

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – January 25, 2023

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Wednesday, January 25, 2023, at 4:00 P.M. at Wayland High School Lecture Hall, South Building 2nd Floor.

Present:

- Chris Ryan, Chair
- Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
- Jeanne Downs
- Erin Gibbons
- Jessica Polizzotti

Also present:

Dr. Omar Easy
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Tom Lafleur
Director of Finance & Operations

1. **Call to Order:**

Chair Chris Ryan convened the regular session at 4:05 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM. The first item on the agenda is to move into Executive Session.

Upon a motion duly made by Chris Ryan, seconded by Erin Gibbons, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter Executive Session at 4:05 p.m. for the purposes of (a) discussing strategy with respect to litigation, as permitted to M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(3), as an open session may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the committee. The School Committee will be joined by Kevin Bresnahan, legal counsel to the School Committee. The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will then reconvene in open session. 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	
Erin Gibbons	X	
Jess Polizzotti	X	

2. **Reconvene in Open Session:**

Chair Chris Ryan re-convened the regular session at 6:08 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

3. **Public Comment:**

Craig Gruber, 108 Sears Road, commented that there is a need for unequivocal support for teachers, staff and building principals, as this will show support for the excellent education for the children in the schools and it must be clear, direct and deliberate from the School Committee. Competency and qualifications should be the focus for administrative positions. Mr. Gruber believes that McCarthyism is present in the district; he explained, adding that it is about the education and working in the best interests of the children. He noted that he has support for the statements he just made, but they were given to him anonymously. The School Committee policy does not allow anonymous comments.

Devon Murphy, 61 Old Sudbury Road, stands in support of the School Committee, teachers, staff and everyone working in the buildings. She also supports the Central Office as well because the staff is being put into a lot of negative discourse. Ms. Murphy is a member of the PTO and has seen nothing but professionalism and competency in every facet of her experiences. People are working tirelessly, and we won't get stronger if the administration is broken in half.

Rebecca Lloyd, 15 Morse Road, commented that she was unaware of all the animosity in the district. She stands in support of the School Committee, Central Office, and the teachers, adding that Wayland is doing a good job. Ms. Lloyd believes that the district, including the Superintendent, can work through the racist graffiti and the issues at hand.

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Jess left the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Chris Ryan read a public comment from Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Hardy, Declores Drive, in which they reference the \$731,000 that Dr. Easy was asked to remove from his FY24 recommended budget. They believe this request undercuts the education of the children. Dr. and Mrs. Hardy also believe that Wayland should offer full day kindergarten to its residents at no expense, as so many other districts do. In their opinion, there is a growing socio-economic gap between struggling families and wealthy families in Wayland resulting in inequities forcing struggling families to leave. They urged the School Committee to recognize this social issue and to help to acquire the funds to support the district and the children of Wayland.

4. **Special Matter:**

4.1 *Discussion with Brian Keveny, Director of Finance for the Town of Wayland:*

Brian Keveny presented the budget that he, Dr. Easy, Tom Lafleur and Acting Town Administrator John Bugbee discussed weekly beginning in late summer of 2022. He stated that this budget is the Town Manager budget through the Town Manager Act and through the Finance Committee.

The FY24 budget goals were to maintain a level service budget, include all payroll lanes and step changes, move all energy budgets in town and school to Unclassified, set a limit, with exceptions, on how much some expenses will increase, establish a Capital Stabilization Fund, and establish a Special Education Stabilization Fund if approved. There were some FY24 budget challenges that Mr. Keveny explained, such as town union contracts, inflation, new school initiatives for TCW and FDK, the decline in the unused levy, special education increases, and the increase in debt service.

