

WEST BOYLSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, April 10, 2024 – 7:00 p.m.
Middle/High School Media Center – Library
Along with live stream @ <https://youtube.com/@wblive125>

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

James Pedone, Jr. Chairman
Jason Ponticelli, Vice Chairman
Jennifer Breen
Nancy Hubbard
Emily Lehman Miller

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT

Richard A. Meagher, Superintendent of Schools
Christopher Fournier, Principal Middle/High School
Alex Audette, Principal Elementary School
Cristy Morrison, Business Administrator
Sherri Traina, Director of Special Education

ADMINISTRATORS NOT PRESENT

Sherri Traina, Director of Special Education

ALSO PRESENT

Faculty and audience.

Mr. Pedone called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. Acknowledgement of Recording Secretary

Mr. Pedone acknowledged Mr. Bokankowitz, the Technology Coordinator, for being present and live streaming the School Committee meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Ponticelli made a motion to approve the minutes from the FY25 Public Hearing Meeting of March 13, 2024, seconded by Ms. Hubbard.

VOTE 5-0-0

Ms. Hubbard made a motion to approve the minutes from the regular School Committee Meeting of March 13, 2024, seconded by Ms. Breen.

VOTE 5-0-0

Ms. Lehman Miller made a motion to approve the minutes from the Executive Session Meeting of March 13, 2024, seconded by Mr. Ponticelli.

VOTE 5-0-0

Ms. Breen made a motion to approve the minutes from the Executive Session Meeting of March 28, 2024, seconded by Ms. Hubbard.

VOTE 5-0-0

3. Student Recognition Awards: Major Edwards, Middle School, High School

Students from the Elementary School, Middle School and High School were recognized as Student of the Month: Anika Kapiris (from March), Ryleigh Divirgilio, Josh Sowden, and Sophia Johnson.

4. Student Advisory Council Representative

Student Advisory Council Members Anabelle Anand and Hunter McNulty-Hochberg reported on:

- A Cappella – Successful carnation fundraiser for Valentine’s Day. Open Mic Night, March 29th.
- GSA – Successful carnation fundraiser for Valentine’s Day! Crochet fundraiser on April 25th. Planning on a hosting a joint GSA event with a local GSA club.
- HS Student Council – Unfortunately Play Comps were not able to take place the first week of April. Mother’s Day Plant Sale to take place May 9th + May 10th in the High School Gym and May 11th at the Town Commons in the morning.
- HS Yearbook – Yearbook has been completed and sent to printer. Should be in by May 24th.
- Interact Club –The club is starting to plan spring events; one possibility is a charity walk, “In It to End It”.
- International Thespian Society – Will be inducting 8 new members on May 15th as well as new officers for the upcoming school year. They will also be helping to facilitate a Jeopardy style game show for the upcoming Refresh Day on May 17th. The Performing Arts Workshop class will performing their spring musical Anastasia on May 3rd + May 4th.
- MHS Jazz Band – Open Mic Night on March 29th went very well. This is a great time to join Jazz Band if you are on the fence we are about to add more music.
- MS Student Council – The Student Council has been collecting information from the student body in preparation for the Heritage Day coming up in May.
- National Honor Society – The induction date is now April 23rd.
- National Art Honor Society – NAHS has welcomed 18 new members on April 4th. They hosted a Middle School Dance on April 12th. We are considering one service project with a nonprofit farm in Grafton, the Community Harvest Project, for the spring.
- Wellness Club – Hosting Refresh Day on May 17th.
- Freshman Class – Completing the last round of the clothing fundraiser, planning ahead for next year.
- Sophomores – The Sophomores are working on the Plant Sale. Orders will be ready for pick up on May 9th and May 10th with sales on the Town Common on May 11th in the morning. Sophomores are in the process of putting together a Prom Committee to start planning for Prom 2025.
- Junior Class – The Juniors are finishing up on Prom details being held on May 17th.
- Senior Class – The Seniors are working on the senior class events to include the senior class trip. One recent subject that has come up amongst the classes, is to consider reinstate class dues to help with funding. It’s not an issue with all classes but it could be helpful in the future.

Mr. Ponticelli asked to Mr. Fournier: “Customarily class dues per students range, about how much?”

