schools but outside of the curriculum.

Cristina Sandza-Donovan spoke about how the elementary schools are addressing diversity, equity and belonging. School meetings are an important event about twice per month and DEB is highlighted at every meeting during which students can share what they like relative to this issue. In the classroom, books are read aloud, such as Ian’s Walk, videos around this issue are shown, and there are Open Circle meetings. One example of an Open Circle meeting in 4th and 5th grades covered the topic of “invisible identities” which are things such as one’s religion and culture. Many students shared their own invisible identities. Also available to students and staff are lunch groups and affinity groups. There is a monthly mentor/mentee program for Boston students who are with one staff member for up to six years, and the METCO liaisons also lead weekly lunch groups for Boston students. In addition, guidance counselors and school psychologists address other topics, such as changing families and LGBTQ+. Caroline Han has a

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wonderful relationship with the students and meets with teachers if needed; she is a great support and resource for everyone. The PTO is very supportive and provides cultural enrichment opportunities for the students. The Just Like Me program works with kids to help them understand and accept differences in everyone, particularly those with disabilities. There are opportunities for families to share their holidays, traditions and cultures as well.

As the EL Coordinator for about 90 to 100 students, Cristina makes sure that all families have access to all necessary information. The interpretation and translation guidelines are currently being updated. When necessary, interpreters are provided for families, but if that is not an option, voice translators are used as well as phone translation services. When district-wide messages are sent out to families, School Messenger will translate in the home language. Cristina also noted that there is sheltered English instruction in the classroom with a teacher who can support EL students. This is meant to make grade-level academic content areas more accessible for those students; Christina explained. There is an effort to relaunch ELPAC (English Learners Parent Advisory Council) next year, which is usually created, along with a parent Board, when there are 100+ EL students throughout the district. However, this year there is an emphasis on tiered focus monitoring which is an audit of the EL Program. Cristina explained this audit process for this year.

Chitra Mills reported that the mission of the Middle School is to create a home away from home for each student in a many ways outside of the classroom. The school theme is BERT (Belonging, Equity, Respect, Trust), and there is positive messaging displayed via artwork throughout the building. Each grade level has a house mentor (Rachel Carson, David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr.) in which activities are done based on the house mentors and their values. The houses are broken down into two teams/clusters and teacher-organized activities occur within the clusters around belonging and community building. Clusters move into homerooms first thing in the morning where slides are presented announcing upcoming dates, such as holidays, community service events, club announcements, and students' birthdays. Within each homeroom, two Teacher Advisory Groups (TAG) meet each Wednesday during which a student can connect with an adult to talk about anything that personally affects them or what is happening around the world as well as develop skills around the school theme BERT. The Just Like Me Program also provides guest speakers at the Middle School; Chitra provided examples of topics. World Language Week is an annual celebration during which students can experience the many different languages in the school via cultural events and food. Some families also make presentations about their cultural experiences. Other ways for students to connect are through affinity groups that began this year and through the many middle school clubs. There are also specific grade level experiences planned for students that includes trips and other events; Chitra described. Lastly, the PTO continues to be supportive throughout the year. A discussion ensued.

Sean Gass addressed the areas in which students and staff create and participate in activities around belonging at Wayland High School, adding that this is a work in progress as everyone is learning and growing together. Once students enter high school, they become more independent and take a more active leadership role in many spaces. There is an active student government that plans events around many topics, such as mental health and racism, and regularly meets with administrators. The Student Leadership Council is made up of leaders from among the 65 active school clubs, such as the Alliance Group (LBGTQ), Asian-American Culture Club, Jewish-Student Union, Muslim Student Association, Chinese Honor Society, Power Club, Russian Club, Safe Space Gym, and the Women's Empowerment Club to mention just a few. The Leadership Council meets with administrators/faculty who act as advisors around the topics happening within the school. All of the clubs are required to give back to the community each year through various activities. The student led and highly acclaimed student newspaper, WSPN, produces incredible journalism and invites different student voices to speak out within the community. There is also a Peer Mediation Program made up of 15 students who are trained to mediate peer conflicts within the school, and this year they have extended their training to the Middle School as a way to build a better culture where conflict can be worked out through communication. As 9th graders enter the High School, they are assigned a peer mentor for a part of their educational journey. In addition, there are many faculty-led programs, such as many cultural flags hung in the Commons representing student cultures, as well as mental health supports that include a therapy dog and an available clinical counselor. Sean noted that advisories are a check-in space four days a week first thing in the morning for seven minutes per day. When a world event occurs and it affects many within the school, they are addressed in many ways; he described. A discussion followed.

