

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Special Meeting – June 10, 2020

A Special Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, June 10, 2020, at 12:00 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

*Present and participating remotely were:*

Jeanne Downs, Chair  
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair (arrived at 12:07 p.m.)  
Nate Buffum  
Kim Reichelt  
Kathie Steinberg  
Chris Ryan (Non-voting member-elect for 2020-2021)

*Also participating remotely:*

Arthur Unobskey  
Superintendent

Parry Graham  
Assistant Superintendent

Richard Whitehead  
Director of Student Services

Susan Bottan  
Director of Finance & Operations

*Also:*

Shawn Bernier, WHS Student Council President, Class of 2020  
Ciara Murphy, WHS Senior Class President, Class of 2020  
Allyson Mizoguchi, WHS Principal  
Sean Gass, WHS Assistant Principal  
Marybeth Sacramone, WHS Director of Guidance

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 12:03 p.m. The meeting was recorded by WayCAM and was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and according to the revised open meeting law that allows remote participation.

Jeanne introduced Mr. Chris Ryan as the newly elected School Committee member as of June 9, 2020, but he is a non-voting member at this time. Nate Buffum will continue as a voting member of the School Committee until the postponed Annual Town Meeting in September. A roll call was taken:

<b><u>Roll Call</u></b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	<b><u>No</u></b>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	absent	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

**1. Discussion with Wayland High School Class of 2020 Students:**

Ciara Murphy described her educational experience at Wayland High School, all of which she enjoyed immensely. As a 2020 graduate and the WHS Senior Class President, she organized fundraising and planning for her class prom, as well as being the captain of varsity soccer, lacrosse, and the ski team and the director of an a cappella group.

*Ellen arrived at 12:07 p.m.*

Ciara commented that her elementary years prepared her for the upper grades and technology made a huge impact to her long-term educational experience. She is grateful that her middle school teachers shaped her into the person she is today given her relationships with them and the peer friendships she made over the years. Ciara encouraged the continuation of extra-curricular activities as they empowered her to discover who she was and noted the importance and value of bonding with classmates during social events. Finally, Ciara feels that what individuals invest into their high school

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experience is what will be given back, such as making an effort in the classroom, time with teachers and administrators, and participation in music and sports.

As a METCO student, Shawn Bernier's experience differs somewhat. He is extremely appreciative of the opportunities given to him and the support he received by the Wayland community. Shawn is thankful for all of his teachers who truly cared about him as well as the peer friendships that he developed over the years. Given the last few months of remote learning, Shawn feels he has learned many life and technology skills that will take him into his future years, including maintaining a work ethic and time management skills that he acquired at Wayland High School.

The students were asked if there was anything more that student government could be doing and should student government support a mentor program. Shawn would like to see more leadership roles on a more inter-personal level, and he agrees that a mentor/mentee program would be extremely valuable for students. Although school administration and advisors do an excellent job, Ciara would like to have more student events that would be very beneficial. Positive changes that resulted from the COVID shutdown were the challenges that online learning presented. If remote learning continues in the fall, Ciara encouraged teachers to have more face-to-face contact with their students based on her own experience.

**2. Comments & Written Statements from the Public:**

The Chair set the parameters for public comment and informed the public that each School Committee member reads every email that is received, including the recent petition received last night.

Jeanne read a public comment from Ann Lyons, a Happy Hollow parent. Although teachers have done their best to provide remote learning, it is her opinion that school must reopen in the fall because remote learning is not sustainable and children must connect personally with their peers and school community. Although COVID-19 is a serious concern, Ms. Lyons feels that the mental health and wellbeing of children far outweighs the risks. Realizing some children may be at risk, Ms. Lyons cited that it is the opinion of her pediatrician that children have a 1% chance of becoming infected with COVID-19 in Massachusetts. Social isolation, depression, the lack of supervision if parents return to work, and an unsatisfactory educational experience could all result in poorer outcomes. Ms. Lyons also referred to the survey recently taken by parents.

