

SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Regular Meeting – March 10, 2021

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, March 10, 2021, at 5:30 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present and participating remotely were:

Jeanne Downs, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Kim Reichelt
Chris Ryan
Kathie Steinberg

Also participating remotely:

Arthur Unobskey
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Richard Whitehead
Director of Student Services

Susan Bottan
Director of Finance & Operations

Also:

Susan Memoli, Director of Fine Arts

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 5:31 p.m. WayCAM recorded the meeting and it was livestreamed via ZOOM. The meeting was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and according to the revised open meeting law that allows remote participation. A roll call was taken:

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

1. Comments and Written Statements from the Public:

Jeanne read a public comment from Lara Bencsics, a senior at Wayland High School. Lara wants to go back to school for in-person learning, as remote learning has been detrimental to her academic, social, and mental success. For her, as well as her peers, their junior and senior year was taken away, they lost the prom, their graduation activities, and their last year together as the Class of 2021. Lara asked the School Committee to consider the health and well-being of the students and make the decision to bring them back to school.

Will Obar, a senior at Wayland High School, expressed his support for a return to school all-in five days a week. He has been attending school four days a week and it has helped him tremendously in terms of motivationally and socially.

Erin Hines, also a senior at Wayland High School, is certain that the pandemic has taken its toll on her education, mental health, and her overall personal well-being. Erin strongly believes that a return to full-time in-person learning is imperative in maintaining a healthy and productive learning environment for the students of WHS and WMS and implored the Committee to vote to bring students all-in, and she cites many reasons why remote instruction is not working. Finally, as a member of the senior class, Erin and her classmates are losing out on so many senior events culminating the last twelve years together.

Ellen Grieco gave a shout out to the Wayland Middle School staff, as she spent a day there observing several in-person and remote classes. She was impressed with the ongoing education taking place with such enthusiasm and under such difficult circumstances.

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Kathie Steinberg also spent a day at Wayland High School and echoed Ellen’s comments. Kathie was also impressed, particularly with the virtual orchestra and the classroom teachers.

Jeanne thanked the PTO and Kim Reichelt for their efforts in helping teachers to secure vaccination appointments.

Kim Reichelt commented that the state has designated four days for teachers’ vaccination appointment, and urged everyone to keep pushing to get everyone vaccinated sooner.

2. COVID-19 Response (out of order):

(a) Discussion of Procedures for Music Programs with Director of Fine Arts:

Susan Memoli updated the School Committee regarding the music program in the schools, particularly choral (singing) programs. She noted that the wind, brass, and singing programs will be back into full capacity safely. Music is very beneficial to the mental health of all those involved, and, according to Susan, singing is the most inclusive of all musical expression.

The National Standards for the Arts includes singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music which is followed by the music staff. According to an NFHS (National Federation of State High School Associations) Study and based on extensive scientific studies, singing and playing instruments can be done safely in the schools. The Department of Education has put forth regulations, and Susan has consulted with the Director of the Health Department and the Town Administrator in terms of mitigation protocols.

Susan reviewed the safety protocols for chorus, singing, and musical theater in terms of mask wearing and social distancing of ten feet both indoors and outdoors. The enhanced safety measures indoors include, a limit of 30 minutes at one time, the use of large, well ventilated spaces including outdoor tents, a lower volume of voices, facing in one direction, and the avoidance of sharing materials. If outdoors, staff will monitor student volume as well.

Chris arrived at 5:55 p.m.

3. Special Matters:

(a) Continued Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve Veritas Christian Academy as a “private organized educational system”, Alternative to Public School, pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 76 for Purposes of Adding Pre-school:

In response to a question in a prior meeting about Veritas’s accreditation, Jeanne noted that the accreditation process is not required. Using DESE’s criteria, Arthur spent three hours at Veritas observing classes, reviewing writing from three different grades, reviewing data from the physical plants, and engaging in lengthy discussions. The school is in demand, operates successfully, and delivers a solid research-based curriculum. Arthur observed solid financial record keeping, as the school is effective at raising money and providing financial aid. In addition, Veritas has solid COVID procedures in place. Arthur recommended that the School Committee vote to approve Veritas Christian Academy as a private organized educational system for the purpose of adding a pre-school.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve Veritas Christian Academy as a private organized educational system, alternative to public school, pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 76 for the purposes of adding a pre-school. 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	

