

**Westport School Committee
Regular Meeting
DATE: Thursday, August 19, 2021
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: Virtual Meeting**

Please click the link below to join the webinar:
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MINUTES

Members Present: Melissa Pacheco, Nancy Stanton Cross, Nancy Tavares, Antonio Viveiros

Members Absent: Michelle Orlando

Also Present: Kevin Aguiar Assistant Principal Westport High School, Thomas Aubin Superintendent, Laura Charette Principal Westport Middle School, Jennifer Chaves Extended Day Director, Stacey Duquette PreK-Gr.4 Principal, Darren Elwell Director of Curriculum, Michael Grandfield Assistant Principal Westport High School, Kerri McKinnon Principal Westport High School, Lori Melo Administrative Assistant, Sean Persico Assistant Principal Westport Middle School, Elaine Santos Director of Special Education, Anthony Tomah Technology Director, 71 Community Participants

Special Guest: Matthew Armendo Westport Director of Public Health

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance - Chair Tavares opened the Virtual School Committee Meeting at 6:30 pm. with a quorum of the members present, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Chair Tavares announced:

This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c.30A, Section 20 and on June 16, 2021 Governor Baker signed an Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency.

Chair Tavares acknowledged the community in sending emails concerning masks. All communications have been read and all concerns are appreciated. Chair Tavares clarified that last week's meeting was based on an advisory received and they needed to meet quickly. The notice was posted to the town but not on the school website. Once this was noticed, the meeting was posted to social media and the school's website. Chair Tavares wants to let the community know the conversation concerning masks is an ongoing topic.

Comments and Statements from the Public - Public comment will be limited to 3 minutes.

Robin Morin - First grade teacher at WES, thanked everyone involved in decisions made to keep student and staff safe last year. She urged to take the same cautions as last year and make mask wearing mandatory. Students will be able to move around more in centers, small groups and it will be a less rigid environment. Since younger children cannot get the vaccine, it would be safer for her and the students to continue to protect everyone by wearing masks.

Shawn Martin - Parent has 2 children under the age of 12 and 1 child over age 12. He would like the committee to reconsider the mask mandate since the numbers continue to increase. By not using masks, this is sending kids into an unsafe environment. Effects of the recent spread of this pandemic shows this variant is more contagious in children. He would like to keep kids safe and not have students quarantine and miss school.

Nicole Potter - She thanked everyone for their continued work with another challenging year ahead. She is mostly concerned about the safety of kids and quarantining for her children. If masks are worn and a child is identified as a close contact, if both are masked and spaced 3 ft. apart they would be exempt from quarantine, using the "Test and Stay" protocol. If masks are not required students need to quarantine for at least 7 days. This is a critical point about the quarantine issue. Students will miss face to face education. She is respectfully asking to consider a phased approach or masks for students at least for those who cannot get vaccinated.

Linda Ferreira - Ms. Ferreira sent in an email earlier, she appreciated the decision to have parents make the choice on mask wearing.

Brittney Brasells - Ms. Brasells has a grade 5 student and is happy with the decision made to allow families to make the decision. Students will not be forced to wear masks. Use social distancing.

Shannon Dufresne - Parent appreciated the committee's choice, she has 2 children in the district. She chose to use home schooling last year. She asked to continue to have an open mind with the kid's best interests at heart.

Ethan Gifford - Mr. Gifford asked a question. If there is a close contact exposure and children were wearing masks do they go by DESE guidelines? Is it on a case by case basis? Who will track? Mr. Aubin stated they will be meeting on August 23 with the nursing staff, Ms. Santos and Matt Armendo from the BOH to discuss testing and quarantine protocols, then policies will be made. They are waiting for a state funded grant as part of the Test and Stay programming.

Abby Clermont - Parent has 3 children and in fall last year they were remote. Ms. Clermont asked if there is consideration on what is happening elsewhere before making decisions? She mentioned Alabama had to close within the first 2 weeks of school and New Zealand shut down their country for 14 days. She has concerns with no mask mandate and mentioned the delta variant has got a greater stickiness that can spread to 8.5 people instead of 2.5. Although she knows it is up to the state, she would like a remote option. Mr. Aubin verified coming from the state as of August 18 Commissioner Riley informed there is no remote option available.

Tracy Pereira - Ms. Pereira is the MAC school nurse. She informed everyone that masking is 1 key for mitigation strategies to keep kids in school as well as social distancing. Last year there were parents that would not follow protocols in place. For example, send kids to school when sick, did not report when appropriate, did not test, and would not pick up kids. They experienced a huge drop in other illness like flu, strep throat, and common colds. She recommends to make a mandate for kids that cannot get vaccinated and at the start of school mandate masks.