Jackie Johnson, 42 Plain Road, commented that she does not support the GPA decision. Students who have not yet discovered their voices and who perform academically lower also struggle with self-esteem and cannot easily engage requiring them to receive extra support. As a result of the pandemic, some students deal with limited access to the Internet and technology, financial instability, and the scarcity of food. We need to be most concerned about them and advocate for these kids because they are at a greater risk. Ms. Johnson feels that it is Wayland's responsibility to serve all of its students and urged that the decision is reconsidered and to come up with a stronger plan so everyone can prevail together.

Jeanne read a public comment from Lindsey Brown, a WHS sophomore and a member of the class of 2022 currently taking honors classes and a college prep class. She feels that her hard work does not matter nor does the administration care, and the students are being penalized based on the decision of not counting grades toward the GPA. Ms. Brown noted that the decision was not based on the guidance provided by the Department of Education. She commented on her upcoming college process during which could be harmful to her and her fellow students given this decision. Ms. Brown encouraged the School Committee and administrators to reverse the decision.

Meredith Prince, Old Sudbury Road, is a rising WHS senior who takes mostly honors and AP classes and is involved in extra-curricular activities. She asked that the GPA decision be reconsidered and to consider what other districts are doing in this regard, including the Commissioner's recommendations. Miss Prince believes that grades should be included in the GPA given that she and others have worked very hard this year, and this year's juniors will be disadvantaged in terms of applying to colleges. Finally, this decision affects all WHS students.

Jeanne read a public comment from Jeanne Brown, parent of a WHS sophomore and senior. Her 10<sup>th</sup> grader who has worked extremely hard in her Honors and AP classes feels that she is being unjustly penalized by circumstances which are beyond her control and that includes the decision regarding the weighted GPA sometime last year. Ms. Brown's son, a member of the Class of 2020, achieved some of his best grades this year and this final grade would have solidified his early decision standing with Macalester College. Ms. Brown noted that WHS students will be at a disadvantage based on other peer towns who have chosen to include a GPA average for students and by ignoring the Commissioner's guidance.

Kim Martin Cook, Lincoln Road, congratulated the Class of 2020, congratulated Jeanne and Chris Ryan as being elected to the School Committee, thanked Allyson Mizoguchi and Laura Cole for the rally parade on Sunday. Ms. Cook thanked

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other staff, past and present, for their contributions to her children's education. Although she supports the GPA decision, she called about the comments made by Kim Reichelt with respect to kids who might change levels in some classes. Ms. Cook recommended that the administration figure out how to support kids, not only with grades, but in other ways.

Jeanne read a public comment from Kamala and Paul Grasso who are parents of a WHS freshman and junior this year. They are disappointed with the district's GPA decision and feels the students will be at a disadvantage as compared to peer towns in the college admissions process and could possibly demotivate and disengage them. Her children have worked very hard this year, but they made the observation that they could do almost nothing and still pass. Although they realize this year is new to everyone and there is no perfect solution, she asks that this decision be reconsidered and implement the Commissioner's guidance. Jeanne also referred to the chart that was attached to the second email.

Tristan O'Leary, 91 Claypit Hill Road, recognizes the circumstances under which the GPA decision was made, including all of the decisions that were necessary to make during this unusual time and added that many are very grateful. She believes the decision was made with the students' best interest in mind given the hard work and consideration done by the school administration. However, Ms. O'Leary feels that this decision should be re-evaluated given new information that surfaced after the plan was created and the decision was ultimately reached so that it can benefit all Wayland students. It is important to look at this with an open mind and a fresh perspective.

Jeanne read a public comment from Laura Batts, 5 Old Tavern Road. Although she appreciates the work done and the district's approach of compassion and integrity that went into the GPA decision, Ms. Batts believes that this policy should be revisited given the lack of information at the time of the decision, particularly DESE's language in their recommendation. The decisions reached by other high schools, such as Lexington and Andover, should also be considered as those students will have a clear advantage. Ms. Batts also referred to the first semester and the decision made regarding the mid-year exam and used math as an example.

Jeff Sklar, Brooks Road, commented on the decision-making process of the School Committee and that the decision about the GPA as a policy matter does fall under its jurisdiction. He is concerned about recent decisions made by the administration that have not been in the best interest of the students and were reached without student, parent and community input, such as the attendance policy, the non-return of math tests and other classes, and the weighted GPA.