4. COVID-19 Response (continued):

(a) Discussion and Review of Planning for Remainder of School Year, including Synchronous Augmentation, Kindergarten All-In Update and Grades 1-5 All-In Planning Update, and Grades 6-12 All-In Discussion:

Arthur updated the School Committee on in-person learning for kindergartners. Teachers are working thoughtfully through new procedures. Arthur reported that there are concerns about the traffic flow at the elementary schools. He recently met with the principal, interim police chief, and the DPW Director at Happy Hollow School to observe the traffic flow. The police chief made some suggestions and signage can be installed.

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Jeanne and Kathie spoke about their experience in a kindergarten classroom. The kindergarten teacher is happy to be back in the classroom with the kids, and, as she put it, not planning for remote learning has freed up some time, and there is a lot of transition time which is a challenge as it breaks up the day. An additional challenge is that the kids gravitate towards one another, but being back in school provides a strong emotional component and impact on the students, adding that there is a possibility that there may not be much more academic progress, but is a social emotional decision on behalf of the students.

K-5 Planning:

There are many questions across the three elementary schools that need to be answered in a consistent manner. Susan is working on the operational details with the principals, and the next piece is to build the schedules, particularly the specialist class schedules into one comprehensive schedule. Other schedules include special education, literacy schedules, and teachers' classroom planning. Time spent on arrival and dismissal will impact the daily schedule.

DESE has mandated K-5 to come back to school on or before April 5. Given that the district has one professional development day left for the year, Arthur proposed that Thursday, April 1, as a professional development planning day for K-5 staff and school will not be in session.

Middle School Planning:

The Commissioner has mandated an all-in return to school for middle school students on or before April 28 five days a week. Arthur proposed a professional development day for middle school staff on Monday, April 26, on which school will not be in session. The students will return on Tuesday, April 27, from spring break. Ellen and Kathie spoke about the difficulty in making this shift happen and the many changes that will occur from the hybrid mode to all-in. Families may have different experiences in the process.

Upon a motion duly made by Kim Reichelt, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a professional day on Thursday, April 1, for Kindergarten through 5th, and Monday, April 26, for Grades 6-8. 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	

(b) Discussion and Review of Middle School Learning Data:

Parry presented a progress report for the Wayland Middle School in which data was collected from parents, staff, and student achievement information through the end of January 2021. As was reported for the elementary and high school levels, the purpose of the data collection is to see how students are doing and if there are students for whom there are concerns.

In the parent/guardian survey, 310 responded and Parry reported that there was a generally positive-shifted bell curve on most questions; Parry explained. Overall, parents are concerned about their children's progress relative to a normal school year, but also believe that the academic needs are being met as opposed to the social emotional needs not being met. Parry shared the parent/guardian data dashboard. Responses do change based on the different sub-groups for students in WRAP, in the hybrid mode, and students with IEPs or 504 plans.

Thirty-two teachers (22 subject-area teachers and 10 student services staff) responded to the survey, and it also includes qualitative feedback from middle school curriculum leaders. Teachers have been able to teach the same essential curriculum typically taught, with some curricular cuts, and with the exception of combined arts and wellness; Parry explained. Academic progress has been generally positive, but it has been challenging to provide students with social-emotional support and is similar to the sub-groups of students identified by the parent survey.

Parry reviewed student achievement data and noted that the standard-based report cards were used for the first time for the entire student population. Parry described what the standard-based reporting represents for the students, adding that the same pre-COVID standards were used. There is a small percentage of the students in the three grades for whom the teachers are very concerned. Moving forward, next steps are to continue to work with those students who are struggling, to plan for all-in schooling, and figure out what ramifications might have on students'

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academic and social-emotional progress, work on curriculum this summer, and plan for student-summer learning opportunities.

High School Planning:

Arthur reported that the Commissioner has not announced a date certain for the all-in return of high school students, and will give districts two weeks' notice when he does. A discussion ensued about a possible date for high school students as somewhat delivered by the Commissioner and/or determined by the School Committee. Arthur reported on what other districts are doing, adding that all 18 TEC superintendents are planning to bring K-12 students into school five days a week by April 28.

