

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Special Meeting – August 5, 2020

A Special Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, August 5, 2020, at 1:00 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present and participating remotely were:

Jeanne Downs, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair (arrived at 1:10 p.m.)
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

Chair Jeanne Downs convened the open session at 1:05 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. A roll call was taken:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Present</u>
Jeanne Downs, Chair	X
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	Absent
Kim Reichelt	X
Chris Ryan	X
Kathie Steinberg	X

Jeanne informed the public that after the School Committee vote on Monday regarding the start of school, there was the intent to communicate with the community that evening. However, new information came from the Commissioner of Education and the communication will be sent after today's meeting.

Jeanne acknowledged that during this global pandemic, we are all trying to decide how to move forward and there is no perfect answer. While emotions run high, we are all trying to make the best out of a tough situation. The School Committee listens and takes all comments and input very seriously. She asked the community to work together with grace, compassion, and kindness to do what is best for our schools.

Ellen arrived at 1:10 p.m.

1. Comments and Written Statements from the Public:

Julie Rainville, 53 Draper Road, commented that she does not understand how school will start with a remote model with a phased in hybrid model. Many parents are feeling that the School Committee is not open to their feedback given parent surveys and government recommendations. Ms. Rainville noted that the students need to be back in school and an opportunity is missed by starting remotely. The weather is still nice and there is access to the outside and natural ventilation through fresh air. In November, the cold weather is here, children come into school with colds, and there could be a need to be remote then. Finally, she stated that we all need to embrace the challenges and live and work in this new normal.

Jeanne read a public comment from Carrie Dirmeikis, WMS ELA Curriculum Leader and Teacher. Ms. Dirmeikis writes in response to the proposal for teachers to teach remotely from the school buildings, which is very risky and can severely hinder the teachers' ability to deliver the exceptional instruction they want to bring to the students and families. She referred to the ways in which her ELA team kept students engaged and present in the spring and how they plan to maximize remote learning, not limit it, in the fall. Ms. Dirmeikis commented that teaching from home in the spring humanized teachers in a

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way that was very, very important and much was gained through students seeing their fuller lives. She believes that teachers should have a choice to teach from the classrooms and if others want to lift the quality of a lesson from their homes, then that should be allowed as well.

Jeanne read a public comment from Leigh Netcoh, WMS Spanish teacher. Although Ms. Netcoh appreciates the Committee's decision to go all remote, she does not support the decision to put teachers back in the classrooms because it is not safe to do so at this time and asks the Committee to give the teachers an option. In her room, in particular, the air circulation is poor and does not have the assurance that the air quality in that room is safe. Given the uncertain information about how the virus spreads, Ms. Netcoh is worried that the virus could easily spread between staff who are teaching in adjacent rooms.

Joanna Posner, WMS special education teacher, read a letter on behalf of the entire Student Services Department who advocate for their students, and they are speaking up because they are expected to be present in the school buildings. Ms. Posner noted that the idea of having security is a learning and emotional philosophy and a human right; only then will students learn. DESE produced guidelines for all districts to follow and teachers have heard that they are fortuitous law and mandated with which they disagree in terms of their accuracy. They work to be sure that students are not singled out, are fully integrated, and have access to the least restrictive environment. Teachers are passionate and confident that they can deliver the work necessary, in accordance with their student's IEP's, in a remote environment. Everyone will be safe, it will reduce the stigma of special education services, and the students will be reached in meaningful and supportive ways.

Jeanne read a public comment from about 27 parents who do not support the remote model and are requesting to start school in a hybrid model. Results from a July parent survey showed that 85% of Wayland families support the all-in and hybrid models. The parents offered several data points as to why they support a hybrid model, such as the advice from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC. In addition, many Wayland parents are frontline workers and now office workers and many have to return to work, and the spring all-remote experience was very disappointing. The parents realize that any option will not be perfect, but the kids and parents are ready to start living in the new normal with social distancing, healthy hygiene practices, mask-wearing skills, and utilizing outdoor spaces weather permitting.

Devon Farley read a letter on behalf of the WMS house and curriculum leaders, in which they want flexibility in deciding from where they will teach during the remote learning phase, adding that most teachers are opposed to being required to teach from their classrooms because they will not be safe. Most business have allowed employees to work from home, and the district should follow this as well so as not to expose everyone to this deadly virus, especially when it is unnecessary. Community among staff in the buildings is not likely because it is unsafe and will meet remotely anyway. Mr. Farley referred to an attached slide show he sent to the School Committee that outlines instructional and experiential differences.

