



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released: 2/3/2022

Date Approved/Held: _____

School Committee Chair: L. Murphy

School Committee Meeting January 6, 2022 - 6:00 pm Town Hall - 2nd Floor Auditorium

1. Call to order
2. Pledge of Allegiance

Attendance:

Larry Murphy, Chair; Ryan Forsythe; Greg Vine; Karen Kast-McBride, Thad King, Superintendent

L. Murphy reads audio-visual disclosure.

3. Public Comment: None

4. Student Representative Report:

Student representative gives update on events at Murdock High School, including indoor track, Varsity hockey, high school boys' basketball, and middle school girls' and boys' basketball, as well as the National Honor Society induction and the musical presented by Murdock High School.

L. Murphy asks T. King about girls basketball. T. King states that there was not enough interest in creating a high school girls' basketball team, so he has looked into creating a co-op team in the future. G. Vine asks why there was so little interest, whether it was due to COVID-19. T. King replies that there has always been an issue with numbers in the high school girls' basketball team, and that in previous years the team was supported by middle school players; however, this year several students graduated and there were simply not enough girls interested in playing.

K. Kast-McBride suggests that all school committee members attend the Little Shop of Horrors musical on February 18-19.

5. Consent Agenda:

L. Murphy introduces Consent Agenda.

G. Vine makes Motion to accept the minutes as presented. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride.

No discussion. Vote is unanimous.

6. Superintendent's Report

a. COVID Update:

Masks were distributed by DESE following the holiday break, and they were passed out to employees Monday morning without issue. Staffing has become an issue following the rise in COVID numbers in staff members.

Updated guidance was provided by the Department of Education regarding COVID-19 protocols on December 30. T. King clarifies that WPS follows the Department of Education guidelines rather than the CDC guidelines. A meeting is being scheduled with the school physician and the local health agent to determine the clearest and safest guidance for our schools, students and staff. A five day quarantine limit has been established, relative to fever and other symptoms.

G. Vine asks for a moment of silence in honor of the Brown family, who lost their father on Christmas Day due to COVID-19. L. Murphy states that he has also lost a family member to COVID. A moment of silence is taken.

K. Kast-McBride questions the effectiveness of the masks which were provided by DESE and asks that if the Superintendent thinks of anything the school committee can do that he please reach out to them.

T. King expresses gratitude for the mask purchased by DESE, as before they were provided, the district had to purchase its own masks using COVID relief funds.

b. Budget Update:

T. King explains that the district is actively working on this year's budget, and everything is as it should be. The district is working to reclassify funds now rather than waiting until the end of the year as was done in the past. Additionally, the district is working on preparing for the FY23 budget, planning to create a budget from the bottom up in a more efficient manner.

R. Forsythe asks if the COVID funds are represented in the YTD printout which was provided in the packet. T. King replies that they are not but gives a detailed outline of the COVID relief grant expenditures and plans.

R. Forsythe asks about the timeline for the ESSER III grant. T. King replies that the district has approximately three years to spend the grant funds can provide more details on timing at the next meeting if needed.

G. Vine asks when the school committee will be able to view the first draft of the next year's budget. T. King replies that he plans to have a zero-based draft within

the next several weeks but he plans to have a draft for the committee to view in March.

K. Kast-McBride asks if the committee can be provided with a printout of the expenses of the district. G. Vine suggests that this information be listed on the district website.

7. New Business:

a. Vaccine discussion

G. Vine addresses the possibility of requiring employees to have the COVID-19 vaccine. It is stated that it is futile to require staff to have the vaccine if students are not required to have it.

L. Murphy asks what percentage of staff are vaccinated. T. King references a survey which indicated that approximately 90% of the staff were vaccinated or planned to be so. L. Murphy states that he is not comfortable mandating the vaccine until more research is done and more support from DESE and the medical community is received. He states that he would be in favor of a statement to be made by the school committee on its position regarding the vaccine. Plans are made to have G. Vine draft a statement and K. Kast-McBride will review.

b. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School (CMVS) statute discussion

T. King introduces the guidance regarding the commonwealth of Massachusetts' virtual schools, indicating that each district can place a cap on the number of students enrolled in virtual schools. As the district is already over 1% virtual school enrollment, the committee has the option to vote to cap that enrollment, which would mean that no more students would be allowed to enroll in virtual schools this year.

Discussion is had. G. Vine makes a motion that the school committee vote to cap the percentage of students attending Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous.

G. Vine makes motion to cap the percentage of the students attending a Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school at 1% of our total student Population. Seconded by R. Forsythe. Vote is unanimous.

8. Old Business: None

9. Future Agenda Items:

T. King suggests that the site visits from the high school be considered for a future agenda item.

G. Vine requests that the district's policies regarding obligations of teachers and staff during a physical altercation between students be added to future agenda items.

R. Forsythe suggests that the open seat on the school committee be added to future agenda items. Discussion is had regarding the potential candidates.

Update is given by T. King on the possibility of returning to remote school committee meetings. The issue is with the audio visual company no longer being able to provide coverage due to distance. A plan is being worked out by the town manager and the IT person at town hall. He suggests adding this as a future agenda item.

10. School Committee Closing Comments:

G. Vine gives his condolences to the Brown family and to L. Murphy's family.

K. Kast-McBride echoes these sentiments and asks that people get vaccinated if they are able and to stay home or keep their children home if they are sick.

L. Murphy thanks the Superintendent and his entire staff for all the work they have done to keep our schools open and safe.

11. Adjournment:

G. Vine makes Motion to adjourn. Seconded by R. Forsythe. Vote is unanimous. Meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted: _____



Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None