



WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To: Westport Board of Education Members
From: Thomas Scarice, Superintendent of Schools
Re: January 18, 2022 Board of Education Meeting
Date: January 14, 2022

Provided below for Board consideration is an overview of the meeting agenda items for January 18, 2022. The meeting will be held in-person.

Discussion

1. Health Update

Supervisor of Health Services, Sue Levasseur, will continue to provide health updates to the Board as we continue to endure this recent severe Covid-19 wave of infections. Updates on testing, infection rates, mitigating measures, and other Covid-19 related matters will be provided to the Board. The requirement of masks at recess will be removed on January 18, and before and after school programming will also return on January 18. It is anticipated that the FCIAC will collectively welcome fans back to games following their meeting on January 22, but that is yet to be determined. Although hard to imagine, the official infection rates during the Omicron surge was over four times our peak levels in the spring of 2020 and the winter of 2020-2021. Based on conversations with CT DPH, it is possible that, based on home tests and those who did not test, the actual rates might be five to ten times higher than reported rates.

2. FY 2023 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools

Given the postponement of the first Board of Education full day budget workshop, and the adjustment to the budget calendar, the Board will pick up where the process was left off on Friday at the all day budget workshops. After thematic presentations on staffing, special education, teaching and learning, technology, facilities, and transportation, the Board posed a number of inquiries which, when applied, would adjust the total budget. The administration will be prepared to demonstrate the financial impact of these various considerations. In addition, the administration can assist the Board in considering the programmatic implications of each of these.

3. Board of Education 5-Year Capital Forecast Including Long Lots Elementary School and Stepping Stones Preschool

On January 13, the Finance and Facilities Committee was presented with a report on Long Lots Elementary School, the Stepping Stones Preschool, and a draft of the 5-Year Capital Forecast. Our partners from Colliers, International will be in attendance to review and present these reports to the Board. After input from the Committee on January 13, the administration is making adjustments to the 5-Year Capital Forecast, which is expected to be reflected in a revised version to be presented at the Board meeting Tuesday. This is a first read only for the Board and no decision is expected to be made at this point.

It is important to include the Long Lots Elementary School and Stepping Stones Preschool reports as they both present implications for long term capital forecasting. The Board will be presented with these reports, as well as a consideration of next steps in this process. Now that a thorough review of the Long Lots Elementary School mechanical and building envelope has been completed, it will be necessary to review these projects in the context of the district-wide capital plan, and to make considerations for how the current facility supports, or hinders, sound elementary instructional practices. In addition, it will be necessary to review how efficiently the square footage of the facility is used to deliver programs and instruction to elementary level students, and how the projected enrollment of Long Lots Elementary School could impact future plans and options for the Board and community.

Stepping Stones Preschool, housed at Coleytown Elementary School, is experiencing space issues due to the student enrollment growth at the elementary level. Increased sections at Coleytown Elementary School has forced the building administration of both schools to work creatively in assigning spaces to the preschool, the special area teachers, and support staff. In addition, the ideal preschool model is a "50/50" special needs/typical peer composition. In order to appropriately

accommodate this model, additional space could be needed.

The current recommendation for a temporary solution is to add two modular classrooms (constructed in one structure) in order to accommodate the increase in student enrollment at Coleytown Elementary School, while keeping the preschool functioning as one efficient model in one location. Consideration for splitting Stepping Stones Preschool into two locations was entertained last year, however, for a number of reasons, including inefficiencies, the recommendation is to add temporary space to Coleytown Elementary School, while a long-term solution is determined for Stepping Stones Preschool. In order to advance the long term planning process, the administration has already contracted for services that determine the appropriate educational specifications for the preschool model (i.e. space needed based on programming expectations). Once a temporary solution has been identified, the administration is prepared to study long term solutions for the Board's consideration.

4. Proposed Modifications to the 2021-2022 School Calendar as a Result of January 3 PD Day

As a precaution, based on the exponential rise in infection rates due to the Omicron variant over the winter break and New Year, and the concern for our ability to staff schools with building based personnel (i.e. teachers, support staff, administrators), and buses with drivers, I made the decision to cancel school for students only on Monday January 3.

This action was taken to ensure staffing levels would be sufficient to hold school as some districts across the state had to close due to lack of staffing and bus drivers in the days and weeks after the New Year. Over the break, infection rates among our students and staff were beyond anything we experienced during the pandemic, and there were many reports of travelers struggling to return home due to many flight cancellations. I intended to avoid a chaotic scenario where we might have had to send students home early at a school, or more than one, due to lack of staffing. Just before the break Coleytown Elementary School was very close to closing for one day based on staffing issues. Fortunately, Coleytown Elementary School Principal, Janna Sirowich, worked closely with Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and General Administration, John Bayers, as well as with her peers across the district to ensure appropriate staffing levels which kept the school open.

Furthermore, I forecasted significant numbers of students and staff out of school over the coming weeks following the New Year due to isolation or quarantine. While requiring staff to attend on January 3, we would be able to assess our true levels of staffing and bus drivers (i.e. those actually in attendance on January 3 since reports of infection were rapidly filling the reporting inbox). This day also afforded the opportunity to direct staff to develop plans in advance of substantial student absences, and alternative plans for staffing absences. The goal, which has been consistent this year, has been to remain fully open for all instruction and extracurricular programs the entire school year. January 3 was an opportunity to maintain this goal.

There are calendar implications for this decision on January 3. Teachers are contracted to work 188 days and the student calendar provides for 182 school days, two days above the legally required minimum of 180 days. The school year was expected to conclude on June 16, prior to any snow days. There have been two snow days, January 5 and January 7. There is a distinct possibility of additional snow days between now and the end of the winter season. Given that we have remained consistently in school during the most infectious period of the pandemic, and that our resolve to endure the greatest challenges of the pandemic is strong, I recommend that the Board reduce the student calendar by one day, from 182 to 181 student days, to accommodate for the professional day on January 3, which was used as described above. I anticipate that there will be no further interruption of student days due to the pandemic. I would not recommend Board action at this point in time as there are sure to be weather implications which could impact additional student days. I recommend that once the Board arrives at a date where winter weather will not impact the calendar, action is taken to reduce the student days from 182 to 181.