Arthur recommended that the School Committee vote to start the high school students on the same date, April 27, when the middle school students return, as he is concerned about students' mental health and ZOOM burnout, particularly when the weather improves. Students should get into a rhythm now of being in school every day so they can be better prepared for school in the fall.

Kim responded to Arthur's recommendation noting that her ambivalence to returning to school all-in has been somewhat swayed based on the student social-emotional data, but her concerns remain in terms of safety protocols. She cited those mitigation adjustments that she believes are necessary to make the all-in plan safe that include, masks, ventilation, testing, and vaccinations. Kim further described her concerns and recommendations for each safety protocol. Kathie asked if the staff is prepared to shift again to all-remote, if necessary, and recommended that this be a part of the planning and include steps to mitigate a disruption in the schedule from all-in to remote to all-in.

Arthur added that the state has extended its surveillance testing program until April 16, and the district signup is also extended to Thursday, March 18. A discussion ensued regarding the importance of pooled testing and the possibility of mandating testing for all or certain student groups, as well as replacing the volunteers and nursing staff many of whom have reached their maximum sustainability. Testing for certain groups will not be mandated by the School Committee, but it strongly encourages more participation.

Ellen strongly recommended outdoor lunch periods whenever possible. It is challenging for students in K-2, but could be done in most schedules. The Committee discussed mask protocols and it was suggested that information is provided to students and families about the most effective masks as recommended by Dr. Joseph Allen. In terms of ventilation, air purifiers are being considered in some areas to augment air filtration. Arthur reviewed all the ventilation work that has been done up to now, adding that the ventilation systems provide a high level of air exchanges in classrooms and, in some cases, exceeded the recommended levels. Portable Hepa air filtration systems have also been purchased, and energy recovery vents were installed on some rooftops to bring in more fresh air to some rooms.

Kim raised another concern in terms of having all teachers and staff vaccinated fully, including the two-week waiting period, before opening school all-in for secondary students. She highlighted some flawed data in terms of social distancing leading to a flawed recommendation by the Commissioner. A discussion followed.

Upon a motion duly made by Chris Ryan, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to bring the high school back five days a week full-time and in-person with the students starting on Tuesday, April 27, and a professional day on Monday, April 26, for the teachers. 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Arthur confirmed that elementary students will not have school on Thursday, April 1, and middle school and high school students will not have school on Monday, April 26. These days will not result in additional days in June.

(c) Special Education Update:

Richard reported that he and his staff are working with the principals toward reopening the buildings all-in for students.

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(d) COVID Learning and Safety Team Update:

Jeanne informed the Committee that the COVID Learning and Safety Team recently met in a kindergarten classroom to observe how it is going as well as the classroom setup. Next week they will meet at Happy Hollow Elementary School to review the classroom setup with 3 feet of distancing. The team also discussed ventilation and the COVID testing program.

(e) Next Steps:

Next steps were discussed during the meeting.

5. Financial Matters:

- (a) Review and Discussion of Short-Term Space Utilization Study, including Impact to Capital Budget and Warrant Article: In collaboration with Susan and the elementary principals, a short-term space utilization study was prepared by TBA Architects, and short-term and long-term solutions were provided. Some of the short-term solutions would meet the needs of bringing in the students to meet the strict parameters required by the state now, but the study was designed for use in the fall. Susan added that a \$350,000 capital request was also put forward to address the anticipated need for additional classrooms.

The study's narrative addresses the specific needs defined by each principal and lays out three options that TBA Architects defined, one of which addresses the immediate needs to bring students all-in. Also included are the floor plans, site plans, and a cost overview for each of the three options. Susan added that since furniture has been purchased, it is no longer a part of the cost overview. The short-term needs, including a list of priorities, are driven by COVID, as well as enrollment and changes in the delivery of instruction.

The recommendation is to forge ahead with Option 3 as defined for each elementary school in the utilization study that will address needs for one year. Some specials will be shifted from designated spaces to shared spaces and integrated into the classrooms. Susan explained further about the schools' spaces and the repurposing efforts. A discussion ensued about Happy Hollow's extensive space needs, short and long-term, and the financial impact to the capital and operating budgets. In repurposing the BASE office at Claypit Hill, it is also recommended to spend funds to mitigate the loud sound in that space. The work in this space will begin in April with a plan recommended by the Town Administrator, including a funding source.

