

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – January 17, 2024

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, at 6:00 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building

Present:

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Jeanne Downs, Vice Chair
Ellen Grieco
Erin Mueller
Christina Rodrigo

Also present:

David Fleishman
Acting Superintendent

Betsy Gavron
Interim Assistant Superintendent

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Debbie Dixson
Interim Director of Student Services

Also:

Ronnie Kessler, Asst. Director of Student Services
Tyler Steffey, Interim WMS Principal
Meeghan Pierce, Gr. 8 English Teacher & House Leader

Finance Committee:

Pam Roman, co-chair
Steve Correia, co-chair
Jonathan Barnett
Michael Hoyle
Kelly Lappin
Brian O’Herlihy
April Methot (virtual)

1. Welcome & Call to Order:

Chair Erin Gibbons called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

Erin Gibbons reminded the public that the School Committee does not read public comments during meetings on behalf of the community members. An email can be sent to the entire Committee making them aware of the issue or another community member can read a public comment for someone else, but they must be present at the meeting. She added that this changed post-Covid and then stopped in 2023 for a variety of reasons.

The School Committee shared their school experiences since the last meeting. Jeanne attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. luncheon at which four students spoke and the honors jazz band led by Mr. Oneschuck played a special piece, “Lift Every Voice.” David added that there was a diverse group of attendees ranging from preschool age up to grandparents. He described his opening remarks at the event that included the history of METCO in Wayland.

Ellen Grieco announced that the Wayland Public Schools Foundation would like to present their mid-year report at an upcoming meeting in February. Ellen provided highlights of their fundraising efforts and on behalf of the WPSF, she thanked all those who have made donations, including the contributions from The Villa.

Christina Rodrigo shared that she attended the recent Loker school meeting at which her 5th grader as part of Team Pride participated in role playing skits for social and emotional learning; she described.

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Erin Mueller announced that WaylandCAN is sponsoring an event tomorrow evening at Loker at which conflict management experts will be present to discuss how to have interactive and productive conversations, as well as difficult conversations with your kids.

The School Committee will pass over Executive Session this evening.

2. **Public Comment:**

There was no public comment.

3. **Acting Superintendent Update:**

3.1 *Discussion regarding Adjustments of School Buffer Zones:*

Susan Bottan provided a status report of the school buffer zones which are in place to balance class sizes. Street listings were last published in 2017, and she is working with the Town's Building Department around additional streets that have been added in Wayland since then, thus, providing a new map from which to work. There are no specific recommendations currently, but changes are being considered now as we enter into the Kindergarten registration process.

4. **Administrative Matters:**

4.1 *Continued Discussion of and Possible Vote to Approve 7th and 8th Grade Class Field Trip Proposals:* 8th Grade Trip:

Meeghan Peirce presented additional information about the 8th grade field trip proposal to Boston. The goal of the planning was to give students the opportunity to explore and make connections in the real world and ultimately connect it to the classroom curriculum in writings, for example. Also, Meeghan noted that Wayland is a diverse community with many layers and visiting Boston can be very beneficial. She used the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial as an example. Teachers wanted to use different memorials that represented different time periods and different communities and allow students to reflect on commonality of ideas while exploring. Meeghan explained what the Edward M. Kennedy Institute offers around the legislative process, as it gives students the opportunity to role play in groups of 100. There are also opportunities for 8th graders to participate in community building and volunteerism at the elementary schools; Meeghan described. The itinerary and conversations are still ongoing.

If a student does not want to participate in the 8th grade trip, he/she will spend the day at school. However, the goal is to have as many students as possible go on the trip. The price of the trip remains the same even if students do not want to attend the Red Sox game or participate in one or more fun evening activities. A tour company is used to organize and secure transportation and other logistics such as food and ticket purchases. The teachers focus on the students and their experience. Meeghan described the itinerary for the four-day trip to Boston and volunteering in the elementary schools.

A discussion ensued about the School Committee's concern that the Washington, D.C. trip may be eliminated altogether. David confirmed that he met with the 8th grade house leaders and there will be a working group of teachers, parents, and possibly community members to discuss future middle school trips. Meeghan responded from a teacher's perspective noting that it is difficult to predict out to future years, and the teachers want to give the current 8th graders a powerful experience. Students' feedback varies around this topic as discussed.

