



HAMILTON-WENHAM
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
5 SCHOOL STREET, WENHAM, MA 01984 • TEL. 978-468-5310

School Committee Meeting ([agenda](#))

In-Person Meeting

Buker Elementary School Multipurpose Room

[Zoom Link](#) for Public Comment

Meeting ID: 892 4764 4962

Thursday, February 10, 2022

6:30 PM - 9:05 PM

Present:

Dana Allara, Chairperson

Michelle Bailey

Julia Campbell, Vice Secretary

Jennifer Carr, Secretary

Michelle Horgan

Anna Siedzik, Vice Chairperson

David Polito (approximate 6:40 PM arrival)

Also Present:

Eric Tracy, HWRSD Superintendent

Vincent Leone, Assistant Superintendent to Finance and Administration

Erin McAleer Crowley, President/CEO, Project Bread

Bryan Menegoni, HWRHS Principal

1. Call to Order

With a quorum present, Ms. Allara, Chairperson, calls the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. This meeting is being recorded and broadcast by HWCAM.

2. Public Hearing #1 - HWRSD FY23 Budget

[Exhibit](#)

The public hearing for the HWRSD FY23 Budget opens at 6:30 PM. Mr. Leone reviews the FY23 budget presentation, as shown in the [exhibit](#).

Mark Provost, 162 Asbury St., Hamilton: Mr. Provost asks about the money the district received from the CARES act and American Rescue Plan (Esser I, II, and III), and how much money has been used in the budget as presented. Mr. Leone responds with the details about how the money has been spent, and how it will be spent in the future, as indicated in the FY23 Budget.

Ms. Allara asks Mr. Provost to put his mask on, and notes that she will let anyone know if there is difficulty in hearing comments.

There are no additional comments at this time.

The hearing closes at approximately 6:45 PM.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

All those in attendance, with the exception of School Committee member Anna Siedzik, rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Citizen's Comments

[Exhibit](#)

Ms. Allara notes that the meeting agenda serves as guidance, however she is mindful that the agenda indicates that citizens' comments begin at 7:00pm. Therefore, the committee will address a few agenda items before opening the floor to comments.

5. Review of School Committee Protocols

[Exhibit](#)

Mrs. Carr reads protocol #4 as written in the *School Committee Protocols* detailed in the [exhibit](#).

D. Universal Free Lunch Discussion (originally 7/ New Business, item D)

[Exhibit](#)

Ms. Horgan provides an introduction to this discussion, noting that food insecurity has increased since the start of the pandemic.

Erin McAleer Crowley, 1 Appaloosa Ln., Hamilton: She is a mom to kindergartner in the district and the President/CEO of **Project Bread**. She speaks about the importance of a universal free school lunch program. She asks the School Committee to make a statement in support of this program, pointing out that the [exhibit](#) is a potential resolution. Ms. McAleer Crowley directs members to the [Project Bread website](#) where they can take additional action with regards to the issue.

4. Citizen's Comments

[Exhibit](#)

Any citizen wishing to speak before the Committee shall identify himself or herself by name and address. Speakers will be allowed three (3) minutes to present their material. After Citizen's Comments, the chat feature will be turned off. If members want to be recognized, they can use the raise hand feature.

Ms. Allara opens the floor to citizen's comments at 7:05 PM. She reminds citizens that comments are limited to 3 (three) minutes, and asks those offering comments to indicate the spelling of their name and their address for the record.

Mike Hebert, 96 Blueberry Lane, Hamilton (in-person): Mr. Hebert has repeatedly asked the School Committee to make the right decision regarding masks. He expresses his frustration that the School Committee has yet to take any action to end the mask mandate.

Victoria Harris, 162 Asbury St., Hamilton (in-person): She asks if the committee has done research on the effectiveness of masks. She urges the School Committee to remove the mask mandate and end the damage being done to the children.

Mark Provost, 162 Asbury St., Hamilton (in-person): Mr. Provost inquires about the funds the district has received from the ESSER grants. Mr. Leone responds, briefly reviewing protocols associated with receiving the funds. Mr. Provost, becoming noticeably upset, lists the fund requirements including the district's vaccination rates, contact tracing, and a masking requirement. He states that this is the fourth meeting he has attended, and he is frustrated that the School Committee has not listened to his requests to lift the mask mandate. He goes on to accuse the School Committee and the district of engaging in "bribery and fraud", also claiming Mr. Leone's response was "pathetic". Finally, he states that the district/School Committee has deliberately masked the the children for money, and begs the committee to stop the madness.

Lawrence “Larry” Oke, 19 Longfellow Rd., Wenham (in-person): Mr. Oke is following up on an email he previously sent to the School Committee. He believes the School Committee should follow the leadership of the Governor and lift the mask mandate.