Susan reviewed the costs for Option 3 identified by TBA Architects. The total cost is \$148,367; however, some costs have been incurred this year bringing the total cost down to \$102,221, thereby reducing the capital request of \$350,000 by \$247,779. Kathie voiced her disappointment in the larger process, noting that there will be more costly issues going forward, even with the short-term needs being addressed now.

The district will embark on a long-term feasibility study for which \$200,000 was appropriated at the annual town meeting last year. Susan explained the process, adding that the utilization study is a starting point toward the feasibility study.

(b) Update on FY22 Operating Budget:

The School Committee discussed the options, as recommended by Arthur and Susan, of meeting the \$400,000 gap in the budget, given the School Committee's recommended budget and the request by the Finance Committee. The first option was discussed in the previous discussion in choosing Option 3 to address short-term needs for the elementary schools. Although there is some risk, another option is to carry only \$150,000 in the SPED out-of-district tuition account resulting in a \$100,000 savings. The third option is to increase the bus fee to \$500 with the assumption that there could be a loss of ridership of about 25% down to 834 riders from 1,098 riders and could generate \$175,000 in savings. The School Committee reviewed the transportation budget as prepared and explained by Susan.

In terms of best practices for municipal finance, raising the bus fee must be a permanent change and not just a one-year change.

The School Committee reviewed a memo from the Town Administrator in terms of recommendations to close the budget gap of \$400,000. A discussion followed and Susan presented a fourth option which is to increase the bus fee to \$400 and reduce the circuit breaker by \$50,000. Kathie explained her concerns about the budget gap process and acknowledged that the burden falls on the school families rather than on the entire Wayland taxpayer base and proposed that the expenses be divided among the entire Wayland community. Jeanne expressed the importance of collaboration between the town and the schools, and other members expressed justification of moving forward with

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finding the money to satisfy the budget gap as discussed.

Upon a motion duly made by Kathie Steinberg, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to reduce the short-term space needs CIP by \$247,800. 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted (3-1-1) to decrease the Circuit Breaker by \$50,000 and increase the bus fees by \$100 to \$400. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

A discussion ensued about the Circuit Breaker reduction and possible options if funds were needed and funding options for COVID related expenses, such as a remote educational program for next year.

Ellen attended the most recent Finance Committee meeting at which many questions were asked. The Committee delegated Ellen, Jeanne, and Susan to provide the answers to the questions.

- (c) Discussion of Logistics for Budget Hearing:
 Jeanne reviewed the components and logistics of the budget hearing presentation, including the status of the unmet needs, and the budget booklet that will be uploaded on the website for the public. There will also be a Q & A for those who attend the virtual hearing.

6. Policy Matters:

- (a) Review and Possible Vote to Approve Updates to
 - KDD – News Media Relations/News Releases
 - KE – Public Complaints
 - KI – Visitors to the Schools
 - LDA – Student Teaching and Internships

This agenda item was passed over.

6. Consent Agenda:

- (a) Approval of Minutes: February 24, 2021

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda. 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

7. Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:

Chris thanked the PTO volunteers, including Melissa Ricci, Kim Reichelt, and Sheetal Acharya who have assisted in the vaccination process in getting appointments for teachers.

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8. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter executive session at 9:16 p.m. for 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 discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee, (b) discussing strategy with respect to negotiations with non-union personnel, the incoming Superintendent and the outgoing Superintendent, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(2), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; and (c) approval of the following executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: February 3, 2021, February 10, 2021, February 16, 2021, and February 24, 2021. 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, Parry Graham, Assistant Superintendent, and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

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

9. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 10:29 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	
Kim Reichelt	X	
Chris Ryan	X	
Kathie Steinberg	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comments
3. Memo from Superintendent re: Veritas Christian Academy
4. Cost Estimates for Elementary Space Project
5. WPS Space Needs Conceptual Costs
6. WPS Space Needs Diagram
7. WPS Space Needs Summary Findings
8. Bus Fee Analysis
9. Summary of Potential Reductions to FY22 Budget
10. Budget Hearing Presentation
11. Minutes of February 24, 2021
12. Executive Session Motion