

MINUTES OF WESTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Woodland School

January 29, 2020

A meeting of the Weston School Committee was called to order at 4:00 PM at Woodland School by Mr. John Henry, Chair. In attendance were Mrs. Danielle Black, Mr. Alex Cobb Ms. Anita Raman, and Mrs. Rachel Stewart of the Weston School Committee; Ms. Cheryl Antoine, METCO Representative to the School Committee; Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent; Dr. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning; and Ms. Sheri Matthews, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations.

Also present were Finance Committee members Ms. Lisa Reitano and Mr. John Sallay; Dr. Lee McCanne, Director of Technology and School Libraries; Ms. Jen Faber, Woodland School Principal; Ms. Erin McGuire, Country School Principal; Dr. Dan Green Field School Principal; Ms. Jen Truslow, Director of Student Services; and Ms. Anne Zernicke, Assistant Director of Student Services;

Mr. Henry welcomed everyone, introduced members of the School Committee and Administration, and reviewed the agenda. He indicated that elementary schools would be first for review. He reviewed the procedure for public participation at the meeting.

Budget Review

Elementary – Ms. Faber, Ms. Maguire, and Dr. Green presented budgets for elementary schools. Ms. Faber expressed appreciation for the opportunity to present together as it demonstrates the elementary principals' collaboration and budget planning together. Ms. Maguire expressed appreciation for the instructional coaches which help unify the schools across the district. She noted that Country will have one less section of Kindergarten next year and, if an additional section is needed, it would be housed at Woodland. She also noted that Country School was reducing office aide support by one position. Ms. Faber reported at Woodland, there will be one less section at Grade 3, a reduction of a .2 Special Education teacher, reduction of .3 BCBA, and reduction of building aide. Dr. Green reported that Field School enrollments appear stable, with the same number of classrooms next year as this year, 7 sections each of Grades 4 and 5. He spoke highly of the addition of Jenna Poras, former Grade 4 teacher, as Math Coach, a position funded in August by a grant. He reported that Field School would reduce physical education from 1.5 hours to 1 hour per week and indicated a building aide position was cut.

Audience member Patricia Dacey asked about the relevance and success of instructional coaches and asked if this is an area of the budget that might be considered for reduction. Ms. Maguire reported that the coaches provide ongoing professional development and allow teachers to learn new curriculum. Several parents questioned the reduction in physical education when studies show the importance of movement for students. Dr. Green agreed and said he is always looking at ways to increase student movement but noted the additional time would be used for SEL and Responsive Classroom.

METCO – Ms. Matthews noted she would update the grants page and share with School Committee. Ms. Rivers reviewed how METCO is funded, noting that the amount of state grant is determined by the number of students in the program. She noted there are 160 Boston students in Weston this year and that the grant funds the salaries of the director, liaisons, support staff and some transportation costs. Ms. Rivers noted that additional funds are provided by an anonymous donation that funds the breakfast clubs and Woodland and Country Schools, Friends of METCO, a St. Peter's Episcopal Church grant that generously supports academic travel of METCO students, and donations to a general fund. Ms. Rivers talked about the recent changes in enrollment of students to METCO, Inc., and its potential impact. Dr. Connolly noted that towns cannot discriminate based on disabilities, so that if Weston has a program that can provide services, we must do so; otherwise, a child could be sent back to home district.

Special Education – Ms. Truslow presented an overview of Special Education, noting the difficult decision to reduce the BCBA position, a high school reduction of .5 or .6 FTE, reduction of a learning assistant at Field School, Middle School and High School, and elimination of the Out of District

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Coordinator position. She noted the responsibility for that will be absorbed by Team Chairs. Ms. Truslow noted an increase in out of district costs primarily due to students who moved in during the year. She noted a reduction in support staff in Student Services as well. Audience members raised concerns regarding reduction in Student Services personnel given student need for services. Ms. Truslow responded that reductions were based on service deliveries required under IEPs, and that the district will be able to meet those needs as currently known. There was much discussion by audience members about the work of the Out-of-District coordinator, concern regarding the loss of that position and whether that work could be absorbed by the Team Chairs. Ms. Truslow noted she believes that the Team Chairs are well equipped to provide required services for out-of-district students. Dr. Connolly noted that staff had been increased significantly in recent years. Mr. Henry noted that the School Committee would also monitor service needs. The Committee and Mr. David Poras discussed possible collective bargaining impacts of changes to duties.

Ms. Truslow also responded to audience concerns regarding absenteeism, discussing the Compass program at the high school. Ms. Truslow also responded to audience concerns regarding learning assistant workloads, noting that all learning assistant assignments are IEP-based, and that service needs under all IEPs will be met.

A brief discussion took place regarding electronic IEPs as a means of saving paper. Ms. Truslow noted the DESE has an improvement project underway and that is being looked at.

Central Office – Ms. Matthews noted that Case House renovations would soon be completed and people would be moving back. She talked about the Employee Portal purchased last summer, leases for copiers, increase in membership dues, postage and contracted services. Ms. Matthews reviewed some of the accomplishments of the district, including work of the instructional coaches, Lucy Caulkins Institute, Math intervention.

Mr. McDonald asked about the increase in Administration at a time of declining enrollment. Dr. Connolly spoke about the importance of the Director of District Advancement and Director of Human Resources positions. Several audience members spoke highly of the work Ms. Amy Kelly has been doing in providing support in social/emotional learning across the district for staff and students.

Grants and Revolving Funds – Ms. Matthews reviewed State and Federal entitlement grants and WEEFC grants. She also provided information on revolving funds, which include Food Services, Pre-School tuition, Circuit Breaker and money from Wayland for transportation provided.

Mr. Henry informed people of the process from this point, noting that a public hearing on the budget would take place on Monday, February 10. Mr. Poras asked if the Committee might consider relocating the meeting at the Middle School, noting difficult logistics in the current space. Mr. Henry said they would look into the details of relocating a posted hearing.

Adjournment

MOTION: Upon motion made by Mr. Henry and seconded by Mrs. Black, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:33 PM.