

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – February 9, 2022

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, February 9, 2022, at 5:30 P.M. broadcast by WayCAM in the Wayland Town Building.

Present:

Chris Ryan, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Jeanne Downs
Jessica Polizzotti
Kim Reichelt

Also present:

Dr. Omar Easy
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Ellen Whittemore
Director of Finance & Operations

Also: Kathie Steinberg, Highland Circle
Rebecca Stanizzi, 14 Winthrop Road

Chair Chris Ryan convened the regular session at 5:37 p.m. The meeting was recorded by WayCAM.

1. Public Comment:

Middle school student MacKenzie Young commented that her last normal school year was in the third grade, and it's time to remove the rules requiring the students to wear masks. It's difficult to make new friends and actual learning is more difficult given that MacKenzie has to repeat herself many times in order to be understood. Lastly, students eat outside in the cold or have to step into the hall to get a sip of water. It will never get better if we don't take the first step.

Sara Sun requested that Chris asks the following question and its response be read into the formal record on this meeting. *"Can you provide the specific legal authority which allows the Wayland School Committee to adopt and enforce mask mandates? We understand there are CDC guidelines and DESE guidelines, but what specific Town ByLaw, Statutory Authority or Regulatory Authority provides the Town of Wayland the legal authority to adopt and enforce mask mandates on our students"*

Third grader Arden Young introduced her friend Ashton as she was speaking on his behalf as well as her own. They believe masks should not be in the schools any longer. It's not fair that they have to choose to be cold and eat their snack outdoors or to choose to be warm indoors and hungry. Masks should be a choice as kids are not happy wearing masks. Teachers cannot be heard and teachers cannot hear the students. Arden and Ashton want mask rules to end.

Vivienne Polizzotti is in third grade and has had only one normal school year in Kindergarten. Her public comment was to talk about how she feels about unfair COVID restrictions, such as masks, lunch breaks, and indoor recess. Vivian finds it difficult to hear her teacher with a mask on, she can't sit with or talk to her friends during lunch and during indoor recess, and she and her classmates sit at their desks with masks on which is boring and not normal. Even more difficult, her friends are in different classes and there isn't an opportunity to make new friends. Vivian asked the School Committee to remove COVID restrictions as soon as possible.

Chris read a public comment from Doug Alongi. He believes in science and feels everyone should do their part to protect the community. However, he encouraged the School Committee to end the mask mandate in the schools as soon as possible, given that the current strain seems to be less dangerous and, in his opinion, it is time to move ahead.

Caroline Owen, Garden Path, asked the School Committee to remove the mask mandate in the schools effective immediately, as mask mandates are being overturned in the courts and in state and local governments throughout the country. Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley lifted the mask mandate as of February 28. Ms. Owen commented that there are long-term ramifications and harm being done to the children because of the pandemic, and it is time to reclaim normalcy for the kids as it is the best way to support them. Parents should determine what is best for their

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children since dozens of Wayland parents want masks removed now.

Chris read from Wayland parent Angela Zachary who commented that given the science and high vaccination rate in Wayland, it is time to get back to normal. She offered a list of comments made by Dr. Edward Ryan, the Director of International Infectious Disease, at MGH. Some include, "Close to 100% of the positive cases in Massachusetts are Omicron; DELTA is almost gone from New England"; "February will be clean up mode and March will begin to return to 'normal'"; "40% of those infected will be asymptomatic"; and "We are fighting the last war with COVID and should be pivoting back to normal life, but society isn't quite ready for it yet."

Fifth grader Sloane Diroberto commented that she has worn a mask every day since second grade and COVID has changed everyone's lives. He can barely hear her teacher, and he can't learn if he can't hear what she is saying. He can't comfort a friend because he can't see if they are sad. Mask wearing should be a choice, and COVID cannot ruin lives forever. Sloane asked the School Committee to think of the kids and vote to remove masks.

Jordan Diroberto is a third grader and 8 years. Old. She has worn a mask every year except during Kindergarten and can't remember what it was like to be mask free. Jordan asked why masks are necessary if everyone is vaccinated and she believes that COVID could in some ways be compared to the flu. It's hard to know what her teacher and friends look like and to know what they are thinking. Jordan said it is time for lives to go back to normal.

Ellen Grieco praised all the students for their public comments, as they were well written and the students were well spoken.

