

SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Regular Meeting – March 3, 2021

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, at 5:30 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present and participating remotely were:

Jeanne Downs, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Kim Reichelt
Chris Ryan
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:

Dr. Joseph Allen, Harvard Chan School of Public Health

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 5:32 p.m. WayCAM recorded the meeting and it was livestreamed via ZOOM. The meeting 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	absent	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	absent	

1. Presentation and Discussion with Dr. Joseph Allen, Harvard Chan School of Public Health, regarding Health and Safety in Reopening Schools:

Dr. Joseph Allen, Director of Harvard's Healthy Buildings program, came before the School Committee to discuss healthy buildings and risk reduction strategies for reopening schools. Dr. Allen briefly spoke about his credentials and the work he has performed in this field.

Kathie arrived at 5:34 p.m.

If schools are closed long-term, there are documented individual and societal costs to both kids and adults, such as virtual dropouts, food insecurity, a decrease in physical activity, socialization, and an increase in abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. In terms of COVID, kids are less likely to get infected (about 50%), less likely to suffer a more severe case if infected, and less likely to transmit the virus, particularly younger kids.

Dr. Allen reviewed a report that he and his team published in terms of the strategies schools should consider to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in five different categories, healthy activities, healthy policies, healthy classrooms, healthy schools and healthy schedules. Dr. Allen focused on the healthy building strategies and building level controls, such as increased outdoor air ventilation, filtered indoor air, addition of portable air cleaners in the classrooms, verification of ventilation and filtration performance, and the possible consideration of advanced air quality techniques. Dr. Allen recommends maximizing outdoor air ventilation, an upgrade to MERV 13 system filters, and supplemental portable air cleaners with HEPA filters. He elaborated on his recommendations and the many ways to achieve better air quality in classrooms and other spaces, noting that clean air is virus free.

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In terms of social distancing – six feet vs. three feet – Dr. Allen and another colleague wrote an op-ed about why they recommend three feet from student to student and six feet from adult to adult in an effort to reopen schools. This is also the conclusion of many other experts, including specialized medical doctors. If good controls are in place, people can be protected with masking, hand hygiene, and air filtration. Also, kids are at a lower risk to get infected and transmit the virus.

Dr. Allen added that “shared air is the problem, not shared surfaces.” Although fomite transmission can occur, he is not aware of one documented case of fomite transmission and it can be avoided through good hand hygiene. Dr. Allen believes that closing schools for deep cleaning is “hygiene theater” and not supported by science, as cleaning chemicals can be very harmful. Dr. Allen recommended any three-layer mask or a surgical mask worn with a cloth mask that fits well, noting that N95, KF94 from Korea, and the KN95 with a ‘NIOSH Certificate’ are the best for mitigation and safety.

Dr. Allen received questions from the School Committee and the audience Q & A. Topics covered were the transmission of virus variants related to social distancing and ventilation, and potential risks in eliminating cohorts in the hybrid mode. Dr. Allen believes that the hybrid mode does not protect everyone because kids and staff participate in other outlets outside of school, which can result in more exposure and more risk. Other questions asked were about the research for the “six foot rule” established early on, CDC’s six-foot distance guidelines and studies, and strategies for mask breaks.

Questions from the audience included the impact of age on transmissibility in terms of being interchangeable or mixed, the role and function of air purifiers, proof of low transmission in the hybrid mode, a recommendation for the number of students in classrooms based on air exchange and occupancy density, the mitigation effects of pooled testing and proper evaluation, the importance of vaccinations, particularly for teachers, long-term immune responses from children with the constant use of hand sanitizers, and mask recommendations for young children.

2. Comments and Written Statements from the Public:

Jeanne read a public comment from Joe Polizzoti in which he believes the children should be back in school as it is their right to a free and appropriate education. Mr. Polizzoti’s children, grades 5 and 2, are not having a good experience in the hybrid model and are much happier when they are in school two days a week. He urged the School Committee to do what is best for the children and bring them back to school five days a week, as what was expressed by many parents in a recent survey.