Natalie Hildreth, 121 Linden St. Hamilton (Zoom comment): Ms. Hildreth thanks the School Committee for following CDC guidance and consulting with local Boards of Health over the past 2 years of the pandemic. She believes that the State and DESE are showing poor leadership, and regrets that the School Committee is tasked with making decisions while dealing with the anger from parents. She is concerned about lifting the mask mandate and potential complications with the teacher’s union contract.

Angela Arvanites, 4 Partridgeberry Lane, Hamilton (in-person): Ms. Arvanites has been silent for a long time, however she cares deeply about others. She is concerned about mental health consequences of the mask mandate, and is upset about what kids have been taught over the past 2 years.

Ms. Allara closes public comments at approximately 7:23 PM and the Zoom link closes at this time. Community members may view the meeting through HWCAM’s livestream on the HWCAM [website](#) or [YouTube channel](#). She asks those in the room to please respect the masking policy, covering their nose and mouth. There is a brief exchange regarding proper mask wearing.

6. — Consent Agenda

7. New Business

A. eSports Student Activity Request

[Exhibit](#)

Superintendent Tracy and HWRHS Principal Mr. Menegoni review the 01/31/2022 formal request to establish a Student Activities Account for an eSports team at the high school. There is some discussion regarding the competitive gaming involved in this student activity.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON - WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE HIGH SCHOOL’S FORMAL REQUEST TO ESTABLISH A STUDENT ACTIVITY ACCOUNT FOR THE ESPORTS STUDENT ACTIVITY AT THE HIGH SCHOOL.

MOTION by Jen Carr; SECONDED by Michelle Bailey.

MOTION PASSES unanimously through vote of seven (7) members present.

B. Adopt FY23 Budget

[Exhibit 1](#)

[Exhibit 2](#)

Mr. Leone reviews the FY23 Budget, offering to e address any final concerns or questions that the School Committee may have at this time.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE FINAL FY23 GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES BUDGET OF \$41,237,938, THIS AMOUNT INCLUDES GENERAL FUND OPERATING EXPENSES, AFTER OFFSETS, IN THE AMOUNT OF \$40,666,248 AND GENERAL FUND DEBT SERVICE EXPENSES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$571,690; FURTHERMORE THE GROSS OPERATING EXPENSES OF THE DISTRICT, BEFORE OFFSETS, HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED BY THE DESE DEFINED CHART OF ACCOUNTS ACCORDING TO THE “SUMMARY BY DESE CATEGORY” CHART INCLUDED IN THIS BUDGET PRESENTATION, AS DETAILED IN THE EXHIBIT.

MOTION by Jen Carr; SECONDED by Anna Siedzik.

Discussion: Formatting of the motion in future years.

MOTION PASSES unanimously through vote of seven (7) members present.

C. Budget Communication Strategy

There is a discussion surrounding the committee's communication strategy as far as reaching out to local groups. Ms. Horgan explains that she has a Google Doc outlining these groups and the communication strategies developed before the pandemic. There is some discussion regarding attending the towns' warrant meetings, as well as identifying additional groups including SEPAC, Friends of the Arts, Friends of the Library, etc. Ms. Bailey reminds School Committee members to present the FY23 Budget information without asking the groups to vote in any particular way. Mr. Polito offers to create a 1-page budget overview. Ms. Horgan will share this Google Doc with the School Committee later this evening; the committee will reach agreement regarding member(s) responsible for each group. The *Annual Town Meeting* is scheduled for the first week in April.

D. Universal Free Lunch Discussion

[Exhibit](#)

Addressed earlier in the meeting.

E. Discussion Regional Agreement

Ms. Bailey summarizes the changes made to the *Regional Agreement*, which Ms. Allara circulated to the School Committee earlier today (not included in original agenda, but can be found [here](#)). Ms. Bailey explains that the *Negotiations Subcommittee* collaborated with the Town Clerks to revise the language about election methodology (new language indicates that elections will follow local laws/guidance, and Town Clerks will be in charge of holding such elections).

There is some discussion regarding the formatting and finalization of the *Regional Agreement*, including behind-the-scenes work of the *Policy Subcommittee* to ensure consistency within the district's policies/procedures. Ms. Allara anticipates that the revised *Regional Agreement* will appear on the next meeting agenda (02/17/2022), after Marc Terry, legal counsel, has had opportunity to review the changes.

8. — Finance and Operations

9. Policy

A. Review Face Coverings Policy

[Exhibit 1](#)

[Exhibit 2](#)

[Exhibit 3](#)

[Exhibit 4](#)

Mr. Polito notes the numerous complexities involved in running the district, evidenced throughout this meeting (members have spent 100+ hours on the budget alone). He explains that the School Committee is working to address the community's concerns surrounding the mask mandate. At this point, a number of community members interrupt Mr. Polito, with some arguing that they do not have adequate opportunity to voice their concerns. There is a brief discussion/argument surrounding appropriate times for citizens to offer their comments.