Charlotte Trim of Lincoln urged the School Committee to vote to take masks off the children. Due to the pandemic, DESE issued protocols for masking, regular testing, and an 80% participation rate in what she called a drug trial in exchange for funding which she says violates all laws around medical experimentation. She called discipline in schools for not following protocols as coercion and violating the law as well. Ms. Trim cited the laws in this regard. She asked why school policy overrides State and Federal laws and also asked how much money the schools have received since the beginning of the pandemic.

Doug Padden, 16 Thompson Road, has three children in the schools. He introduced his son Troy who is in Kindergarten now but attended The Children's Way during the time COVID shut everything down and all students transitioned to online learning. Troy had speech and OT therapy but struggled in front of a computer screen and, as a result, regressed. Mr. Padden said it is impossible for Troy to learn in a masked environment, as his development has stalled and he cannot reach his full potential. He advocated for a return to full linguistic and emotional engagement, as protecting the mental, social, and emotional health of students should be the top priority and asked School Committee to remove the mask mandate.

Chris read a public comment from Sharon Nugent in which she asks the School Committee to continue the mask mandate in the schools because her family is vulnerable to COVID. Her kindergartner and five-month old are unvaccinated, and her younger child recently had open heart surgery at which time she was on a ventilator. Ms. Nugent understands the desire for normalcy, but until the youngest community members can be vaccinated, she urged the School Committee to make decisions that affect whole families.

Sara Sun, 171 West Plain Street, is a parent and a literacy specialist who reached out to Dr. Shira Doron, an infectious disease expert from Tufts Medical Center. Dr. Doron provided a written statement that Ms. Sun read in full. Dr. Doron and other infectious disease specialists support the end of the mask mandate as of February 28 for reasons cited in the statement.

Chris read a public comment from Caroline Hanlon, 44 High Rock Road, in which she states she is in support of the Governor's and DESE's decision to lift the mask mandate on February 28, as masking should be a personal choice. The risks are much lower and there are better treatments for those who become infected. Ms. Hanlon states that it is no longer necessary to mask the kids, as they are unmasked outside of school, language development, nonverbal communication and human connection is affected, and children should return to a normal school experience.

Sophomore Xande Protopapa Santos, 216 Concord Road, asked the School Committee to stop asking students to wear masks for a virus that he believes presents zero risk for children. He said he has missed many expressions from his friends, all of whom have been robbed of a normal high school experience, and he finds wearing masks during sports to be harmful since kids can't breathe. Xande acknowledged that kids are resilient, but they are also vulnerable and

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they are not okay. He believes that science says masks don't work, and he is done wearing a mask going forward.

Chris read a public comment from Ted Harding in which he implored the School Committee to end the mask mandate in all Wayland public schools on February 28, the date that the Governor has announced for Massachusetts' schools. There is evidence that the duration of mask mandates in schools has not only harmed the children, but they have not provided any significant benefit. The schools' testing program has also been effective in preventing any outbreaks. Mr. Harding believes that families should be able to make decisions that are in the best interests of their entire family.

Drita Protopapa is a child of political refugees from Albania due to communist rulings. She was born and raised in Wayland and is a member of the WHS class of 1983. Ms. Protopapa grew up learning about justice and freedom because of her parents' experiences in Albania. She asked the School Committee to help in restoring freedom and justice in the Wayland Public Schools.

2. **Special Matter:**

(a) Update regarding Bus Parking:

Becky Stanizzi and Kathie Steinberg updated the School Committee on the latest developments since their last presentation on the status of school bus parking. The next steps include presenting to the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and the ZBA.

The short-term parking options include staying at the Town Building or renting parking outside of Wayland. The long-term solutions include the short-term options, as well as previously mentioned sites at 357 Commonwealth Road, Claypit Hill School, the town beach/cemetery, Loker Recreation, the Wayland Middle School, and the Route 20 South Landfill. Some of the long-term sites have been removed from the list including the schools.

Ms. Stanizzi recapped what has changed since the public forum, such as signage for The Children's Way morning drop off, and town employees can now park in the rear rows of the parking lot as well as in the front of the Town Building and at the Trinitarian Church parking lot. The Town Building parking lot has been monitored and there are no everyday concerns; however, there should be coordination between departments for buildings events that could result in the need for more parking. The location of the bus dispatcher's office will be determined going forward. Finally, the Dover Amendment could apply and ZBA approval may not be required, as explained by Ms. Stanizzi. The feedback received from the public forum was to pursue permanent ZBA approval for parking at the Town Building and continue to explore the Route 20 South Landfill option as well as acquiring electric buses.