Jeanne read a public comment from John O’Neil in which he asked the School Committee to clarify the differences between the planning enacted by the School vote on December 20 and the directives laid out by DESE, specifically for elementary, on February 23. He thanked the School Committee for moving towards bringing the elementary kids back to school.

Ted Harding asked why the students could not return to in-person learning five days a week starting tomorrow, given the high cost to have the students in the hybrid mode and the low risk that Dr. Allen outlined in his presentation

Jeanne read a public comment from Ariana Price, a 5th grader at Happy Hollow School. Ariana really wants to come back to school to see her friends, improve the method by which she receives education, connect in-person with her teachers, and to be a part of the Happy Hollow community again before she goes to Middle School in September.

Jeanne read a public comment from MacKenzie Young, a 5th grader at Loker School. She does not consider the hybrid mode of education “real school” or an acceptable form of receiving instruction. This year has not been challenging enough, the brain is not stimulated when the instruction is the same over and over, and she misses her friends. MacKenzie wants to come back to school for these and other reasons.

Jeanne read a public comment from MacKenzie Grogan, a 5th grader at Loker School. MacKenzie wants to come back to school because remote learning is not the best way to learn, she misses the social interactions, playing outside, and her teacher. MacKenzie thanked the School Committee and stated that kids can make a difference, too.

Sharon Burke commented that Dr. Allen’s presentation was very well done and he gave her a lot of hope for bringing kids back to school sooner rather than later.

Jeanne read a public comment from Heather Maddox, a student at Loker School, wants to return to school five days a week. Heather believes that it is difficult to learn properly, learning is not challenging enough, specials are not great, and it is difficult to do well in school with only two in-person days. Heather wants to socialize with her friends and believes that going back to school with all safety measures in place, including pooled testing, will be safe for everyone.

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Mike Brown is a Wayland parent and a Weston educator. Given the state's recent announcement about bring kids back to school, he asked for a specific plan for the Wayland schools, such as a different rollout for elementary and secondary levels. He believes that everyone in Wayland has been compliant with all of the guidance, believes the kids will continue to follow the rules, and stressed the importance of bringing them back to school.

Other public statements were submitted, but due to time constraints were not read. They can be found on the website and are from the following: Cassandra Kasdorf, Abby Bergeron, Karis Tam, Sheetal and Nish Acharya with a petition signed by 200 parents to bring kids back to school, Anna and Dave Visi, Caroline Hanlon, Orla Daunt, an anonymous commenter.

3. COVID-19 Response:

- (a) Discussion and Review of Planning for Remainder of School Year, including Synchronous Augmentation, Kindergarten All-In Update and Grades 1-12 All-In Planning:

Arthur updated the School Committee on the return of kindergartners four days a week. The return and experience has been very positive, the students are happy and positive, the social and emotional benefits were immediately noticed, the teachers appreciate not having to dual plan for remote and hybrid, and they appreciated the planning time. Some of the challenges are lunch time, snack time, specials, more cleaning being done in a short period of time, social distancing, and morning and afternoon traffic flow.

The School Committee voted on December 20 to bring the kindergartners into school during the week of February 22. Susan reviewed the operational challenges that included three days of moving furniture in and out of classrooms, placement of desks and chairs, and teachers spent time providing input, boxed materials, and organizing their rooms. Parry described the scheduling process for kindergartners for the purpose of a comparison for bringing other students into school. This has been an enormous challenge and effort for not only staff, but for the families, with all of the transitional changes. Planning for grades 1 to 5 thus far have included budgeting and logistical planning.

Following the Commissioner's announcement and the imminent authorization by the Board of Education for students to return to school all-in, there were questions about the waiver process that he offered for some districts. After consulting with other superintendents and school counsel, Arthur noted that the waiver process is designed for schools that can't make the transition, as some have been in remote mode all year and some are using their buildings for food pantries and health services. Thus, a district like Wayland probably would not be able to access a waiver. The process is time consuming and may not be successful.