Mr. Keveny reviewed the FY24 total available revenue that includes \$750,000 from the Rivers Edge apartment complex and a snapshot of the taxes raised over the past ten years showing the use of taxes vs. the amount actually taken in by the town. The total omnibus budget submitted to the Finance Committee was \$100.5M resulting in a \$7.8M increase or 8.45%. Mr. Keveny noted that most school budgets account for about 50% of school and town budgets and Wayland is consistent with those municipalities in the State. There are also other appropriations raised by the town that are factored into the omnibus budget. Mr. Keveny further explained the Town budget, the School budget, and the Unclassified budgets, as well as the FY24 Financial Plan. The three budgets make up 70% of the total increase in the Town budget. Mr. Keveny reviewed taxation, the tax rate, and the increase in the levy limit including the actual levy and the unused levy, adding that Wayland is one of three towns that has any levy capacity.

There are items that are still open in terms of final numbers around State aid, health insurance increases, The Children's Way, River's Edge tax growth, the Capital and Special Education Stabilization Funds, and the recently settled Fire Union contract. A discussion ensued about full day kindergarten and the impact it will have on the town if the cost is kept in the proposed school budget based on assumptions for tax revenue, including why the town could face an override for FY25.

5. **Superintendent Update:**

Dr. Easy addressed the two disparaging public comments made at the last School Committee meeting that he believes were mean-spirited and misinformed. He disagrees that his leadership is driving teachers out of Wayland, as teachers and administrators who are leaving the profession is nationwide as a result of the pandemic. He noted that he is an open, honest and open communicator who holds others accountable and takes pride in providing a safe and equitable environment for everyone. Dr. Easy commented that nationwide math scores are at very low levels and there is an increase in language-based disabilities, both of which he has taken steps to address using data, referring to the pilot core math curriculum and adding that the district has made great strides in this regard during his leadership. The racist graffiti was a hateful and demarginalizing act displaying the most inhumane word toward any human being. Dr. Easy said that there is a problem if the belief is that there isn't a race issue in Wayland. Finally, Dr. Easy has always been committed to move the district to a place where everyone feels safe and comfortable in the work and learning environment. The district is divided for so many reasons, but we are not quitting, as he is committed to making sure that good overcomes evil.

Jess Polizzotti returned to the meeting at 6:58 p.m.

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5.1 *Presentation by Caroline Han, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:*

Caroline Han began her Equity Lens presentation acknowledging the indigenous people, as Wayland High School sits on Massachusetts Pawtucket and Nipmuc lands. The percentage of students of color in the Wayland Public Schools is 26% and, according to DESE's enrollment by race and ethnicity includes, African-American, Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and multi-race non-Hispanic. Hispanic students for reasons given by Ms. Han, and White students are not included in the statistic.

There are guiding principles around Diversity, Equity, and Belonging (DEB), the first being "knowing your why" which is the purpose. People need to listen to each other with the intent to learn and make change with action. Making change requires centering students who are "furthest away from opportunity" and are the black/brown students according to data. Ms. Han noted that the district should not wait for another racist event before addressing the urgency around anti-racism. To sum up these principles, "equity is a lens and a commitment" and should be agreed upon and acted upon by 100% of the staff.

Ms. Han presented and explained the levels of DEB work that is being done in all of the schools, including The Children's Way and the BASE program. The Wayland Public Schools Foundation has funded an elementary program "Play for Change" that focuses on justice and rights; Ms. Han described.

Ms. Han recommended that this work continue with an Equity Audit followed by a Strategic Plan that will provide benchmarks, as well as having a "Listening Tour" because there are some voices among students, parents, caregivers and staff that should be heard. She believes that the district needs a full-time Director of Diversity, Equity and Belonging, as Ms. Han is a .5 FTE DEB Director. There should be dedicated time and funding for teachers to meet with their colleagues in different settings and, lastly, there should be a shared vision in order to move forward with collaborative results by holding each other accountable.

The School Committee asked questions about the facilitation and scope of the equity audit and strategic plan. As requested by Dr. Easy, Ms. Han described her recommendation and the difficulty of providing more time for teachers as it relates to the work around "Pacing for Privilege." Dr. Easy highlighted the work of the English Department at the Middle School. A discussion followed.