Sidewalks and lighting were recommended at the front of the Town Building by the Planning Board but would cost about \$400,000 and is currently on hold. It has also been recommended to postpone issuing an RFP for off-site parking depending on Town Building usage. However, there are more immediate operational steps that are needed, but not limited to, revising existing directional signage, maintaining the sidewalk from the church to the Town Building, and finalizing the office for the bus dispatcher.

The School Committee is in agreement to move forward with parking the buses at the Town Building.

3. **Superintendent Update:**

(a) COVID-19 Response:

Parry looked at data for the last few weeks in an effort to see the trends of positive COVID cases. The results are as follows: January 13 to 19 (91 total student COVID cases), January 20 to 26 (71 total student COVID cases), January 27 to February 2 (37 total student COVID cases), and February 3 to February 9 (29 total student COVID cases) resulting in a downward trend. The results in pooled testing are similar. The first round of state provided tests were sent home with students on Monday, and the distribution for 1,939 students will be bi-weekly going forward. It is recommended that students test before returning to school after February break on either Sunday evening or Monday morning. Also, about 500 staff members received test kits today. The district will be shifting away from contact tracing and test and stay.

Dr. Easy reported on the results of the WTA survey in which the number of responses varied for each question. The first question asked how safe teachers feel now: 78.1% feel very safe, 15.2% are neutral, and 6.7% feel very unsafe. The second question asked how safe teachers would feel if masks were optional: 24.3% would feel very safe, 16% are neutral, and 59.7% would feel very unsafe. The third question asked about their level of safety if masking was optional for students: 65% would not feel safe, 12.1% remained neutral, and 22.9% would feel safe. If it was optional for teachers, 62.4% would not feel safe, 10.3% were neutral, and 27.3% would feel safe. The final

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question asked if the mask mandate should be lifted: 59.2% strongly disagree, 17% were neutral, and 23.8% strongly agree.

Kim updated the School Committee on the most recent Superintendent's Advisory Committee's (SAC) meeting. The Committee includes Dr. Easy, two doctors, parents, administrators, the Health Department Director of Nursing, the WTA President, and Kim as the School Committee representative. During the discussion, the doctors noted that we are still in a pandemic, and it is too early to lift the mask mandate. It was suggested by the Director of Nursing that the mitigations should not be lifted at one time, particularly after February break, but small adjustments/transitions can be made going forward. Also, if one tests positive for COVID, he/she can be contagious on day five and, therefore, should test before returning to school. Removing distancing would have the greatest impact on students. Town-wide messaging was a concern since the town does not have a mask mandate except in municipal buildings.

Phased Transition to Typical Safety Protocols:

Dr. Easy reviewed Phases 1 to 4 and the steps being taken during the transitional mitigation process:

Current Phase 1:

- Three feet of physical distancing in classrooms and 3 to 6 feet in the lunchroom.
- Masks work indoors and on school buses for those vaccinated; masks not required for recess.
- Weekly pooled and at-home antigen testing.
- Quarantine for five days, can return to school on day 6 if the recommended antigen test is negative.

Phase 2 – February 14-18:

- No physical distancing in classrooms; distancing in elementary lunchrooms only (not WHS/WMS)
- Masking, testing, and quarantine requirement are the same as Phase 1.

Phase 3 – February 28:

- Physical distancing is the same as Phase 2, except for elementary students returning from quarantine.
- Masking, testing, and quarantine requirement are the same as Phases 1 and 2.

Phase 4 – March 7:

- No physical distancing in classrooms or lunchrooms.
- Masks will become optional for all students and staff, but are required on school buses and health office.
- Testing is the same, but a negative at-home antigen test will be required for staff and students to return to school on day 6.

Phase 2 is now underway, and Dr. Easy recommends masks are worn until March 7. The Commissioner of Education announced today that schools cannot apply for a mask mandate waiver any longer beyond February 28. However, districts can extend mask mandates if so desired.

The School Committee asked questions about the current state of social distancing in the classrooms, particularly for those elementary students returning to school on day six, and masking for students coming out of quarantine. Kim recommended that individuals should be required to test at home before returning on day six immediately. A discussion ensued about what is best for students, how to move forward, including at-home testing on day six of quarantine. Jess asked about applying no social distancing during lunch in Phase 2 for all K-12 students.

