

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

July 15, 2019

Call To Order

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order at 9:04 AM at Babson College Executive Conference Center, by Mr. John Henry, Chair. In attendance were Mrs. Danielle Black, Mr. Alex Cobb, and Ms. Anita Raman of the School Committee; Mrs. Cheryl Antoine and Ms. Onika Jenkins, METCO Representatives to the School Committee; Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent; Dr. J. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; Mrs. Sheri Matthews, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Not present: Mrs. Rachel Stewart.

Also in attendance were members of Administrative Council Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology and School Libraries; Ms. Amy Kelly, Director of District Advancement; Mr. Tim Heavey, Director of Human Resources; Ms. Jennifer Truslow, Director of Student Services; Mr. Anthony Parker, Weston High School Principal; Mr. John Gibbons, Weston Middle School Principal; Dr. Daniel Green, Field School Principal; Ms. Jen Faber, Woodland School Principal, and Ms. Erin Maguire, Country School Principal.

Mr. Henry welcomed all present and thanked them for attending.

Presentation on District Advancement

Ms. Kelly and Dr. Carter provided an update on District Advancement and Social/Emotional Learning (SEL). Ms. Kelly informed the Committee that SEL is inclusive of self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. She shared data from several studies that show that students whose teachers use a comprehensive SEL approach have better social skills, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and are more likely to finish college. Results from studies where Responsive Classroom approach is used show higher academic achievement on standardized tests, improved teacher-student interaction, higher quality instruction, educator job satisfaction, higher lifetime earnings, better mental and physical health, and reduced juvenile crime. There was much discussion as to where and how Weston fits in with these studies. Ms. Kelly discussed examples of ways Weston uses SEL, including bullying prevention, Open Circle, morning meetings, assembly, advisory, buddy bench, and Facing History and Ourselves, among others. Mrs. Black asked about a plan to include SEL as part of teacher evaluation. Dr. Carter said he would discuss Visits of Practice with the principals to figure out what to focus on. The Committee asked about other districts and what they are doing. Mr. Cobb said he would like to see data to be able to measure success. Mr. Henry said how to measure results could be an agenda item for a future meeting. No action taken.

Update on Enrollment

School principals updated the Committee on current enrollment and class size at their schools. Ms. Maguire reported there are 23 new enrollments across the elementary schools, in addition to prior kindergarten enrollment. She indicated no problems are anticipated regarding class size for any grade. Mr. Cobb asked if principals could in the future include data for the numbers for students leaving the district and reasons why (i.e., moving, private school).

Mr. Gibbons shared data for the middle school enrollments including classes with greater than 24 and fewer than 15 students enrolled and reported a total enrollment of 437 students. Mrs. Black, noting the low enrolled Mandarin section, mentioned that languages in general should be revisited. She indicated that the Committee would have be committed to continuing a language for three years if started in Grade 6. Committee members questioned the economic use of resources in supporting such a low enrolled course. Some discussion took place on the topic. Mr. Henry noted that Director of World Languages Kathy Baker was planning to attend a Committee meeting in the early fall to discuss the topic. Mr. Cobb noted they have continued to have this discussion about whether to continue to offer four languages. Mr. Henry indicated that in order to enroll in AP Mandarin, a consistently low-enrolled class, a student must begin the study of Mandarin in middle school. Some discussion took place regarding contractual obligations for faculty scheduled to teach low enrolled courses should the Committee not support the

class. Mr. Henry said he believed eliminating the start of a language is a big decision that should involve the community.

MOTION: Upon motion by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the School Committee voted 3-1, with Mr. Henry voting against, to eliminate Grade 6 Mandarin for 2019-20.

It was noted that this may not prove to be cost savings for the year because of contractual obligations with faculty. It was also noted that this did not preclude Mandarin from being offered next year.

Mr. Parker said courses with fewer than 15 students had previously been presented and reported that all other classes, including all visual arts classes, are now at 15 students or higher. He indicated that the average class size is 20 students with stable numbers and total high school enrollment of 696.

Principal Key Initiatives

School principals highlighted one initiative for the upcoming year at their schools. Mr. Parker noted the high school dropped the weighted GPA starting with the freshman class and indicated the focus for Cabinet this year would be looking at the curriculum and how to remain relevant and viable in the long term. Dr. Connolly noted the continued dual enrollment opportunity in Economics with the school's partnership with Syracuse University. Mr. Gibbons said he is excited about SEL as it fits well with the goals of the middle school. He also noted the near completion of the science classroom renovations. Mr. Cobb suggested pictures of the renovated classrooms be posted on the website.