Jeanne read a public comment from Allison and Brad Kates, 31 Claypit Hill Road, in which they urge the School Committee to reconsider their decision and move into a hybrid model. Mr. and Mrs. Kates moved to Wayland for the quality of the education and beginning in a remote model is a disservice to the children. The situation could worsen much into the fall and winter, and the children should have the opportunity to meet their teachers in person, settle in with their new classes, and have as many outdoor learning opportunities as possible. They recognize the challenges, but feel that remote learning is not the answer.

Dana Cooper, 100 Old Sudbury Road, commented that, although there has much said about the teachers' health and safety, there has not been much talk about the known risk of the mental health of the children by not being in social settings and in school. She urged and demanded that the School Committee provide an accountability for the administration and staff to provide a clear detailed plan for moving to the hybrid model in four months.

Jeanne read a public comment from Jim Medeiros, Decatur Lane, in which he asks that the Superintendent address the issue of the MIAA's potential ruling regarding sports if districts start the year in an all-remote model. Mr. Medeiros also asks the School Committee to reconsider their decision and begin the year in a hybrid model, given the learning loss in the spring and the GPA decision, particularly for the rising juniors and seniors. Mr. Medeiros agrees that the COVID situation could worsen eliminating the move to hybrid altogether, and since students learn differently, it would be beneficial for them to meet their peers and teachers and engage in live personal instruction, as also recommended by Dr. Fauci. He believes the fairly, new high school is safe and meets requirements for teachers and students to return.

Jeanne read a public comment from Ruchi Saggar in which he expressed his support related to a letter from parents supporting the hybrid model although his first preference is an all-in model assuming cases in the state remain at a safe

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level according to the state guidelines. During the time in which students will be learning from home, his strong preference is that children receive synchronous instruction for the same amount of time as if they were in school, as the spring remote model did not meet parental and student needs. Mr. Saggar also asks that parental feedback is given due consideration going forward.

Jeanne read a public comment from Bill and Lori Caddoo in which they are concerned that if the school year starts remotely, students may not be able to participate in athletics, as many agree that athletics and extra-curricular activities are essential for the mental health of many students. Mr. and Mrs. Caddoo advocated that if this becomes a reality, then the district should work towards having this policy changed by the MIAA so the student athletes are not penalized, adding that homeschooled children could participate in athletics.

Pam Roman, Griscom Road, asked the School Committee to reconsider its decision and begin the school in the hybrid model. Like many parents, Ms. Roman feels that the district does not have a clear plan to get to the hybrid model in October or November and it may never happen because this pandemic could be here for a long time. Many families move to Wayland for the excellent education and this decision is a disservice to the community. She also understands that safety protocols should be in place, as well as the opportunity to have outdoor classrooms.

Jeanne read a public comment from two parents of a middle school student. They fully support the decision to start remotely, as the health and safety of the students, teachers, and staff, as well as their families, is very important. They note that it is very likely that positive cases and deaths will increase in Massachusetts as time goes on, and despite current research, children are not impervious to COVID. In addition, there is a lack of understanding for transmittance of the virus, the medium and long-term health consequences, and there is no vaccine at this time. Remote learning is not forever and kids are resilient even though some may struggle. Everyone should be kept safe while helping the children succeed in the best way possible.

Jeanne read a public comment from Janet Manning, a WHS math teacher. Ms. Manning disagrees with the Committee's decision to bring teachers into the buildings to teach remotely, adding that there was no regard for the teachers and their families' safety. She asked for and did not receive scientific data regarding the teachers' effectiveness teaching remotely from classrooms, the potential of an increase in student learning, and the lessened risk of infection by being in school as opposed to teaching from home. Ms. Manning concludes that there is no scientific evidence that students will benefit from teaching remotely from their classrooms. Finally, teachers have performed many roles, such as safety officers, aside from teaching, including asking them now to be health care workers. She questions whether we are all in this together.