Ms. Bailey requests a 5-minute recess at 7:59 PM. The meeting reconvenes at approximately 8:06 PM.

Ms. Allara clarifies that in all meetings, comments should be addressed through permission of the chairperson. Mr. Polito apologizes for having come across as preaching to everybody in the room.

Ms. Allara acknowledges the Governor's decision to end the mask mandate on 02/28/2022. She notes that the topic of masking is an extremely difficult and divisive issue. She anticipates that the School Committee will vote on their 03/03/2022 meeting to finalize a timeline/plan regarding mask removal. Superintendent Tracy will present data (from school nurses, HWEA union, parent survey results, etc.) during the next School Committee meeting on 02/17/2022, and the School Committee will have a more detailed discussion at this point.

There is further discussion regarding strategy moving forward about the mask mandate, including survey responses; HWEA union contract; Hamilton and Wenham town decisions (Board of Health and Board of Selectmen decisions); February vacation; number of participants in at-home testing program; pool testing program; vaccination rates; etc.

There is an interruption from a community member, at which point Ms. Allara reiterates that citizen comments are to be offered during the time set aside for that purpose. Ms. Campbell points out that there are open seats for the School Committee should community members wish to become involved in this way.

Superintendent Tracy states that the 80% vaccination rate/attestation is no longer relevant, as the mask mandate ends on 02/28/2022. Further, he explains that the district has no control over mask wearing on school buses, as this is controlled by the federal government.

There is continued discussion about the mask mandate; data needed for next week's discussion; remaining respectful; unity within the community; etc. Mr. Polito highlights the importance of gathering data from students.

B. First Reading: Flag Policy

[Exhibit](#)

Ms. Siedzik reviews the Flag Policy, as proposed in the [exhibit](#). She explains that the district's legal counsel has reviewed this policy. There is discussion regarding displaying a flag in the classroom; public display; government speech versus student speech; Supreme Court decision regarding government speech (case stemming from the City of Boston); etc.

There is discussion regarding the timing of this policy: this policy arose due to the Progress Flag being displayed in June 2021, and anticipated Juneteenth flag request. There is some discussion regarding when the policy was to be finalized. Ms. Bailey believes the School Committee should focus on educating children and she does not believe that they should be determining the social/cultural norms of the community. There is continued discussion regarding the purview of the School Committee and the appropriateness of potentially adopting such a policy.

Ms. Siedzik will ask Marc Terry, District's Counsel, to provide a written opinion including a better explanation of the principle of government speech and an explanation of whether or not the current pending Supreme Court case from the City of Boston does or does not affect district policy.

10. Superintendent's Report

A. District Update

Superintendent Tracy commends the musical talent displayed at the Community House last night.

11. Committee Reports

A. Capital/Financial Planning Subcommittee

The *Capital/Financial Planning Subcommittee* has not met since the last update.

B. Policy/Legislative Subcommittee

The *Policy/Legislative Subcommittee* provided an update earlier in the meeting (agenda item 9, including Face Coverings Policy and the Flag Policy).

C. Negotiations Subcommittee

The *Negotiations Subcommittee* provided an update earlier in the meeting (agenda item 7, New Business, item E. Discussion: Regional Agreement). In addition, the *Negotiations Subcommittee* has been working with HWEA to review and finalize the MOA: the union ratified the MOA earlier today, and Ms. Allara anticipates that the School Committee will vote to approve this at the next scheduled meeting, 02/17/2022.

12. Chair's Report

Ms. Allara explains that there are three (3) open seats for the School Committee. Residents who have pulled papers as of today's date include:

(Town of Wenham)

- Lauren Lambert
- David Frankel
- Courtney Ashwood
- David Polito
- Andrea VanBoven

(Town of Hamilton)

- Brian Scudder

13. Topics for Future Meetings

- Ensure correct rotation for land acknowledgement (quarterly);
- Schedule for superintendent evaluation:
 - Discussion to include submitting partial evidence; policy for new School Committee members evaluating superintendent; timeline to look at contract, etc.

14. Vote to Adjourn

Executive Session is no longer necessary.

I MOVE THAT THE HAMILTON - WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ADJOURN THE 02/10/2022 MEETING AT 9:22 PM.

MOTION by Anna Siedzik; SECONDED by Jen Carr.

MOTION PASSES unanimously through vote of seven (7) members present.

Respectfully submitted February 23 2022 by Mahala Lettvin, Recording Secretary.
