



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released: 10/7/21

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School Committee Chair: Murphy 10/7/21

School Committee Meeting

September 2, 2021 - 6:00 pm

2nd Floor - Town Hall Auditorium

1. Call to order
2. Pledge of Allegiance

Attendance:

Larry Murphy, Chair, Shauna LaPointe, Ryan Forsythe, Thad King, Interim Superintendent, Karen Kast-Mcbride via telephone

Audio visual disclosure read by L. Murphy.

3. Public comment: None

4. Superintendent's Report:

T. King gives an update on the district's return to school on Monday. A few transportation issues were reported on the first day of school, but by Thursday, they were limited. He reminds the committee that due to Labor Day weekend, schools are closed both Friday and Monday.

An update on the budget by T. King reveals that the town is still working to close out FY 21 on their side. The district still has a number of encumbrances for a lot of the work that has been going on around the district that will be ongoing even after the budget has been closed on the town side. Additionally, the end of year report is due to DESE on October 1. T. King reports that the district was able to recapture some of the money which was destined to go back to the town, approximately \$150,000.

T. King states that the survey was put out today for the Memorial Principal search. Miss Atter, the Memorial Principal recently resigned, effective September 30.

L. Murphy asks what the contingency plan is for the new Memorial Principal, once hired, as that individual will likely need to give notice to their current employer.

T. King states that the district will need to have a back up person in place to bridge that time. He is working on that currently to see who will be available, and he plans to have

leadership in the building during that time. He has also reached out to the superintendent's listserv to see if any of those might have someone available that would be interested in our positions, retired principals, those types of things that could serve for the year if the district does not have a good candidate pool. In that case, the district would repost in the spring during the peak hiring season.

T. King updates the Committee on homeschooling in the district. Last year, WPS had approximately 103 homeschool students. As of the date of this meeting, 57 of the required end of year report cards were submitted. The district is still pursuing those families who have not turned in their reports. Of those 103 last year, 23 families have decided to return to the WPS. Six students will be enrolling in another public school district; six who will be enrolling in a private school. Forty-three families have submitted their plans for this coming school year. So it's an annual process where they both basically report how the year went and then submit their plans for the coming year; WPS has 43 of those to date. One graduated last year from a homeschool program. So as it stands today, WPS has accounted for 79 of the 103 homeschoolers from last year. And so that leaves the outstanding at 24. WPS has an outstanding 24 that will be receiving a letter requesting the reports from last year as well as what their plans are for this coming year. As of the last school committee meeting, WPS has had six homeschool applications in that time.

L. Murphy questions T. King regarding the money that is to be returned to the Town of Winchendon.

T. King replies that he has requested to the town manager, respectfully, that when it comes time for the capital expenditure conversations next year, that whatever money in funds are returned to the town, that that can be somehow earmarked for capital expenses already approved for the school district. WPS has a number of outstanding items on that capital plan, currently with the town that are not funded, although they've been approved. He requested that at the very least, that those funds could be considered to be applied towards those items. The town manager met that very kindly, although there's not a process to actually mandate that and put that in place that he had conveyed that to Mr. Kane, who is the chair of Finance Comm. T. King also had a conversation with Mr. Kane, to suggest that the district would like to do that. And then he would be reminding them of that when they have the capital planning meetings.

5. COVID Update:

L. Murphy presents the next item on the agenda as the COVID update. This item is to be kept on the agenda as a standing item.

T. King states that the COVID lead for this school year will be Nicole Heroux, Pupil Services Director.

K. Kast-McBride expresses concern that Mrs. Heroux may have too much on her should the district get an explosion of COVID cases. She believes that the committee should rethink making her the COVID lead, in addition to her other duties.

L. Murphy replies that the appointment of a COVID lead is a management decision that rests with the Superintendent. It is not the responsibility of the School Committee but that of the Superintendent to decide where to put people in what roles.

K. Kast-McBride states that Mrs. Heroux is possibly too new to the district to handle such a position, given the enormity of the position that she already holds.

L. Murphy replies that Mrs. Heroux has had an entire year of COVID experience, just like everyone else.

K. Kast-McBride asks L. Murphy if he is making the assumption that Mrs. Heroux has experience as a COVID lead or if he is assuming that just because she is a district person that she will be able to handle this.

L. Murphy replies that he appreciates K. Kast-McBride voicing her concern, but the School Committee has no say in who the Superintendent appoints as COVID lead.

K. Kast-McBride replies that they do not know Mrs. Heroux and that her appointment is something to rethink because of her other duties, adding COVID lead to that list might overwhelm her, and she would hate to see her leave.