Jeanne read a public comment from Linda Hines in which she expressed her concern and disappointment in the lack of communication regarding the fall school plan, as she is receiving information from Wayland Patch in much the same way when the GPA decision was reached, adding that this does little to build collaboration. Ms. Hines is concerned about MIAA's potential decision to disallow students to play sports if school districts start remotely, and this could be devastating for students, particularly when those districts that start in the hybrid model can participate in sports. Another concern is for the seniors who are already at a disadvantage given the spring remote learning and grading as well as the potential to lose college scholarships. Ms. Hines feels that many questions need answers, and she would like to receive information directly from the school district.

Jeanne read a public comment from the Wayland High School Department Heads who expressed their concern about requiring teachers to teach from empty classrooms, and see no benefits to students or teachers while making no pedagogical, logistical, or financial sense. Thus, the leadership team asked for the Committee's support in allowing flexibility for teachers to choose the location from which they will teach. Student engagement is diminished if teachers wear masks in the classrooms, and it is logistically impossible to provide a separate classroom for each teacher simultaneously at the high school. They are also concerned about the special education teachers and students coming into the buildings for many reasons. Finally, even if all teachers return to the buildings, team meetings would still take place virtually. Teachers should be given a choice in this regard.

Kathie Steinberg made a clarifying response in terms of safety in the school buildings for staff and students, as there are summer programs at the Middle School currently. If areas/rooms are unsafe, they will not be used until they are safe. The school administrators and school support staff have continued to work from their offices for a while, and two School Committee members have joined this meeting from the Town Building. The Town has implemented limitations during the pandemic and meetings must happen during the day remotely and not in person. For the most part, the community cannot enter the Town Building. In addition, Kathie commented on the Committee's planning process and the timeline of implementation and communications, including FAQ's. The School Committee is focused on a successful implementation.

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Richard Whitehead gave a brief summary regarding guidance from DESE for special education students. The district must provide in person instruction as much as possible particularly for students in specialized programs from pre-school to Grade 12 and based on safety conditions in the buildings. In addition, evaluations for students must be in person and by appointment.

Ellen Grieco added that all town municipal employees are working in pods from the Town Building. In this situation, there are groups of people who believe in taking different paths for different reasons, and we should try to acknowledge different perspectives, as there is no right or good answer.

Kim Reichelt appreciates Kathie’s comment about the overwhelming emails received by Committee members, and she has tried to respond to most of them, including today’s public comment asking about her sources for COVID data.

2. **Administrative/Procedural Matters:**

Jeanne will send out a Doodle Poll to Committee members regarding a date to meet with Lyle Kirtman of FMS. The proposed dates are August 17 or August 21.

3. **Consent Agenda:**

- Approval of Minutes: July 15, 2020

This agenda item was passed over.

4. **Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair (taken out of order):**

Jeanne informed the School Committee that the draft audit report for the Loker windows and doors project is available for their review. Ben Keefe and the OPM reviewed the report, and the project is in the final phase of the MSBA audit, which is signed by several town officials. The state reimbursement rate for this project is 35.42% or approximately \$545,000. Kathie addressed the process for the full fund appropriation at Town Meeting.

Upon a motion duly made by Kathie Steinberg, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to authorize Jeanne Downs to sign the draft audit report for the Loker windows and doors project that was reviewed today. 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	

5. **COVID-19 Response:**

- Review of Timeline for Submission of Fall Reopening Plan to State:
The fall reopening plan is due to the State on August 10, which includes starting in the remote model until November 9 and ultimately moving into a phased-in hybrid model. This plan will be sent to the community after it is submitted to the State.

Ventilation Update: The team addressing the ventilation issues is near completion of the report that will provide plans for upcoming work and the timeline for the work. Arthur will share the report with the School Committee for its discussion at its next meeting.

- Update on Various Working Groups, including Teaching and Learning and Operations:
Parry described the work of the collaborative Teaching and Learning Committee that identifies changing working conditions and how they will be addressed as the district moves into the hybrid model in late fall. This will involve impact bargaining with the WTA as soon as possible. Because this group focuses on contractual issues, it would not be advisable for parents to be included in this process. However, now that the model is identified, parents’ feedback would be welcomed.

A discussion ensued regarding the difference of remote learning in the spring and what is expected in the fall. The spring remote learning was unanticipated and unplanned and districts followed the State’s recommendations with

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fewer standards and reduced expectations for students. In the fall, full school days will be in place with synchronous activities and lessons around curriculum, as well as assessments and accountability for students. Teachers are excited in their planning process for the fall. One concern as discussed by the Teaching and Learning Committee is the amount of time students will be on the computer screens.