Adrienne Beauregard - Parent thanked everyone for all their hard work, and keeping this issue on the agenda. She sent in an email today stating that Westport should start school with a mask mandate. Westport is in red zone and has moved up to over 5%. She urged the committee to engage in an expert like Mr. Bromage to give guidance for masks being mandated or optional.

Rick Grundy - Mr. Grundy is in favor of mask wearing. He expressed appreciation for parents that want choice. He said this is a personal choice and a convenience. He mentioned that all students need to be in person this year. For some students Special Education services are required and many students have pre-existing conditions. These students do not have a convenience choice. Both sides of this issue have the option to home school. There is no perfect option and would like to meet in the middle. In the meantime, continue on the path to have in person learning.

III. Informational Agenda

F. Mask Mandate Update - (taken out of order)

Mr. Armendo Westport Director of Public Health gave an update on case status. Beginning July 1-15 there were 2 new cases, July 16 - 31 28 cases, August 1 - today 89 cases and has since gone up by another 10 cases. Westport is in the red zone at 5.73% now. Children 12 years old and under are not eligible to be vaccinated. We are seeing more infections in this age group. Mr. Armendo recommends

going into this school year, masks should be considered, along with social distancing. This decision can be re-visited each meeting to see trends, then any mandates can be lifted.

Chair Tavares asked if there were any questions for Mr. Armendo?

Ms. Stanton Cross asked several questions. Out of the cases from July 1 to today were these vaccinated or unvaccinated people? Mr. Armendo replied they were largely unvaccinated individuals. Another question was, would you recommend that vaccinated individuals be given the option for mask wearing? Mr. Armendo replied, yes it could be an option. What are the figures for residents? A total of 64% Westport residents are vaccinated according to Mr. Armendo. Ms. Stanton Cross mentioned that Westport is a vacation town. When out of towners report a positive case is this counted and reported to Westport? Mr. Armendo stated it is reported only if they have a residence in Westport. Ms. Stanton Cross asked what percentage would reach herd immunity? Mr. Armendo said upwards of 80%.

Ms. Pacheco asked several questions. Do you have a range that gauges when people should mask up? Mr. Armendo said if the Incident rate drops below 5% then we are showing a downward trend. The numbers should be followed. Ms. Pacheco asked if a person is inside and able to social distance are masks still recommended? Mr. Armendo stated a mask should be worn while the percentage is up in the classroom even when social distancing. Ms. Pacheco asked if vaccinated people should still wear a mask? Mr. Armendo said that DPH states someone who is vaccinated is unlikely to spread the virus but still can.

Mr. Viveiros mentioned last year in the midst of COVID everyone was getting tested. The percentage of the positivity rate is based on the number of people getting tested and there is not as many getting tested now. Mr. Armendo shared there were 908 tested within the last 14 days. Mr. Viveiros mentioned that it is said to wear a mask to protect those around you and not just you. Mr. Armendo stated mask wearing protects each person equally so therefore protects everybody.

Ms. Stanton Cross asked for clarification from Mr. Armendo. The BOH advisory statement issued a reminder masking up for K-12 inside school buildings. This statement has brought confusion to some people. Mr. Armendo said this was an oversight on his part. The state lifted the mask mandate and he did not take it out of the report. It was an error that he will be correcting.

Mr. Aubin reported vaccination numbers from Channel 5 in WCVB Boston. Mr. Armendo said those numbers are not right. The state's report as of August 19 has 65% of Westport residents partially vaccinated and 33% of youth ages 12-15 are fully vaccinated. Mr. Aubin stressed to get the correct numbers we should look to the professionals in community.

Members agreed that after hearing new information reconsideration may be needed so this item will be placed on the Action Agenda for the September 2 school committee meeting. Mr. Armendo will be at the next meeting and a review of the recent local data will take place.

(Mr. Armendo left here at 7:26 pm.)

A. Superintendent Report -

Mr. Aubin gave an update and began by thanking the Town of Westport for issuing a temporary certificate of occupancy permit. Hours of operation are 7 am. - 3:30 pm., 12 people or less, need to leave by 3:30 pm., no wandering in the building unless cleared by Mr. Gilchrist, Ms. McKinnon and Ms. Charette are the contacts, no parents, no teachers, no meetings or tours unless arranged by Mr. Gilchrist.

Anyone needing to contact the school during the transition between the old and new school should send an email. The phones may not be working until the switch takes place.

They have been meeting with Dana Steward concerning the public use of the tennis courts. Tennis courts will not be available for use during the school day. Once school is out, a time can be booked through recreation. They are in the process of coordinating with the Snyder family for the rededication of the tennis courts.