T. King responds, thanking K. Kast-McBride for her feedback and states that he will take her words under advisement. He reassures K. Kast-McBride that the central office staff work as a team to support one another. He likes to work as a collaborative unit, and that is the team he has created in the central office. He also explains that Mrs. Heroux volunteered to be the COVID lead. She also supervises the nurses of the district, so having her as the COVID lead streamlines the process, and she also has experience in this role in a previous position. Despite these facts, T. King reassures K. Kast-McBride that he will take the matter back to the leadership team to readdress with them.

T. King continues with the COVID update for the Town of Winchendon and the school district as follows:

- a. From August 15-28, there were 861 COVID tests performed in Winchendon.
- b. The town is currently at a 5.23 positivity rate, which is an increase from 4.5 percent.
- c. The state of Massachusetts is currently at a 2.74% positivity rate.
- d. The district has two staff members under quarantine, which did not impact the school day.
- e. Three students are under quarantine, but both the students and staff cases were not a result of being in school, and there were no close contacts to be identified.
- f. The district and the town have approximately 30% of students between grades 7 through 12 who are vaccinated.
- g. The district has reached out to Heywood Hospital about a potential vaccination clinic and plans to send out a survey to families to see what the level of interest might be.

R. Forsythe asks if the data presented by the Superintendent was obtained by the Department of Health.

T. King replies that the data came from the state COVID website.

R. Forsythe asks for clarification about the numbers of vaccinated adolescents being from the town as a whole and not just students of the district.

T. King replies that is correct.

R. Forsythe asks that if the number of vaccinated individuals were to reach the required 80%, is the district planning for some system of tracking vaccinations.

T. King references the superintendents' call from the commissioner the previous week. The commissioner gave the guidance that as the date of October 1 got closer, he would put forth more information on how the schools will track vaccinations and how that 80% would be calculated.

R. Forsythe recommends that feedback be provided to the commissioner on measuring the actual vaccination data such as using local DLH data to reach a certain threshold.

6. COVID Testing Programs:

L. Murphy presents the next item on the agenda as COVID testing programs.

T. King explains the testing protocols made available by DESE, including the symptomatic testing program and the test and stay protocol. He explains that both of these testing protocols are in an effort to keep students in schools. He encourages parents to sign the waivers for their students.

K. Kast-McBride expresses concern over these test and asks how they will be paid for.

T. King explains that the testing programs and supplies are completely free.

7. Subcommittee Assignments:

L. Murphy presents the next item on the agenda as Subcommittee Assignments. He asks K. Kast-McBride if she would like to be on the Policy Subcommittee again this year.

K. Kast-McBride agrees.

R. Forsythe asks for confirmation that there is a backlog of policies to examine.

L. Murphy explains that they will be working with the attorney to update policies, and the subcommittee will simply review them.

K. Kast-McBride nominates R. Forsythe for the Policy Subcommittee. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

S. Lapointe nominates G. Vine for teachers' negotiations. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

L. Murphy is nominated for teachers' negotiations. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

G. Vine and S. Lapointe are nominated for the custodians' negotiations. Both nominations seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

K. Kast-McBride and R. Forsythe are nominated for secretaries' and paraprofessionals' negotiations. Seconded by S. Lapointe. Vote is unanimous.

S. Lapointe and K. Kast-McBride nominated for Wellness Subcommittee. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

L. Murphy is nominated for Calendar Subcommittee. Seconded by R. Forsythe. Vote is unanimous.

R. Forsythe is nominated for Sick Bank Subcommittee. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

L. Murphy and S. Lapointe nominated for Finance committee. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

G. Vine is nominated for Capital Planning. S. Lapointe seconds. Vote is unanimous.

K. Kast-McBride is nominated for Townwide Audit Committee. Seconded by R. Forsythe. Vote is unanimous.

L. Murphy nominated for Monty Tech Representative. Seconded by S. Lapointe. Vote is unanimous.

K. Kast-McBride is nominated for CAPS Committee. Seconded by L. Murphy.

T. King is appointed as the Keystone Representative.

K. Kast-McBride and G. Vine nominated for Communications Subcommittee. Seconded by R. Forsythe. Vote is unanimous.

8. Superintendent Search:

L. Murphy states that the ultimate goal is to have a vote on who would be the superintendent on the December 20 meeting, but Tracy is fully aware that it can't be done for sure. That would put the vote on December 28.

9. Committee Calendar:


Meetings have been taking place on the first and third weeks of the month.

K. Kast-McBride makes motion to table discussion until the retreat. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

10. Adjournment

L. Murphy asks for Motion to adjourn. Motion made by R. Forsythe. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted:



Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached:

None