Since the hybrid mode would no longer qualify for enough instructional time, Arthur consulted with school counsel in the event Wayland preferred to stay in the hybrid mode and M.G.L. Ch. 69, S.1 is where the Board of Education's regulatory authority is spelled out. Arthur explained what the implications are according to law, the consequences if not followed, and state and federal funds could be withheld. A discussion followed regarding timing and compliance within the Commissioner's directive. Richard commented on the Commissioner's announcement and the planning process in terms of delivering services and compliance for the students, adding that there are many benefits of being back in school. Arthur expressed why he believes April 5 would be beneficial for the elementary students to come back to school full-time, adding that there would be substantial benefits for kids and logistical gains in preparing for the fall.

Kathie commented that it would be the district's obligation to manage expectations of a logistical plan around what is reasonable and clear regardless of the starting date. Kim suggested that the vote encompasses what the district is required to do rather than vote on a specific date. She also wants families to have the expectation that specials may not occur as usual. She also addressed arrivals and dismissals, traffic at schools, mask wearing, WRAP, and parking lot safety, and the possibility of not having enough furniture.

Parry addressed the possibility of some families wanting to enroll in WRAP vs. going back to school. Families will be accommodated and the program will be staffed appropriately. He noted that there weren't any kindergarten families who ended up transferring to WRAP.

Chris read a statement about the past year, what has been learned scientifically, and the oncoming vaccination process. He advocated that the discussion should shift from "why we can't to how we will." He believes that it is important and urgent to move to all-in schooling and provided some reasons why. Chris also spoke about his personal experiences. The question is what is best for the kids, as he is concerned about the students, including his own children. He supports moving ahead with all-in person learning.

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Arthur added that it would be extremely valuable for students to see their teachers and asked the School Committee to consider voting to come back all-in the week of April 5. Kim asked if an extra week would be beneficial. A discussion followed regarding the date.

Upon a motion duly made by Chris Ryan, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted (4-1) to start all-in person schooling five days a week for K-5 elementary level starting the week of April 5. 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	
Kim Reichelt		X
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

The School Committee thanked the school staff and administrators in advance of the date for all the work ahead.

(b) Discussion and Review of High School Learning Data:

Parry presented the High School learning data from students, staff and a comprehensive analysis of the first semester grades by Assistant Principal Sean Gass. The purpose was answer how students are doing and should the staff be concerned about some students who are not doing as well. The goal was to find accurate patters and stories in the data without drawing early conclusions. Fifty-five high school teachers (40 classroom and 15 student services staff) responded. One teacher wrote that “the overall positive picture in my responses does not capture the small number of students who are struggling mightily with remote learning and other aspects of learning this year.”

In terms of curricular coverage and academic progress, cuts were made to the curriculum, particularly in science, social studies, and band and chorus but were not viewed as being negative, as some changes could be carried forward into next year. In English, Math, Social Studies, Visual Arts, and Orchestra, students are generally meeting the expectations for this year. In Science and World Languages, about 25 to 40% teachers said that students are not meeting teachers’ expectations for this year, but some are exceeding expectations and are behind of what is expected in a normal year. Parry explained the data in more detail, adding that the gap is getting wider between students who are doing okay academically, and those who are not. Teachers are most concerned about the freshmen academically.

Parry reviewed the social-emotional skill development of students in grades 9 to 12. About 60-70% of student services staff say it is more challenging to provide SEL support to students in all grades, but most said it is more challenging and highest amongst the 9th graders. The teachers are particularly worried about remote students who might avoid school, freshmen, ELs, and students of color. In the SEL category, more and more students are struggling with their mental health and the suicide ideation cases and suicide attempts have increased.

The WHS Q2 academic data was presented and the grades are generally higher this year than last year. About 18-20% of students per grade level are considered at risk if they received one grade below C- or more and typically occur in College Prep or introductory classes but does occur for some students in Honors or AP classes. And, certain groups of students are disproportionately more likely to be at risk academically. Parry reviewed the grades by grade levels for Q2 (19-20) and Q1 and Q2 (20-21) to present a comparison. In terms of cohorts of students who are at risk academically, they were placed in three categories for the purpose of this presentation: student race, remote (WRAP) vs. in-person two days a week by cohort, and students who have IEP’s. In total, 162 students were at risk in Q2 which is 25 more from Q1. Parry also presented 9th grade only for all categories.