Caroline Han shared a quote that reflects the district's efforts, "We are truly wonderful and getting better all the time." She added that the work being done within the schools is a team approach in which much trust is evident and collaboration is so important. Staff continually strive to identify students who don't feel as if they belong, as it is about making the invisible visible even if it means trying different ways to achieve the goal. Caroline gave examples, adding that it is not only students, but it could be staff members or parents as well.

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4. Administrative Matters:

4.1 *Vote to Approve the Acting Superintendent's Recommendation for Assistant Superintendent:*

David introduced Suzanne Kenny, our Human Resources consultant, who was hired to assist with the Human Resources reorganization. She presented the search process that was facilitated to search for the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning for next year. David and Suzanne created a job description, the position was advertised for 33 days, and Human Resources collected the applications. The Search Advisory Committee (SAC), chosen by David, underwent an anti-bias training by Caroline Han, and the following week the SAC identified the overarching themes for the necessary qualifications, created interview questions to match the themes, interviewed candidates, and ultimately made a recommendation for the best candidates to bring forward to the next round. The SAC consisted of the PTO President, the WTA President, a WHS teacher chosen by the WTA President, a first-year elementary principal, and a first-year WHS department head. Suzanne facilitated the process and David was an observer. Although not a member of the SAC, METCO Director La Toya Rivers assisted in identifying the themes and questions. Suzanne described a somewhat different process when there is an internal candidate, adding that the SAC signed a confidentiality agreement for various reasons.

The themes included leadership and collaboration, teaching and learning instruction, professional development, supervision and evaluation, equity, knowledge of METCO, special education, and EL, as well as data-based decision making. Suzanne spoke about the four candidates who were selected out of twenty applications received and their range of experience. David added that most came from curriculum instruction experience and not necessarily having been a principal; he explained. Each candidate was asked the same questions, after which each of their responses were rated by the SAC followed by a holistic assessment. Suzanne described the process after the SAC rated the candidates and were then asked to write names down with a rating from 0 to 4. After a thoughtful and lengthy discussion about each candidate and a final review of their notes, the SAC unanimously recommended Betsy Gavron; there was weak support for the remaining candidates. David explained why he agreed with the SAC's recommendation and the experience, leadership and support of staff that Betsy would bring to the role as demonstrated the past few months; thus, he recommended Betsy to the School Committee. A discussion followed, and the School Committee thanked Suzanne for her role in this thoughtful process.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to accept David's recommendation to appoint Betsy Gavron as the next Assistant Superintendent for Wayland.

4.2 *Wayland Public Schools Foundation Mid-Year Update Report:*

This agenda item was passed over.

4.3 *High School Field Update:*

Jeanne provided an update regarding the High School field, as she attended the February 7th meeting. As of that date, Ben Keefe reported there was no additional flooding of the field. After a meeting with the third-party engineer, the Conservation Commission Director and a ConCom member as well as Ben Keefe, the Committee was asked to approve the design of a grid chamber to deal with the crumb rubber. As of this morning, a vendor came in to clean out quite a bit of crumb rubber from the swale in the wetlands, but there is more to be removed after the rain subsides. Once the grid chamber is designed and built, it will be put in place. The funding for the final product of the grid chamber is still in question.

4.4 *Discuss Possible Position Votes on Town Meeting Articles:*

The School Committee was asked if they would like to take a position on two different articles: Article Q - Special Education Reserve Fund and Article OO – Establish Athletic Fields Planning Committee. A discussion ensued about Article Q which was created last year and funds were added to it. At this time, the amount to add to the fund is not decided because the FY25 budget has not been voted. If voted at Town Meeting, the School Committee and Select Board would vote to approve the access of the funds at any time during the school year to cover unanticipated special education expenses.

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Mueller, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend the support of Article Q for the Special Education Reserve Fund.

The School Committee discussed the pros and cons of Article OO, noting that this article could move towards a more positive resolution to the many issues regarding the athletic fields in Wayland. This Committee would only make recommendations to the Town in an effort to develop a multi-year plan.

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Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend support of the article to establish an Athletic Field Planning Committee.

5. Financial Matters:

5.1 *Review of FY24 2nd Quarter Results:*

Susan Bottan reviewed the results of the FY24 2nd quarter report, adding that the operating budget will break even at the end of this fiscal year and includes the use and allocation of the \$150,000 Special Education Reserve Fund transfer for this fiscal year. The School Committee can vote to transfer these funds into the operating budget or another way would be to spend funds directly from the reserve fund. The School Committee agreed with the latter option. Susan will provide an invoice at the next meeting for special education transportation, and the Committee will vote to approve the invoice for payment from the reserve fund.