- Review and Possible Vote to Approve Calendar Change for 2020-2021 School Year:
The School Committee reviewed the approved calendar for 2020-2021, given that DESE and the MTA have developed a plan for teachers to have ten days of professional development and planning time before the first day of school changing the requirement of 180 school days to 170 days. Staff will return on Thursday, August 27 as the first planning day with the proposed additional days: August 28, August 31, September 1, September 2, September 3, September 8, September 9, September 10, and September 11. During that time, teachers will plan for a remote start and the transition to hybrid. Meet and greets, orientations, and device and book pickups will be scheduled for all students outside of their school buildings. The first day of remote classes is Monday, September 14. Assuming that there are no snow days, the last day of school for students is June 15.

In addition, August 27 and August 28 were originally designated as planning days, thus, these two days can be reserved in anticipation of an issue that might arise. A discussion followed, including the length of quarters around the college admissions process and the importance of the district's assistance to students during this process. The first quarter will end on or about November 6. Kim also advocated for Wayland to become an SAT testing site again.

The calendar will be voted upon with the following changes: start date of September 14, planning days beginning August 27 to include professional development, teacher meetings and student orientations, and an end date of June 14. A discussion ensued about September 4 as a non-school day.

Upon a motion duly made by Kim Reichelt, seconded by Kathie Steinberg, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to accept the changed calendar as presented by Arthur. 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	

Commissioner Update: The Commissioner of Education expressed his concern verbally about the districts who are starting in a remote model. As a result, there is a possibility that the MIAA could negate sports since the kids are not in school. School plans are based on local School Committee control, but the Commissioner may ask for details in terms of a robust curriculum experience. Chris noted he was told that the Commissioner asked districts to review their plans for a reconsideration of the hybrid model where there is space to social distance.

A discussion ensued about revisiting the Committee's discussion and vote to start remotely with a transition to hybrid on a date certain sooner than Q2 provided it is safe and the data allows us to do so. Pivoting from remote to hybrid can be more difficult than starting in hybrid and moving into the remote model and pivots could happen more than once and everyone should be prepared if necessary. Arthur expressed his concern about changing teaching and learning models mid-way in a quarter, as well as the possibility of grading and scheduling difficulties.

Ellen Grieco moved that the School Committee begin with the remote model as described in the motion on August 3 and define that we will move into a hybrid model on or before October 19 provided that the administration feels that in order to fairly schedule and grade at the high school and we have to have a different date. After considering grading and scheduling implications at the High School, then it should stay remote until the first quarter is over. Ellen rescinded this motion.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Chris Ryan, the School Committee vote unanimously for the district to begin the year remotely as described in the approved plan of August 3 and to adopt a fully implemented hybrid plan for K-8 by October 19, unless health and safety considerations dictates otherwise. Wayland High School will move to the full implementation of the hybrid model by October 19, unless the grading and scheduling difficulties justify extending the remote delivery of education through the end of Q1. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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<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 addressed the issue of those families who may choose to opt out of the hybrid model once implemented. The Committee may revisit this decision if sports is eliminated because districts start remotely.

- Review of Upcoming Communications and Listening Sessions:
 The School Committee reviewed the draft communication and included the new motion and the updates to the calendar. Jeanne and Arthur will finalize the draft.

Arthur addressed the teachers' health and safety concerns about returning to work in person. He reflected on his personal experiences of being back in the office and the advantages of being in person. It is possible to clean the shared rooms, particularly at the Middle School and High School, during the remote period with other safety protocols in place. There are ongoing discussions to address teachers' concerns and comfortability in order to be ready for the students to return in the hybrid model.

Kathie acknowledged that much has been asked of parents and the community during this difficult time and truly appreciates their input and ideas. The School Committee will identify the resources that families need and secure those resources to ensure success for everyone. Ellen echoed this message and asked that student cohorts be identified so that families can plan. Arthur confirmed that cohort planning is ongoing.

- Next Steps:
 The previous discussions addressed the next steps.

6. **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 4:24 p.m. for the purpose 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. The School Committee will pass over (b) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22.

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. 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. **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 4:49 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	

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Kathie Steinberg

X

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Unobskey, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

- 1. Agenda
- 2. Public Comments