Jeanne left the meeting at 6:58 p.m.; returned at 7:01 p.m.

7th Grade Trip:

Tyler Steffey updated the School Committee regarding the 7th grade trip, adding that there was one change since the last School Committee meeting and logistics are still being worked on. Because the ocean tides are not conducive to the students visiting the salt flats on Cape Cod, the dates of the trip changed to May 14 to May 16, as there will be high tides. During these three days, the students will focus on the water in several communities and the river eco-systems. Two buses will travel to the Cape servicing and rotating 218 7th grade students. The students will visit many locations on the Cape, Boston Harbor and the harbor island area, as well as Metro West and its water treatment plants. The cost is about \$250 per student.

The School Committee's concern is that the trip is not finalized, nor has the appropriate paperwork been submitted. Tyler noted that the goal was to create a trip that was equitable, accessible, calming and safe for all students, as the environment has shifted from overnight trips to day trips based on his experience in other districts. He explained.

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A discussion continued about reinstating the Washington, D.C. trip next year and beyond. The discussion was tabled until later in the meeting.

The Finance Committee arrived at 7:25 p.m.

The School Committee returned to this discussion after approval of the consent agenda and continued to express their concerns. The Committee wants to support the teachers and students this year regarding an 8th grade trip, but also want to move forward to reinstate the D.C. trip in 2025. David described the plan to develop a working group of 6-8 people and its potential goal and process to identify the problems and develop solutions. The group would possibly include faculty, parents, community members and, as suggested, a School Committee member.

Jeanne Downs moved to approve the 8th grade Boston trip as presented with the caveat that the working group that David mentioned includes a School Committee member and moves forward with the intent of trying to bring the traditional Middle Schools trips back.

Erin Gibbons suggested having a School Committee virtual meeting early next week with the Middle School house leaders and to problem solve to get to a place where the overnight trips will be reinstated. A discussion ensued but there wasn't a decision in this regard. Christina amended the motion presented to add "for 2025" at the end of the motion.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Erin Gibbons, the School Committee voted (4-1) to approve the 8th grade Boston trip as presented with the caveat that the working group that David mentioned includes a School Committee member and moves forward with the intent of trying to bring the traditional Middle Schools trips back in 2025.

4.2 *Discussion and Possible Approval of Wayland High School Overnight Trip to Attend the JEA/NSPA National High School Journalism Convention in Kansas City, MO in April 2024:*

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the High School journalism trip as presented.

5. **Financial Matters:**

5.1 *Presentation and Discussion regarding FY25 Budget - Student Services:*

The district goals for Student Services are to ensure that the process and procedures are consistent, aligned, and compliant with State and Federal regulations, to enhance and continue to develop the vertical continuum of service for students with disabilities, and to examine current structures that include staffing, materials, and fiscal resources so that efficient and effective services are ensured for students with disabilities. It is always the goal to keep students in district whenever possible.

While preparing the budget that began in October, each student's IEP and service delivery needs were examined, all special education staff schedules were reviewed, as well as the caseloads across all buildings and programs. Also, current programs and program capacity was assessed, the continuum of service to identify gaps/needs was examined, a formulaic approach was used for related service provider assignments, all placement patterns were considered, and disability categories and associated supports and services were analyzed.

Each staff member's responsibility in the schools and in the community is to support and teach students to become independent, self-sufficient, self-reliant learners who can advocate for themselves regardless of whether they are on IEP's while maintaining high academic and behavioral standards and expectations. Research-based interventions are used by a highly-qualified and highly-skilled staff, as well as state-of-the-art strategies and techniques.

In October, March and June, the State collects data from school districts and provides appropriate reports to the districts. Debbie and Ronnie presented data from last year's June End-of-Year Report and the October 1 report for each school in terms of students on IEP's, and out-of-district placements. Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) are created to meet each student's needs. Accommodation plans, or 504 Plans, are required by law by the Rehabilitation Act and are not included in the data for IEP's. For The Children's Way, the percentage for preschoolers on IEP's was 31% last October, noting that the model is to have integrated preschools; Debbie explained. Last October, there were 37 students placed out-of-district and 5 itinerant students who are either homeschooled or attending school elsewhere as a private expense for families. Itinerant students can access services even if they are not enrolled in Wayland, as the district is obligated to offer services in the schools to these residents.