Mr. Fournier to Mr. Ponticelli: “We voted out class dues right after COVID. Class dues per student over the course of 4 years the student would pay \$50, \$40, and \$30. That would give them a total going into their senior year of \$120. Then they could use that as deposit or for a fundraiser event. I told them I would request putting that on this years’ Summer Retreat Agenda to discuss with the School Committee.”

Ms. Breen commented on the Class Dues subject: “Mr. Ponticelli for reference, I think that one of the reasons we did away with it was that the burden was being placed on student officers to collect money from their class mates. It was causing some difficulties. I also think with fundraising classes have done pretty well. Last years’ class did pretty well. If classes start freshmen year with fundraising classes do very well. I think class dues for some families class dues is a hardship.”

5. Highlight on Schools: Civil Rights Integrated Monitoring – Sherri Traina

Ms. Traina presented the Civil Rights Integrated Monitoring Presentation to the School Committee.

6. Community Input – NONE

7. Warrants

Mr. Ponticelli made a motion of the approval of the Payables Warrants dated March 25, 2024 and April 8, 2024 seconded by Ms. Breen.

VOTE 5-0-0

Ms. Lehman Miller made a motion of the approval of the Payroll Warrants dated March 15, 2024 and March 29, 2024, seconded by Ms. Hubbard.

VOTE 5-0-0

8. Subcommittee Reports

- a) School Safety Subcommittee – Mr. Meagher shared with the School Committee that the School Safety Subcommittee met on March 28th to review the planning process for the continuation of staff and student training with the I Love U Guys Foundation in 2024-2025. A full staff training has been tentatively scheduled for Monday, August 26th. Discussions also touched upon summer parent information sessions and exploration of classroom locking mechanisms. Mr. Meagher also shared they are looking to schedule a meeting in May and another meeting in June to be in alignment for the August meeting.
- b) Policy Subcommittee – Ms. Breen shared with the School Committee that at tonight’s meeting two votes would be needed. The first would be to make a motion to approve the second reading and adoption of Policy JICFB – Bullying Prevention. We had two policies where we merged them together along with using some of the language recommended from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. After merging the policies and the language from MASC the policy being adopted tonight has language to make it more concise and less redundant.

Ms. Breen then shared with the School Committee the second policy needing a vote is Policy GCBA-Management Compensation, Fringe Benefits, and Conditions of Employment. There is was just some language to some vacations, sick time and other benefits that were in contracts for employees that needed to be in alignment across the board. To ensure everybody has the same thing across the board.

- Motion to approve the second reading and adoption of Policy JICFB – Bullying Prevention.

Ms. Breen made a motion to approve the second reading and adoption of Policy JICFB – Bullying Prevention, seconded by Ms. Lehman Miller.

VOTE 5-0-0

- Motion to approve the first reading of Policy GCBA – Management Compensation, Fringe Benefits, and Conditions of Employment.

Ms. Hubbard made a motion to approve the first reading of Policy GCBA – Management Compensation, Fringe Benefits, and Conditions of Employment, seconded by Mr. Ponticelli.

VOTE 5-0-0

9. Communication and Reports

- a. Major Edwards Elementary School Principal Mr. Audette reported on:
 - 3rd Grade MCAS; April 11th
 - Spring Vacation; April 15th- April 19th
 - Special Person(s) Dance; April 5th
 - PTA Meeting: April 24th
 - Fundraising updates: Special Person(s) Dance, C.A.N.S. Food Drive, Coin Competition
 - Animal Adventures (2nd Grade); April 25th

- b. Middle/High School Principal Mr. Fournier reported on:
 - 10th Grade ELA MCAS update
 - 10th Grade Math MCAS; May 21st and May 22nd
 - 6th and 7th Grade ELA MCAS Update
 - 8th Grade ELA MCAS update
 - Washington DC trip; May 7th-May 10th
 - Spring sports updates
 - Collegiate Book Award Ceremony; April 12th at 12pm
 - Middle School Spring Dance; April 12th
 - PAW Production “Anastasia”; May 3rd and May 4th

- c. Director of Special Education Ms. Traina reported on: NONE

- d. Business Administrator Ms. Morrison reported on:
 - March Expense Report

- e. Superintendent of Schools Mr. Meagher reported on:
 - School Choice updates
 - Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training; @ Major Edwards on April 18 + April 19th
 - Universal Free and Reduced Lunch Funding updates
 - Per Pupil Funding updates
 - Budget Presentation follow up information
 - Town wide Scholarship Committee

- f. School Committee reported on:

Ms. Breen shared with the School Committee that during the meeting she had made a couple of notes just now because of the discussion of budgets. She was surprised that more individuals were not aware that this is a statewide problem and not just a problem in West Boylston. She quickly looked up a few things and found Acton/Boxboro district is facing a 9.5 million dollar deficit for FY25 and they are calling for reduction of 20 to 30 staff members. Hingham, known as an affluent town, they have a 1.2 million dollar deficit for FY25 and they are also recommending layoffs. Hopedale which is very similar to us in size and scope, they did a proposition 2 ½ override last year for 1.35 million dollars and got it. They are going for another Proposition 2 ½ over ride of \$500,000 to close the gap and that is after they have cut things out of their budget. This is not just a West Boylston problem. This is not a mismanagement of funds by the town, by the schools or by anyone else. No one is spending money that we don't have. This is a problem that has come from the state and from COVID where we had things covered and those things are now going away. Those grants and the extra monies but, the problems are still there and our students still need our support. As Mr. Meagher mentioned when you are spending \$179,000 per student to go out of district through our Special Education Department on average and you have no way of negotiate that cost along with the travel expense of \$45,000 you have to pay the bill. That money comes directly out of our budget no matter what.

Ms. Lehman Miller commented that she is new to the School Committee this year however she has been in education for a long time. She understands that school funding is incredibly complex. She shared with the School Committee that today Boston Radio produced a 45 minute broadcast about the complexities of school funding along with school funding in Massachusetts. She expressed her thoughts on how the School Committee should write a letter to Massachusetts Legislators for school funding formulas.

- Override – Discussion/Vote

Mr. Pedone addressed the School Committee about the Override – Discussion/Vote listed on the agenda. Mr. Pedone shared with the School Committee that Mr. Meagher, Ms. Morrison and Mr. Pedone have already met with the Town Administrator, the Town Accountant, a representative of the Selectboard, a representative of FINCOM to discuss how we move forward with this. At this time the Selectboard has not taken a full position on the override until the numbers are in. At this time the School Committee is being asked to work together and come to town meeting jointly with the Selectboard as a large portion of the town’s overall budget to support the override. We are asking for a five year projection so we don’t have to ask for another override next year.

Mr. Pedone to Jennifer Warrant-Dyment (West Boylston Town Administrator): What are the next steps once there is a number from the Selectboard? Is there an additional ask from the School Committee with a number? We only meet one more time before town meeting regularly.

Jennifer Warrant-Dyment (West Boylston Town Administrator) to Mr. Pedone: Thank you for entertaining me tonight. I wasn’t planning on speaking tonight but would be happy to share where things currently are. An override is a two-step process. It needs to be voted at town meeting and needs to be voted at the ballot box. When it is placed on a town meeting warrant there does not need to be a number. However the total number amount needs to be on the election warrant. The town is looking for a 2 million dollar override. The town is giving a best faith estimate. We will need the number from the school as soon as possible, perhaps even have a Special School Committee Meeting may need to happen to obtain that number. In full transparency, if the School Committee is not inclined to go forward on an override this year my recommendation to the Selectboard will be that we pass over it because we can make it through the next budget cycle. My concern is this town has not had an override question before them in many years. The last time they did have an override question before them, it did not pass. The last time an override question passed before them was in the 90’s and it was for \$200,000 for “The Trash” for one year. I’m concerned about FY26 and the sever alternatives.

Ms. Lehman Miller commented to the School Committee that they should send a letter to the Legislators requesting joint statement in regards to the school funding formulas.

Mr. Pedone to Ms. Lehman Miller: This request would need a vote and would be added to May’s school committee Agenda.

Mr. Ponticelli made a motion to support the Selectboard’s recommendation to pursue an override at the upcoming town meeting, seconded by Ms. Lehman Miller.

VOTE 5-0-0

10. Executive Session – To conduct strategic sessions in preparations for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

Mr. Ponticelli made a motion to go into Executive Session to conduct non-union personnel discussions, and the School Committee will not return to open session and will adjourn the meeting from Executive Session, Ms. Breen seconded at 8:11 p.m.

A roll call vote was taken.

Ms. Hubbard – Yes

Mr. Ponticelli – Yes

Ms. Breen – Yes

Ms. Lehman Miller – Yes

Mr. Pedone – Yes

Respectfully Submitted,

Anita Pratt, Recording Secretary