Jeanne read a public comment from Linda Hines and asked for reconsideration to include students' grades into the GPA, as neighboring towns have done so per the DESE guidelines. Wayland High School should not be any different and should consider the hard work that the students have put in given the difficult year, and the upward trend of student grades should not be ignored. As the GPA is a screening tool for many colleges and recognizing the lack of athletics and the ability of taking the SAT and ACT exams, this current plan puts many students at a disadvantage.

June Kim, 10 Aqueduct Road, is a sophomore at WHS. She asked for a reconsideration to include first and second quarter grades in the GPA. These are the grades that she and other students have earned with a lot of effort and hard work this year, and she believes this decision discredits their efforts and could result in a disproportionate weight in the grading of prior years. The decision also sends the unfair message that the students' time was not valuable and that their efforts were meaningless.

Jeanne read a public comment from Ashley Boyer and is the parent of a WHS sophomore. She offers her full support of the fair and equitable decision made by the School Committee and administrators given the unprecedented circumstances this year. Ms. Boyer feels that this decision was fair and equitable, particularly for those students who had a difficult start establishing relationships with teachers and getting a footing on the class load. Although many are in disagreement, there are many who support this decision but have not made their opinion known. Ms. Boyer does not think that this decision should be reversed.

Jeanne read a public comment from Joshua Liu, member of the Class of 2023. The GPA decision, as well as this global pandemic, has had a negative effect on his emotional wellbeing and feels that this year has been pointless even though he was very excited about entering WHS last fall. Because he did so well, he is especially upset that his Q3 grades will not count toward the GPA and will affect his future.

Stephanie Brandeleone, Spencer Circle, commented that she is personally indifferent towards the GPA decision. She feels that if a grade is reflected, then it should be shown in the best light for the students. She commented that many are not doing the work for Q3 and Q4 and nothing will be taken away from them. However, for those students who are doing the work, there needs to be some type of motivation and support and they should be rewarded in some way.

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*Public comment was closed at 1:00 p.m.*

The following emails from residents were not read: Paul and Gretchen Dresens, Caryl Capeci, Emily Chau, and Lori Caddoo.

**3. Discuss COVID-19 Response:**

- Continued Discussion of High School GPA Calculation for the 2019-2020 School Year (taken out of order): Arthur noted his appreciation for the administration's careful, thorough, and thoughtful process while still focusing on the students during this time.

After many conversations with parents and staff, including reading all the emails she received, Allyson Mizoguchi prepared and read a statement to clarify some information and to update the School Committee about her current thinking regarding the calculation of this year's grades and the students' cumulative GPA's. The following is some of Allyson's statement.

The staff is committed to equity and the social emotional wellbeing of all students which have been a driving force during this process and throughout the school year. The school works through the challenge to create equitable policies where everyone wins or can win when provided with the appropriate support and opportunities; thus, there is no perfect solution in this situation. Lincoln-Sudbury and Natick High School will have a pass/fail model for Q3 and Q4 and will not be counted in the GPA. Lexington will give a grade bump to students who pass all four quarters and will be calculating the final grade in the GPA. Newton High School has suspended the calculation of the cumulative GPA temporarily due to pending Committee work. Wellesley has reweighted the four quarters in order to calculate a year-end grade that counts toward the GPA. Given the different decisions, districts are trying to apply State guidance based on each district's own unique needs and priorities. All of the core recommendations received from the May 6 guidance, including those of March 26 and April 24, are the guiding principles of this particular proposal. The overriding themes of the Commissioner's recommendations are safety, wellbeing, and flexibility, adding that while everyone is working through this pandemic to keep in mind that many families and students are struggling. The May guidance that many people have referred to in letters and the petition, is on page four of a seven page document in which the Commissioner writes: "Students could be given the opportunity to bump up their final course grade. For example, increasing a B+ earned prior to the school closures to an A- for earning credit for the work completed before the remote period." Allyson adds that this flexibility is in the context for those students who cannot adapt to the change of remote learning. The Commissioner also acknowledges the tension of offering students this flexibility and providing incentives to maximize learning. In this way, he says that "Grades do matter to students and their families particularly in the calculation of their GPA class rank as possible factors in college admissions." Allyson continues that this guidance was at the forefront of the administration's thinking when drafting the GPA proposal, which holds students harmless because first semester grades are not reflective of the full journey that a full school year would afford all students. As shared before, the vast majority of students do improve their grades by year's end, and to include it in the cumulative GPA would be harmful for them. Although the college admissions process is changing due to COVID-19, the administration wanted the transcript to have integrity, be simple, transparent and fair. The specific grading practices that are being used this semester, including the decision to implement pass/fail for the second semester, was a result of the remote learning plan shared on April 10 with families as well as a FAQ to generate questions about these practices from students and families. Once Phase 2 of remote learning was implemented, the March 26 and April 24 DESE guidance was consulted which recommended that districts use the pass or no credit or pass model. Results from a student survey of which over 400 students took, indicated that many students were struggling with remote learning and worried that they might not meet their teachers' expectations. It is the administration's opinion that the shift to pass/fail for Q3 and Q4 was appropriate and equitable during this global health crisis. Allyson noted that there was no intent to make the students feel demoralized, disadvantaged by this decision, or to dismiss the hard work of their first semester, adding that the administrators are proud of their academic and non-academic efforts throughout the year. Because of the outpouring by students regarding this issue, Allyson is convinced that there is more work to do about the values and balance of social emotional health and the importance of a holistic educational experience.