Important dates were announced as follows: Moving day is August 19 and August 20, August 30 teachers can set up their classrooms (optional), August 31 new staff orientation, September 1 Convocation, September 2 Professional Development for staff, September 10 Pre-School orientation, September 13 Pre-K and K orientation, September 14 1st day for Pre-K and K, September 16 1st day for Preschool, September 7 first day of school for K-12.

Mr. Aubin met with the Marion Institute to implement a farm to table initiative to improve meals and bring awareness to the food supply chain and be able to access food locally.

On August 24 there will be a meeting with nursing staff and Mr. Armendo to set protocols for the September 2 meeting.

It was noted that 94.6% staff are vaccinated.

B. WCS Bill Warrant: 8-13-21 \$119,672.29 and 8-27-21 \$334,050.44 - Chair Tavares acknowledged that the bill warrants were signed. The bill warrant dated 8-13-21 was in the amount of \$119,672.29 and the bill warrant dated 8-27-21 was in the amount of \$334,050.44. Both bill warrants were emailed to school committee members for review.

C. O.G. Certified Teacher and Training Update – Ms. Santos reported a total of 16 staff members were trained in OG strategies that consisted of classroom teachers, special education teachers and interventionists. There are 7 staff that are interested in being certified, with a possibility of 1 more. A total of 3 staff are willing to be district trainers.

D. Edgenuity Program Update – Mr. Elwell reported this software replaces Odysseyware used at the high school as a credit recovery program. Edgenuity is a credit recovery program and provides elective offerings through Virtual High School. This program gives students the opportunity to take electives not readily available through school.

Mr. Elwell mentioned Mr. Aguiar will give an update on the program from his experience last year. Mr. Aguiar mentioned this program is not a program all students will pass. Students need to be monitored and have the ability to take career electives. The program is worthwhile and a lot of students benefit from it.

Ms. Stanton Cross asked about costs. Mr. Aguiar mentioned they saved \$1,200 from the original price. Mr. Elwell reported Odysseyware cost \$11,000 and Edgenuity cost \$17,875 (\$11,000 coming from high school budget/ \$6,800 from Title IV). Last year cost more with the Professional Development package. Ms. Stanton Cross supports the program and wants to be sure funds are available to pay for it.

E. Summer Reading Update - Ms. Stanton Cross clarified that when she was questioning the summer reading books she was speaking about the 9th grade list. She also was in contact with guidance and the adjustment counselor. She mentioned the reading was gloomy and heavy and should have been assigned during the school year to have guided instruction available. Since there are no department heads a better way to have some oversight is needed. Ms. Stanton Cross asked Mr. Aubin to look into this. Possibly have Mr. Elwell oversee reading lists, add some variety, flexibility by doing a STEM project, write a song, write a play or somehow enhance the community at large. Think out of box and have variety.

Discussion took place on other summer reading issues. Members do want students reading, they want some structure in creating the book lists, promote choice and have them read what they want to read with teacher approval, let students do what brings them joy, do what they love and expound upon and share with others, this could be to practice an instrument or read manga books.

Mr. Viveiros mentioned that summer reading has a weighted grade. A student is already starting at a deficit at the beginning of the school year if they choose not to complete the assignment.

Ms. Stanton Cross asked Superintendent Aubin to have the Leadership Team meet and come up with ideas for next summer, preferably before the holiday break.

Ms. R. Mercer a Westport English Teacher wants to share a teacher's perspective. People in general are becoming less literate and it is difficult to have kids read. We should inspire and offer titles that can be chosen from. They should be free to choose from a wide variety of topics and themes as well as be relevant to their world. What needs to be looked at is what is written and how it is read. It is difficult to select books to challenge and not overwhelm students. Go to amazon.com for quick overviews of book titles. Ms. Mercer recommends to include all English Teachers and make time in a Professional Development Day to discuss summer reading. A few years back they did have options to be creative.

Mr. Aubin mentioned that Ms. Mercer expressed logistical concerns. He is asking the Leadership Team to look at "why do we do what we do"? What is the purpose of Summer Reading? Mitigate learning loss over summer? They will take a look at summer reading and include as many people for collaborative thinking.

G. Sound Equipment for Hybrid School Committee Meetings – Mr. Tomah gave an update on the mixing board. He is hoping to receive it on time for the start of school. Mr. Tomah has been in contact with Ms. Jolly and Mr. Van Voorhis about having the proper wiring installed for the new mixing board.

Equipment for hybrid meeting - Mr. Tomah informed everyone that all microphones except the one where the person is talking, must be muted. Other options to avoid a sound problem is to have 25 ft. in between each other or wear a headset.

H. New Enrollments – SRO Residency Checks - Mr. Aubin reported the enrollment numbers are going up every day. There will be a new school resource officer this year and the committee will be updated.