In response to the student survey, 660 students participated. There were clear patterns in terms of level of engagement on in-person vs. remote days and in terms of opinions about Wednesdays. WRAP students generally feel less connected to school and disproportionately appreciate the time spent at home. Students also provided interesting responses about their emotional changes this year. Parry reviewed all of the data gathered from the student survey as well as the summary of patterns that include, but are not limited to, teachers’ academic and SEL concerns about specific student groups based on their responses.

In terms of next steps, the High School is responding internally to the achievement data, staff is preparing for all-in and the possible ramifications that this could have on the students’ academic and social emotional progress, planning for curriculum summer work, and planning summer learning opportunities for students.

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In terms of district planning, the Commissioner is waiting for authorization from the Board of Education and has not been specific about start dates for all-in learning for middle and high school students and it is not clear if he will mandate start dates. Susan presented the most updated financial implications for all grades if coming back all-in and providing lunch. For Grades 1-5, the cost is between \$122,164 and \$137,164, Grades 6-8 is \$102,368, and Grades 9-12 is \$50,688. There is a possibility that there could be additional Federal funds for school districts. A discussion followed about funding and next steps for middle and high school planning.

Kim suggested setting up a buddy system for teachers/staff to help with making appointments for vaccines.

(c) Discussion of Travel Policy:

Travel policy guidelines were discussed for those who will choose to travel over April break. It is strongly recommended that families quarantine for five days and get a PCR test after 72 hours upon returning home. A discussion followed about how to proceed in terms of recommended vs. mandated protocols. Committee members agreed that a strong recommendation should be put forth to families.

(d) Special Education Update:

Richard advocated further for the needed counseling support for social emotional issues across all grades and for all students, as it is not just a special education matter, adding that the adults/staff have experienced similar issues. Richard identified different situations that kids find themselves in, and school may be the only place that they can access the help they need. When kids get the help they need, it improves the lives of the whole community and affects the community long-term.

Kathie encouraged the public to attend the Finance Committee Budget Hearing on March 4 relative to the budget and the need for additional counseling support.

(e) Next Steps:

Next steps were discussed during the meeting.

4. **Financial Matters:**

(a) Update on FY22 Operating Budget:

The Finance Committee has asked the School Committee to find savings in the budget of \$400,000. Jeanne reviewed the budget discussion from the School Committee's meeting in terms of finding savings in order to maintain the Tier 1 initiatives prior to its vote to approve the FY22 recommended budget. Jeanne noted that the union contracts will be under the current year transfer in the abbreviated articles. A discussion ensued about keeping the current transportation model in place in an effort to save money, as there are concerns about getting the original transportation model back moving forward. Several options were reviewed regarding transportation, including increasing the bus fee to \$500 for one year keeping in mind that it could result in fewer riders.

(b) Discussion of Logistics for Budget Hearing:

The School Committee discussed the budget hearing scheduled on March 11. Jeanne and Ellen will work on the Budget Booklet.

Susan reported that a warrant article was submitted for short-term space needs and the funds are in the capital budget for which she requested that the funds of \$350,000 are maintained in the capital budget. It is necessary to add a fund transfer to the current transfer article for Town Meeting to cover the gap in the salary reserve. Susan will provide an update next week.

5. **Administrative Matters:**

(a) Possible Vote to Approve Superintendent Contract:

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the contract for the incoming superintendent as discussed. 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

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6. **Consent Agenda:**

- (a) Approval of Minutes: February 3, 2021 and February 10, 2021
- (b) Approval of Accounts Payables Warrant dated March 3, 2021: \$972,422.55

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

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

None.

8. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 10:01 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comments
3. Final FY22 School Committee's Recommended Budget Booklet
4. School Committee Response to the Finance Committee's Budget Request
5. FY21 Budget Hearing Presentation
6. Minutes of February 3, 2021
7. Minutes of February 10, 2021
8. Accounts Payables Warrant