Allyson appreciates all of the feedback received and given the concerns raised by students and families, she presented some new thinking that evolved over the last week, adding that this is not the preferred way to move forward but is comfortable raising it for the Committee's contemplation. In the new thinking and in alignment with DESE's guidance around flexibility and holding students harmless, the cumulative GPA would be run both ways for every student with and without the mid-year average and the higher of the two numbers would be reported on the

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transcript. The mid-year average would be at half weight, that is, half the weight of a final grade in the calculation of the cumulative GPA. The process would be done manually and would require an individual review for every student. This idea presents some complexities for the School Committee's consideration that Allyson pointed out in terms of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders and will help those students who have performed well this year and in previous years, but not necessarily students who were on their way to improve grades. For anyone who reads the transcripts, the process would be reported to achieve transparency and clarity.

The School Committee members thanked Allyson and the WHS leadership team in their efforts to move forward. Some of the concerns raised by the School Committee are the lack of taking into consideration the work that the students did from the beginning of year, for instance the mid-term exam, and the potential to offer a boost option depending on Q3 and Q4 grades, as well as the non-alignment with other peer districts and the integrity of the transcript in terms of the college admission process. Another concern is how this process will affect the 9<sup>th</sup> graders to which Allyson, Marybeth Sacramone and Sean Gass responded. The WHS team expressed the importance of acting imminently to complete this process, as the high school is waiting to send out senior transcripts. Marybeth shared the positive comments and support from guidance staff in other districts praising WHS for their decision.

Ellen noted that the School Committee should consider what is most fair for the students in this situation, while keeping the integrity of the academic judgments made by the Wayland Public Schools. She agrees with Allyson's tweak to the proposal but acknowledges that it is not perfect; Jeanne agreed. The discussion continued regarding the colleges' approach to the calculations of the GPAs that they received. Kim added that she continues to be concerned about the mid-year grade itself in terms of how the mid-year exam is counted, and feels it is important to present multiple ways to evaluate the grades of students, particularly if a grade comes in at the end of the term. The discussion continued.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Nate Buffum, the School Committee voted (3-2) to accept the suggested change to the original GPA proposal with the caveat that the High School team goes back and assess whatever they need to do to make the approach equitable for ninth graders. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt		X
Kathie Steinberg		X

*Nate left the meeting at 2:20 p.m.*

Comments were made and another discussion ensued prior to the final vote. Kim noted that this is fine as far as the GPA is concerned, but she is still uncomfortable with the overweighting of the mid-term relative to the rest of the grades and would like to discuss this further. Kim offered to work with Allyson in the event that there could be additional revisions made to the proposal. Chris Ryan believes that more thought would be beneficial on all sides.

Jeanne asked the School Committee to be mindful that there is a lot of work to do in preparation for the fall reopening before making the decision to keep this discussion open. The high school team reiterated that this process was very thoughtful and explained how the Q3 grading decision was made also with students' input.