Dr. Green mentioned SEL as a top priority and also discussed differentiated instruction in math, with extra staff support. Ms. Faber reported this year's focus in the Learning Walkthroughs will be on SEL, and Ms. Maguire highlighted a school-wide initiative this year.

Discussion of District Communication Protocols

Dr. Connolly and school principals discussed their methods of communication with parents and staff. Dr. Connolly reviewed plans to publish a quarterly newsletter with input from other administrators. She indicated this newsletter will be shared with the entire school community. Dr. Connolly reported that she communicates every Sunday with an electronic message, "A Couple of Thoughts," to the other central office administrators. Dr. Green, Ms. Maguire and Ms. Faber all reported that they send their faculty a weekly newsletter on Saturday or Sunday evenings and communicate as necessary with parents through Infinite Campus. They also hold principal coffees and use social media on occasion. Dr. Green reported he sends a bi-weekly newsletter to parents and plans to review the website and coordinate with PTO about communication. Mr. Gibbon reported a daily electronic update is sent to parents from the Middle School office and he communicates as needed with faculty. He noted that much communication is provided by grade directors and teachers using Google classroom. Mr. Parker reported the high school also publishes a daily update, a web-site blog post, and that most communication from the high school is from teachers, PTO, Athletics, Class Parents, Class Advisors, etc. All mentioned the "clunkiness" of Infinite Campus.

Mr. Henry shared a complaint he received that district communications have not all been received. Dr. McCanne discussed communication tools, including the website, school and district updates that are pushed out and blog based, Infinite Campus, and RAVE. He reported some changes and updates had been made that have helped with messages being received, but he did note that some messages may be considered junk mail. Dr. McCanne shared a flowchart of communication protocols. Dr. Connolly said she would ask new families to subscribe to the updates.

Mr. Henry asked about gathering student telephone numbers as a means to improve communication with students. Dr. McCanne noted the goal is to start collecting mobile phone numbers from students. Mr. Cobb suggested the flowchart be shared with the PTO and also inquired as to the school administrative assistant role in communications. No action taken.

Technology Discussion

Dr. McCanne shared information regarding cost buying or leasing equipment cost savings. He sought Committee approval to pursue leasing options. It was noted this would not be an authorization to purchase. Dr. McCanne indicated he would present sometime in the fall a proposal for next year.

MOTION: Upon motion by Mr. Henry and seconded by Mr. Cobb, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the Director of Technology to pursue 0% percent financing option for technology, with actual purchase to be authorized at a future meeting.

Review and Approval of Technology Acceptable Use Policy

Mr. Henry said this would be a future agenda item and not approved at this meeting. He noted there are current policies in place for students and staff and also current School Committee-approved regulations. He noted that Dr. McCanne is not proposing changes to policies but is proposing new guidelines for K-2, 5-8 and 6-12, to be reviewed by Technology, and coordinated with the Superintendent and Principals. Ms. Raman suggested that students review guidelines as well, and Mr. Cobb suggested the policy may need updating to include social media. Some discussion ensued and it was agreed this should be an agenda item later in August. No action taken.

Discussion of Composition and Charge for Secondary School Schedule Committee

Mr. Henry proposed the composition of a new committee to follow up to the Secondary School Start Time/Scheduling Innovation Committee. He proposed committee composition include the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, High School and Middle School Principals, Field School Principal, one Department Head, two teachers (one High School, one Middle School), two parents (one current, one graduated former), two School Committee members, and students. It was noted that this committee should include discussions with drama, athletics and guidance staff. Mr. Henry suggested the committee's primary charge would be to review current middle and high school schedules and determine what, if any, changes are recommended. He said the focus would be on what will be offered and what is relevant for students to learn in six years. Mr. Henry indicated they would send out requests for participation in early fall. No action taken.

Discussion of Why Weston

Dr. Carter shared "a conversation starter" on what is extraordinary about Weston. Some of the things Dr. Carter cited are Weston's closely-knit school community; the amount of relational trust between students, families, and staff; outstanding educators and their retention rate; multi-faceted learning (i.e. wax museum); opportunities for professional collaboration; design thinking, such as the Triangle Challenge; Creative Expression and Showcasing Talents in drama, music, art; Science on Case Campus; Project-based and Service Learning, like J-Term and June Academy; Music for Everyone (90% of student body participates); Teamwork and Sportsmanship; Community Events, such as the Civics Bee, Trunk or Treat, Symposium for High School and Council on Aging; WEEFC and PTO Support, and success of the graduates and colleges they attend. Dr. Carter shared what he called a "working document" and said this is just a beginning of a plan to showcase or market Weston. Dr. Connolly suggested students might be able to put the slide show out as a multi-media on website. A question arose as to whom the target audience is for the marketing. Mr. Henry said it would be good for realtors as well as the community. He requested Committee members share with Kimo their thoughts and any proposed additions to the list.