There are budget drivers and there is some savings to offset other increased expenses that were budgeted or not anticipated. Thus, Susan is paying close attention to the budget. From Q1 to Q2, approximately \$200,000 in special education expenses for out-of-district transportation services and tuition was incurred. Susan spoke to the absence of special education pre-pay funds this year, as it was used last year for unanticipated costs. A discussion ensued.

Erin Gibbons left the meeting at 8:38 p.m.; returned at 8:40.

5.2 *Review and Possible Vote to Approve Special Revenue Fund Budgets:*

Susan highlighted areas of the special revenue funds in preparation for a School Committee vote at the next meeting. Special revenue funds are not meant to end the year with more than 10% of operating expenses with the exception of Food Service, as allowed by DESE; Susan explained. Food Service programs can reinvest their funds. For example, Wayland Food Service is covering the expenses for kitchen equipment. Food Service Director Cheryl Judd has more innovative programming going forward to bring in revenue. Wayland School Community Programs keeps a balance from year to year and works with Susan to find ways to invest in the district, such as paying for part of a school playground and helping to implement new security systems. There is a plan to find more ways to invest in the community. Susan noted that Food Service and BASE will reimburse the Town for their portion of OPEB costs that they could not pay in FY22. Most of the special revenue fund budgets are sustainable. However, The Children's Way is not able to contribute to benefits and OPEB costs for different reasons, particularly in that enrollment has decreased and it is now a public school model. Susan explained the structure of TCW; a discussion ensued. Lastly, the 2014 high school parking fund maintained a high balance in which offsets were developed, such as a \$27,000 for snow plowing and landscaping prior to graduation paid to DPW during that time. Currently, there are enough funds to pay for a campus supervisor, but only enough to pay DPW for one more year.

5.3 *FY25 Operating and Capital Budgets Update:*

This agenda item was passed over. Erin Mueller thanked the Finance Committee for adding back two school capital projects back into the capital budget, and Susan thanked them for their efforts to understand the FY25 school operating budget.

5.4 *Finance Subcommittee Update, including After School Programming, Transportation Bid and Registration Update, and FY25 Financial Assistance Guideline:*

Jeanne highlighted the topics discussed at the recent Finance Subcommittee meeting. WSCP Director Pat Keefe and Recreation Director Katherine Brenna attended to provide an updated report on their existing programs, those new this year, and possible new programs for next year. They were invited to present at the March 27 School Committee meeting. A discussion followed with recommendations for information in the presentation.

The transportation bus contract has been signed for the next three years, and registration opens on March 1 at a cost of \$400 per student rider.

The FY25 Financial Assistance Guideline was updated with 2024 data. The Building Use Guidelines reflects a change for long-term users of the high school and middle school auditoriums. A discussion ensued, and the policy will be reviewed by the Policy Subcommittee at a future meeting.

6. Consent Agenda:

6.1 Approval of Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants:

- Wayland Public Schools Warrant, dated February 28, 2024, in the amount of \$896,977.40

6.2 Approval of Minutes: February 14, 2024

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Jeanne recommended one revision to the minutes.

Upon a motion duly moved by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the consent agenda with the minutes edit discussed.

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

None.

9. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Erin Mueller, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to enter Executive Session at 9:16 p.m. for the purposes of (a) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: February 14, 2024 with the intent to withhold said minutes; and (b) a discussion and possible vote with respect to the collective bargaining agreement with the public employees’ local union no. 1116 – custodians and maintenance personnel, pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3). 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	absent	
Erin Mueller	X	
Christina Rodrigo	X	

The School Committee will be joined by David Fleishman, Acting Superintendent, Susan Bottan, Director of Finance & Operations, and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

The School Committee will adjourn in executive session and reconvene in open session to potentially announce the vote.

10. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion made by Erin Mueller, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Article Q – Special Education Reserve Fund
3. Article OO – Establish Athletic Fields Planning Committee
4. FY24 Q2 Financial Report
5. Fee-Based Special Revenue Funds FY21-FY27
6. Building Use Guidelines
7. Financial Assistance Guidelines 2024-25
8. FY25 Transportation Contract Summary
9. Payroll & Accounts Payables Warrants
10. Minutes of February 14, 2024
11. Executive Session Motion