As Kim voted no, she added that she likes having the improvement in the GPA part but dislikes not addressing the grades. She asked Kathie to expand on her vote. Kathie supports the initial proposal, adding that she had the May 8<sup>th</sup> guidelines when considering the proposal and was satisfied with the robust discussion that took place between the School Committee and the WHS administrators. Ellen added that the WHS staff has gone over and above to try to communicate to the students that they validate their work and care a great deal about them and what they are doing.

A discussion ensued about the communication process of the vote and by whom, as well as the process taken over the past two weeks regarding this decision.

**4. Discussion of Possible Community Outreach Opportunities (taken out of order):**

Kim proposed a Facebook page that would provide School Committee agendas and act as another outlet to inform the

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community. She will continue to have online “coffees” and asked for participation by one other member. Ellen volunteered to participate in the online “coffees”. Jeanne would like to research guidance regarding the use of Facebook.

5. **COVID-19 Response (continued):**

- Phase Two Remote Learning:
  - *Update of Implementation:*  
Arthur presented information regarding the parent and teacher surveys taken about remote learning and planning for next year. This challenging process will need to be streamlined so there is as much as clarity as possible, adding that there is a good possibility that remote learning will be in conjunction with in-school learning. Participation was high – 80% of teachers and 70% of parents.

Specific themes and comments were evident in the parent survey, such as the appreciation for the teachers’ hard work, examples of where and why students did better with remote learning, the overall great access to technology, the time commitment for parents of elementary children, the belief that students are more engaged face-to-face, and the desires for more challenge and structure for students, particularly during remote learning. Arthur continued to explain the parent survey in terms of access to technology, the amount of parent support at home, parent and student engagement, and access to extra help and support.

The teacher survey presented the following data: the teachers sharpened their remote teaching practices in terms of what works best for students, independent learning can be tricky for the younger students, small learning groups on ZOOM are more meaningful, the time involved to produce work for students and to provide feedback, the teachers miss their connection to students, the challenge of their own childcare issues, and the high school teachers miss their traditional structure.

There are concerns for parents and teachers as administrators make decisions for a fall reopening, such as some families may choose to keep their children home, clear communication regarding cleaning protocols, health screening, the movement of students during the day, and the process if a COVID case is identified. In addition, social distancing for younger children is a concern, the learning loss that may have occurred during remote learning, and the significance of staff childcare issues. Arthur explained further noting that there is a desire for normalcy with the realization that the fall will not be normal.

*Parry, Richard and Susan left the meeting at 2:58 p.m.*

Kathie noted that there is a challenge to balance the plan for the different constituencies, and financial resources and the impact are still not known. Chris added that some questions were difficult to answer not knowing what September will look like, particularly about making the decision to send their kids to school for several reasons and managing the balance between their professional lives, childcare and potential health issues.

*Chris Ryan left the meeting at 3:11 p.m.*

- *Discussion of Current and Future Feedback Process:*  
This agenda item was passed over.
- Discussion of Response to Possible State Mandates:  
This agenda topic was passed over.
- Next Steps:  
This topic was addressed in previous discussions.

6. **Financial Matters:**

- Loker Roof Update:  
This update was passed over.
- Discussion of Financial Reporting During Remote Meeting Period:  
This discussion was passed over.

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7. **Discussion of Superintendent Search Process:**

This agenda item was passed over.

8. **Consent Agenda:**

- Approval of Minutes: May 20, 2020

The Consent Agenda was passed over.

9. **Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**

Passed over.

*Nate rejoined the meeting at 3:12 p.m.*

10. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 3:12 p.m. for the purposes of a) discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Wayland Teachers Association (WTA), as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; and b) approving the following Executive Session Minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 22: May 27, 2020. The School Committee will not come back into open session, but will adjourn in Executive Session. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

The School Committee will be joined by Arthur Unobskey, Superintendent of Schools, and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will not reconvene in open session.

11. **Adjournment from Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 3:41 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Nate Buffum	X	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk  
Wayland School Committee

**Corresponding Documentation:**

1. Agenda
2. Executive Session Motion