Review and Approval of High School School Improvement Plan (SIP)

The Committee discussed the High School SIP prior to approval. Mr. Henry said the main change in the document reflects what is in process. Mr. Cobb noted a missing word or phrase under Strategic Initiatives regarding homework, which Mr. Parker clarified.

MOTION: Upon motion by Mrs. Black and seconded by Mr. Cobb, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the 2019 School Improvement Plan for Weston High School as amended.

Discussion of Open Meeting Law (OML) Complaint

Mr. Henry discussed a recent OML complaint filed by resident Mary Ellen Sykes regarding three sets of minutes. He said a recent complaint was for missing minutes for a February 4, 2019 meeting that convened in open session and then immediately went into Executive Session without returning to open session. He noted the minutes reflecting the meeting convening would soon be approved. He noted other minutes of May 20 and June 3, 2019, where the Committee convened first in open session prior to the regular meeting were revised to clarify that and were scheduled for approval tonight. Mr. Henry indicated that no periodic review of Executive Session minutes would occur in Open Session until they are reviewed by the Chair, no later than the end of the summer. He said the Chair would recommend to the Committee which Executive Session minutes could be released, noting that most of their Executive Sessions are regarding Collective Bargaining strategy and may not be releasable or available for public review.

Mr. Henry noted this is the third complaint filed with the Attorney General, without any inquiry, email or discussion to Committee members. He noted that the School Committee is a dedicated group of volunteers trying to do the best for our students. He said the complaints take time, incur legal costs, and said he is trying to address them in a transparent manner. Mr. Henry urged the citizens to contact a School Committee member with any questions or concerns before filing a complaint, noting that honest and open discourse goes two ways. Mr. Cobb agreed and indicated it is easy to reach out to Committee members. No action taken.

Discussion of Weston Educational Administrative Assistants Association (WEAAA) Contract

Mr. Henry reported on reaching successful negotiations with the WEAAA and reviewed key elements of the agreement, including increases of 2.25%, 2%, and 1.75% increase for three years and a concession to end retirement bonus for new employees. Mr. Henry indicated that contract approval as an agenda item had not been posted prior to the 48-hour OML requirement so they would wait to have the Committee vote on the agreement until a future meeting. Mrs. Black indicated she was undecided if she would support the agreement as she thought the 6% increase over three years was high. Mr. Cobb, who served on the negotiations team for this unit, suggested the school administrative assistants might assume a larger role in school communications.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Approval of Minutes of June 18 and June 22, 2018

MOTION: Upon motion by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Mrs. Black, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of June 17 and June 26, 2019 and revised minutes of May 20 and June 3, 2019.

Certificate of Warrant

Ms. Matthews presented a Certificate of the Secretary, approval of warrants for payment.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Mr. Henry, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrant for payment of \$6,582,955.41 by the Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations.

Acceptance of Gifts

Ms. Matthews informed the Committee that Director of Music Chris Memoli reported that parent Leila Hooper would like to donate a bassoon valued at \$9,500 to be used for a new student, particularly one with financial need, and requested the Committee accept this generous gift.

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Ms. Raman, the School Committee voted unanimously to accept gift of bassoon valued at \$9,500 from Ms. Leila Hooper as proposed.

Adjourn for Lunch and Executive Session

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Mrs. Black, at 12:25 PM the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn for lunch, to resume at 1:00 PM for Executive Session, for purposes of discussion of Collective Bargaining, with the intent to not return to

open session, but to hold a legal training workshop, with Mrs. Black voting aye, Mr. Cobb voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye; and Mr. Henry voting aye.

Executive Session

Participants discussed negotiations with AFSCME and WAPA. Various points and strategies were brought up and discussed. No action taken during Executive Session.

Adjournment

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Cobb and seconded by Dr. Heller, at 1:42 PM, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn from Executive Session with Mrs. Black voting aye, Mr. Cobb voting aye, Ms. Raman voting aye, and Mr. Henry voting aye.

Workshop on Legal Training

The School Committee held its annual workshop for update on legal training. Attorney Angela Smagula attended along with other members of the administration. No action taken.

Documents used by Committee:

- Country/Woodland/Field Enrollment 2019-2020
- Weston Middle School Class Size Report 7.15.19
- Technology Acceptable Use Guidelines (GK-G2, GE-G5, MS/HS, Employees)
- Technology Discussion Items, June 15, 2019
- Technology Information re: lease vs purchase
- Communication Flow Chart
- School Improvement Plan (Weston High School)