I. Discuss the Hiring of Six Substitutes – 2 For Each Building - Mr. Aubin is requesting approval to hire building substitutes to help with absences. Last year from COVID issues attendance was a huge problem.

Ms. Stanton Cross mentioned they looked at numbers and it would cost a bit more but not impactful and it will provide a consistent person kids are familiar with.

J. Subcommittee Updates - Mr. Viveiros reported weekly construction meetings are ongoing. They continue to see progress and are finalizing details. On August 23rd limited staff can go into the building. To date the project is on schedule for normal opening day.

VI. Action Agenda

A. Review and Act on Minutes of Thursday, July 27, 2021 Work Session, Thursday, August 5, 2021, and Thursday, August 12, 2021 -

A motion was made to approve the Minutes of Thursday, July 27, 2021 Work Session, Thursday, August 5, 2021, and Thursday, August 12, 2021.

Motion by Viveiros, seconded by Stanton Cross 4/0/0

B. Review and Act on the Hiring of Six Substitutes – 2 for Each Building -

A motion was made to hire 6 building substitutes to be placed at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Motion by Stanton Cross, seconded by Pacheco 4/0/0

It was noted these positions are not covered under the WFT contract and are a fixed salary for 180 days.

C. Review and Act on 5-Day Pre-K Program -

A motion was made to approve having a 5-day Pre-K Program.

Motion by Viveiros, seconded by Stanton Cross

Ms. Santos reported that they have contacted all enrolled parents from the 2-day and 3-day program and asked about their interest in a 5-day program. A total of 10 parents said yes and agreed to a 5-day program. Two were already in a classroom since they take enrolled students first. They have not contacted parents on the waitlist of 20. The classes will be capped at 15 and we have 11-12 right now. There are 3 classrooms going. Ms. Santos said 1 teacher and 1 teacher assistant will be needed if an additional classroom opens up. Ms. Santos verified the 3 classes impact the budget by \$190,000.

Ms. Stanton Cross would like to amend the motion to add 1 classroom teacher and 1 teacher assistant for an additional Pre-K class to be paid with ESSER funds since this has not been budgeted. This

amendment is contingent upon it being an appropriate expense for ESSER funding and post for the positions.

Motion amended by Stanton Cross, seconded by Pacheco

4/0/0

Further discussion was requested by Ms. Pacheco if funding is not available.

D. Review and Act on Westport Middle-High School Handbook -

Discussion took place on parts of the handbook that included page 54 recess at MAC, lunch detention, list of consequences, attendance pg. 22-23, more equitable dress code and page 30 mask policy.

Ms. McKinnon explained by including the code of conduct this shows the use of progressive discipline as a framework. Attendance will utilize the same system as this past year's protocols by nurses and the mask protocol will be added when finalized.

Ms. Stanton Cross asked about cell phone use. Ms. Charette would like approval for no cell phone use at any time for grades 5-8. Ms. Charette is also looking into changing the Honor Roll Eligibility to have High Honors changed to 90 and above and Honors changed to 80 and above. Chair Tavares requested for this to be tabled. A Policy Subcommittee meeting will be needed for any policy changes.

Ms. McKinnon stated the cell phone policy for the high school will be kept the same. Cell phones are not allowed anywhere in the building except in the cafeteria.

Ms. Stanton Cross asked about a gum chewing policy. Ms. Charette said there is not one for the middle school and some IEPs have this listed as an accommodation. Ms. Stanton Cross would like to have a policy for no gum chewing unless stated in a student's IEP for the middle school. Mr. Aguiar verified on the high school side there is a policy concerning gum chewing.

The approval of the Westport Middle-High School Handbook was tabled for the next meeting.

V. Routine Matters - Correspondence and Notices - Chair Tavares received many emails. She has acknowledged and responded to them.

VI. Topics the Chair could not Reasonably Anticipate Forty-eight (48) Hours in Advance of the Meeting-

Mr. Aubin announced the School Committee will be having community discussions on the spending of ESSER funds on August 31 and September 9 both days at 6 pm.

FOLLOW UP ITEMS

The committee requests:

- Have the Leadership Team meet and come up with ideas for next year's summer reading, preferably before the holiday break.
- Check to see if ESSER funds can be used for an additional Pre-K class.

VII. Adjourn - A motion was made to adjourn. With members being present and voting individually and unanimously, the motion passes.

Motion by Stanton Cross, seconded by Pacheco

4/0/0

Roll call vote:

Pacheco	Yes	Stanton Cross	Yes	Tavares	Yes	Viveiros	Yes
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The Virtual School Committee Meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

MEETING DOCUMENTS

Hiring of Six Substitutes – 2 for Each Building
5-Day Pre-K Program
Westport Middle-High School Handbook

Submitted by Sharon Pinho School Committee Recording Secretary