

Willow Creek Elementary School
School Improvement Committee/Accountability Committee
Minutes for December 4, 2025
5:00 P.M.

Attendees: Mary Whitney (principal), Julia Apte (parent chair), Laura Stephens (parent), Ana Schwander (parent), Chris Domino (tech)

1. Welcome and Introductions (Julia Apte)
2. District Accountability Committee (DAC) Updates (Chris Domino)
 - a. We had a presentation from the District Safety Coordinator, Ian Lopez, and his manager, Jason Koenig, Chief Information Officer.
 - b. Many of the safety improvements funded by the 2024 bond issue have either been finished or are in progress. Key improvements:
 1. Completely new and more comprehensive security camera systems in all buildings with greatly improved camera quality and software.
 2. Bullet-resistant window film has been tested and chosen.
3. PTO Update
 - a. The most recent meeting discussed the grants given to teachers. We are still searching for a president for next year. We are continuing to search for a way to make the pledge process easier.
4. Principal's Report (Mary Whitney)
 - a. Panorama SEL (Social Emotional Learning) Survey
 1. This survey is administered to students in grades 3–5 twice per year (fall and spring). Participation is voluntary; a small number of families opt out.
 2. Survey results are **not anonymous** at the administrative level:
 - a. Teachers can view data for students in their own classrooms.
 - b. Administrators and mental health staff can view individual student data. We have a full-time social worker, Alex Rodasti, and a part-time school psychologist, Cynthia Bernero. Administrators can also compare our results with district results.
 - c. When shared with any others, results are presented as **class-level data only**, not individual responses.
 3. Use of SEL Data
 - a. The data informs SEL instruction and interventions.
 - b. We share resources for addressing areas of concern with teachers.
 - c. Topics are highlighted in weekly staff communications ("Willow Weekly" staff newsletter).
 - d. Teachers use class-level data to facilitate discussions with students about classroom strengths and areas for growth.

4. Slide Show with Results
 - a. Our group is the first to see it; teachers will see it next and share a summary with students.
 - b. The following SEL domains were discussed:
 - Supportive relationships
 - Growth mindset
 - Self-efficacy
 - Self-management / emotional regulation
 - Social awareness
 - Sense of belonging
 - c. Overall results are strong across most domains.
 1. A small percentage of students reported lacking supportive relationships, prompting discussion of targeted supports.
 2. **Growth mindset continues to be the lowest-scoring domain**, both at Willow Creek and across the district.
 3. Emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging have shown improvement over time.
 4. Differences between grade levels (3–5) are minimal.
 5. Fall scores are typically lower than spring scores due to new teachers, peers, and routines.
5. Growth Mindset Discussion
 - a. Growth mindset is defined as students believing their abilities can improve through effort and learning.
 - b. Some survey questions feel misaligned with how growth mindset is taught in classrooms.
 - c. Our staff emphasizes “not yet” language, learning from mistakes, and persistence through challenges.
 - d. The school goal is to increase positive growth mindset identification from 53% to 65%.
6. SEL Instruction and Resources
 - a. The Second Step curriculum is used schoolwide, with flexibility in implementation.
 - b. SEL is integrated into academic instruction rather than taught exclusively as a stand-alone subject.
 - c. Our mental health team provides short SEL videos, discussion prompts, and classroom-ready strategies. Alex has put together a webpage for our teachers called “The Inclusive Classroom.” Cynthia creates short videos on topics; the group watched part of the most recent one on how the brain works.
 - d. Panorama has an SEL “Playbook” that allows teachers to search for lessons and interventions by topic (e.g., competitiveness, emotional regulation).

- e. We do regular POWER and ROAR assemblies to recognize students and emphasize the importance of growth mindset and responsible behavior.
- 7. Equity and Data Disaggregation
 - a. SEL data can be reviewed by grade level and demographic groups.
 - b. Demographic information is sourced from district records, not student self-identification.
 - c. Some subgroups show particularly strong outcomes.
- b. Budget and Funding Update
 - 1. Most of us have seen this budget video, but it's on the CCSD YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvBLEaL-dsU>
 - 2. Brief recap of major points to know about funding and budgets:
 - a. School funding is impacted by state-level formulas.
 - b. Increases in local property taxes result in reduced state contributions, i.e., when our property taxes go up, it does not mean that funding to our schools goes up — instead, the state contributes less money and funding per pupil stays the same. However, our voters have passed override funding that does stay with the district.
 - c. Bond funds may only be used for facilities, not staffing.
 - d. PTO funds may support paraprofessionals, classified staff, and programs and enrichment; PTO funds cannot be used for certified teaching positions.
 - e. Staffing is based on the number of students we have; the ratio is 1 FTE (full-time equivalent) staffing unit per 18.5 students. Enrollment fluctuations affect staffing flexibility. School of Choice students help maintain staffing levels and programming.
 - f. Since students don't come to us in neat little "packages" of 25 at a time, we can end up with larger classes at some grades than we would like. For instance, fifth grade has over 30 students per class. In situations like this, we try to provide extra help for teachers, such as the work Andrea Gee, one of our interventionists, is doing with that grade.
 - 3. A parent who had recently seen the list of Educator Initiative Grants funded by the Cherry Creek Schools Foundation brought up using this kind of resource. We discussed what external funding can pay for and what it cannot. For instance, external funds can't pay for an art teacher (against Board policy) but can pay for an artist-in-residence program.
 - a. Cherry Creek Schools Foundation grants are available annually.
 - b. Some schools submit multiple successful grant applications.
 - c. Use of AI tools was suggested to help teachers generate ideas and complete applications efficiently.

- c. What's New
 - 1. Our classrooms are getting new carpeting this summer, and the cafeteria is getting new flooring.
- 5. Open Forum
 - a. Parent Communication and Engagement
 - 1. Parents noted a drop-off in communication from kindergarten to first grade and thus are feeling “out of the loop.” The first-grade newsletter is fairly generic and does not give insight into how their children are doing. In addition, Kindergarten welcomed parent volunteers much more than first grade does. Mary pointed out that classroom teachers decide for themselves how many volunteers they want, since preparing for volunteers takes teacher time.
 - 2. Fall conferences were viewed as valuable but felt late for some families.
 - 3. Discussion focused on balancing parent communication with teacher workload.
 - 4. TalkingPoints (an app for communicating with parents) was highlighted as a district-supported communication tool.
 - 5. Suggestions for Improvement
 - a. Improve expectation-setting for families transitioning into first grade.
 - b. Spotlight unique school resources in newsletters (e.g., librarian, instructional coach, SEL supports, enrichment).
 - c. Post SAC agendas, minutes, and presentations on the school website.
 - d. Share meeting highlights in weekly communications to increase awareness.
 - e. More news stories about what our school does well.