Chris responded to a public comment regarding the School Committee's legal authority as it applies to mask mandates and the process taken by some parents to sue DESE and some school districts. The Superior Court did not agree with the parents, the parents appealed to the Appeals Court, and the appeal was denied. Chris cited the law, "*School Committees can establish educational goals and policies for the schools in the district consistent with the requirements of law and state-wide goals and standards established by the Board of Education.*" Chris continued citing the law, adding that the decisions are based on all court cases, and the decisions have been kept with DESE and the school districts.

Jeanne noted that some during public comment stated that they will stop wearing masks immediately. This was addressed by the School Committee according to DESE's recommendations.

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(b) Update regarding District Gifts:

Dr. Easy updated the School Committee about recent gifts received by the school district for WHS Robotics, a WHS golf team donation, and a donation to the Water Warriors.

4. Financial Matters:

(a) Continued Discussion regarding the FY23 Recommended Budget:

Given that the Finance Committee recently requested that the FY23 operating budget is reduced by \$875,000, Dr. Easy again reviewed the FY23 recommended budget in the amount of \$47,323,092, which is an increase over the FY22 recommended budget of approximately \$2.1M or 4.6%.

The principals, as well as Central Office administrators, will review their budgets in time for the School Committee meeting on February 16. Dr. Easy noted that the FY23 utility costs funds of approximately \$1M will be moved to the town's budget for which the town will now be responsible. This will change the increase of the FY23 recommended budget over the FY22 budget to 2.4%.

A discussion ensued about how to proceed while maintaining fiscal responsibility for level services given the budget has been significantly reduced in prior years. It was noted that the town will receive an additional \$750,000 in State aid, and this information was received by the town after the Finance Committee made its request. Ellen Whittemore reviewed the Circuit Breaker for FY21 and 22 and going forward, including budget offsets for out-of-district special education and litigation costs, while acknowledging that these costs are fluid and adjusted monthly. Currently, the Circuit Breaker funds are all accounted for. The School Committee discussed this further.

The next steps include a vote by the School Committee on February 16, which will take into consideration what the principals have removed from their school budgets. Dr. Easy will present reductions of \$100,000 to \$150,000 for the next meeting. He referred to the Middle School repairs as a result of faulty sprinklers noting that insurance will cover some of the cost. It was noted that since July 2021, there have been four significant building issues that were covered by the schools' budget.

5. Administrative Matters:

(a) Discuss OML Complaint Filed on March 2021 and Response Dated February 2, 2022:

An OML complaint was filed on March 25, 2021 alleging that the School Committee violated the OML law for approving minutes that lacked sufficient detail. The Attorney General's response dated February 2, 2022 found that the School Committee did not intentionally violate the law. However, the School Committee was asked to watch a five-minute video to which they will attest in a letter. All members have watched it with the exception of Ellen Grieco. She will watch the video and sign the attestation letter that will be sent to the Attorney General.

(b) Update regarding TEC Legislative Breakfast:

Jeanne updated the School Committee about The Education Cooperative Legislative Breakfast that was held virtually. State senators and a state representative were also in attendance. Discussions were around what is being done at the legislative level for the school districts. The message conveyed was for people to reach out to their state legislators. Student data privacy contracts and vendors were also discussed.

(c) PMBC Update, including Loker Roof and High School Athletic Complex:

Jeanne also updated the School Committee on the most recent PMBC meeting at which time they strongly suggested that the Loker roofing materials be moved from the subcontractor's storage location to another location in case of any unanticipated issues going forward. The Loker roof replacement will begin immediately after the last day of school. In addition, there is one outstanding gutter repair at the high school as well as the flooded turf field.

(d) Review of OML Determinations:

This agenda item was passed over.

(e) Review of Happy Hollow School Council Minutes Approved on January 27, 2022: December 16, 2021:

The School Committee reviewed the Happy Hollow School Council December 16, 2021 minutes as the Council approved on January 27, 2022.

6. Consent Agenda:

(a) Approval of Minutes: January 19, 2022 and January 24, 2022

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Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda.

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

None.

8. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Chris Ryan, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 8:06 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; (b) discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with Wayland Educational Secretaries Association (WESA), 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 (c) approving executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: January 19, 2022, and January 24, 2022. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

The School Committee will be joined by Dr. Omar Easy, Superintendent, 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 Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 8:52 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Omar Easy, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Observers:

See attached.

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Public Comments
3. Chart re: Phased Transitions re: School COVID Protocols
4. March 25, 2021 OML Complaint and Response
5. Happy Hollow School Council December 16, 2021 Minutes
6. January 19, 2022 Minutes
7. January 24, 2022 Minutes
8. Executive Session Motion