6. Financial Matters:

6.1 *Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve Elementary School Student Activity Funds:*

Tom Lafleur requested that the School Committee approve raising the limits of the elementary schools' student activity funds/checking accounts to \$7,500 per school, as the replenishment cycles take much too long.

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the request as presented.

6.2 *Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve Fees:*

The School Committee reviewed the user fees that have not been approved to date, such as bus transportation, athletics, the high school parking fee from \$250/yr. to \$200/yr., computer maintenance fees and full-day Kindergarten. In addition, Tom recommended pro-rating the cost of parking by the month if a student does not sign up for a full year.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the fees as presented.

6.3 *Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve the Superintendent's FY24 Recommended Budget:*

Ellen Grieco recused herself from the vote on the budget, as her family situation could be implicated, but as of this date it is not certain. She left the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

Dr. Easy began the discussion commenting that those who have worked at length on this proposed budget feel that it will provide all the necessary services for the students. Dr. Easy reviewed the FY24 recommended budget that totals \$50,001,482 and does not include staff COLAs. After meeting with the acting Town Manager and other town officials, the recommended budget reduction was reduced to \$598,287 from \$731,000; Dr. Easy explained. Some of the proposed middle school FTEs for some staff positions were reduced, bringing the FY24 Town Manager's Recommended Budget to \$49,403,195.

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Jess advocated for the students, adding that every reduction in the budget takes so much away from the students' education. She also commented that the schools are in desperate need of repairs as well. A discussion followed. Jeanne described the meeting discussions, including why decisions were made, at which two members of the Finance Committee, Acting Town Manager, Finance Director, Dr. Easy, Tom Lafleur and she were in attendance. Dr. Easy noted that the budget has been level funded twice during his tenure and stressed the importance of funding Full Day Kindergarten and is hopeful that ARPA funding will be available for FY24.

Upon a motion duly made by Jess Polizzotti, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the School Committee voted (4-0) with one abstention to approve the Superintendent's FY24 Recommended Budget of \$49,403,195 as presented. 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	abstain	
Jeanne Downs	X	
Erin Gibbons	X	
Jess Polizzotti	X	

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the High School parking special revenue budget.

The School Committee discussed the schedule for budget presentations to the community focusing on the biggest budget drivers, such as Special Education and The Children's Way. It was decided to present on Monday, February 27, with a Q & A as well.

Chris left the meeting at 8:28 p.m.; returned at 8:30 p.m.

Ellen Grieco returned to the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

7. Administrative Matters:

7.1 The Education Collaborative (TEC) Update:

Jeanne reported that Emily Parks, the current Westwood Superintendent, will be the next Executive Director of The Education Collaborative as of July 1, 2023. There will be an Interim Director until then.

8. Consent Agenda:

8.1 Approval of Minutes: January 4, 2023 and January 9, 2023

Upon a motion duly made by Erin Gibbons, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the minutes of January 2023 and January 9, 2023.

9. Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:

Dr. Easy reported that he and Dr. Cataldo presented to the ACCEPT Collaborative today for the purpose of becoming a member of the Collaborative. Jess Polizzotti attended at the School Committee representative. It is hopeful that there will be a vote to accept Wayland as a member before April 30 which could then be approved by DESE. If this process takes place after April 30, Wayland would not be Board members, but Wayland students could still attend the Collaborative but not at a discounted rate.

10. 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 8:34 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 executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: January 4, 2023 and January 9, 2023. 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	

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Jeanne Downs	X
Erin Gibbons	X
Jess Polizzotti	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.

11. Adjournment:

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 9:11 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	
Erin Gibbons	X	
Jess Polizzotti	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Omar Easy, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Observers:

See sign-in sheet.

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Elementary Schools Student Activity Funds
3. User Fees
4. WHS Parking Fund
5. Minutes of January 4, 2023
6. Minutes of January 9, 2023
7. Executive Session Motion