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Debbie explained the disability categories as acknowledged by State and Federal law, noting that the district can only report the primary disability to DESE even if a student has complex disabilities. The “health” disability, which also includes ADHD, is the most prevalent in the district. There are 552 students in special education services or 19%, which is also the state average. Wayland is an inclusionary district which reflects the placement patterns within the district – 452 full inclusion placements, 37 partial placements, and 10 students in mostly sub-separate specialized classrooms.

There are range of services across the district such as, but not limited to, speech and language, audiology, skills improvement program (SKIP), individualized learning (ILC 1 and 2), organizational skills, and language-based services (LBC). Ronnie reviewed and explained these services including the school at which these services are offered. The district’s contract with Landmark servicing dyslexic students is renewed annually in July and hours are purchased. Forty hours were purchased this year which was doubled from last year during which an assigned consultant comes to Wayland and meets with the language-based teachers, consults on writing curriculum, focusing on executive functioning skills.

Debbie and Ronnie reviewed the actions taken to develop a budget that was budget neutral and to provide high-quality programs and services making sure that the staffing was better aligned to meet the students’ needs. To provide more building-based administrative support, the proposal is to create team chairs at The Children’s Way and the elementary schools, an Assistant Principal for Student Services at the Middle School, and an Administrator for Student Services at the High School. These positions will free up some of the mandated paperwork for teachers. The team chair would monitor the special education process from beginning to end, reach out to parents, facilitate meetings, preparing agendas, note taking at meetings, making sure the district is compliant, and assist with evaluations of special education staff. The Children’s Way will move 5 classes into 4.5 classes which will require less staff and could possibly change the model and service delivery at TCW. They explained as well as explaining the changes in the other schools for SAILS, ASD, ILC I and II, and Life Skills. These changes are still being developed. The SKIP and ALRT programs will remain as is at the High School. Language-based classrooms will be added at the Middle School and High School, and the LBC program at Claypit Hill will be reassessed depending on screening and referrals. A discussion ensued. Examples of structural shifts in staffing so that the district is staffed appropriately were provided and the shifts had no impact to the operating budget.

In terms of the FY25 budget, out-of-district placements (\$3.2M) which is offset by the Circuit Breaker (\$1.3M) and special education transportation (\$942,921) are the biggest expenses in the budget. All special education staff is about \$1.7M and all other expenses total \$387,509. The Circuit Breaker is a reimbursement program for high-cost special education services which is reached through a formula. The reimbursement does not include transportation. A discussion followed about transportation costs and the use of the Circuit Breaker funds. Susan Bottan outlined the allocation of Circuit Breaker funds which are conservative, as well as responding to questions about staff turnover savings around benefits, etc.

The Finance Committee left the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

5.2 *Review of January 12, 2024 Community Budget Presentation:*

The presentation was well received by those community members in attendance. It was also recorded and sent to the staff.

5.3 *Possible Vote to Approve the FY25 School Operating Budget:*

The School Committee appreciated the administrators’ thoughtfulness and transparency in presenting the FY25 recommended budget. Jeanne explained the process after the School Committee votes on the proposed budget for the benefit of new members. A discussion ensued about possibilities for next year’s budget.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the Superintendent’s recommended budget for FY25 of \$53,166,532.

6. **Consent Agenda:**

6.1 Approval of Accounts Payables & Payroll Warrants:

6.2 Approval of Minutes: January 3, 2024

Jeanne noted that the adjournment vote was 4-0, not 5-0, and she suggested language changes to 4.1.

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Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Christina Rodrigo, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda with Jeanne's edits to the minutes.

8. **Matters Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

None.

9. **Executive Session:**

Executive session was passed over.

10. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 10:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Gibbons, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Information re: Wayland Buffer Zones
3. WHS Overnight Trip Proposal for Journalism Students to Missouri
4. FY25 Budget Questions & Responses
5. Special Education Budget Overview
6. Superintendent's FY25 Budget Presentation to the Community on 1/12/24
7. Accounts Payables Warrant
8. Executive Session Motion