



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released: 1/5/23

Date Approved/Hold:

School Committee Chair: 

School Committee Meeting

December 20, 2022 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Larry Murphy; Karen Kast-McBride;
Alicia Jordan, via telephone call-in; Thad King, Superintendent; Amanda Babinski,
Director of Finance & Operations

1. Call to order

2. Pledge of Allegiance

R. Forsythe reads audio visual disclosure.

3. Public Comment:

Lisa Barbaro approaches and gives a summary of the opinions of several of the WPS teachers regarding the possibility of opening an Early Childhood Literacy Center and reorganizing the schools. There are concerns regarding the bathrooms at Memorial, which are designed for small children. Additionally, the playgrounds are enclosed and fully visible to staff with age appropriate equipment. The libraries at both Memorial and Toy Town have been updated with the age of the current students in mind, containing cubbies and hooks for coats. These would need to be redesigned for the change in age if the school reorganization took place. The auditorium and gym at Toy Town are twice the size of that at Memorial, making them better suited for older elementary students. The playground at Toy Town has been recently updated to suit the needs of 8-11 year old students. This year, a path was added for Toy Town's walkers to safely exit the school. Murdock is not suited for fifth graders to have recess, nor are fifth graders ready, socially or emotionally, to share a building with the sixth through eighth graders. Restructuring would also cause turmoil for the staff who would be forced to move buildings. For Toy Town teachers, this would mean they would have to become middle school teachers instead of elementary teachers. Mrs. Barbaro feels that this change would create many challenges and stress for students and staff, wasted space at Toy Town and many additional costs for unnecessary building changes. She suggests that the district could instead use the money to help close the gaps created by the pandemic, or at the very least, take more time to consider the drastic change and possibly get input from stakeholders before voting on it. R. Forsythe thanks her for her well-organized, thoughtful and constructive feedback.

Tamarah Estes approaches to inquire as to whether the meeting is being live streamed. R.

Forsythe responds that the meeting is broadcast via the public access station; K. Kast-McBride states that the meeting is supposed to be live streamed on the town website. Ms. Estes asks if the committee is able to make the meeting a hybrid meeting. L. Murphy responds that the committee was informed by the town that it did not have the capabilities to offer hybrid town meetings. R. Forsythe states that technical support has just notified the committee that the live stream has not been working for some months; therefore, it is not available for this or other meetings. It is currently being worked on.

Kayla Maine approaches to offer a summary of her opinion regarding the possible school reorganization. She questions how transportation, bussing and parent pickup would work should the schools be reorganized. She believes it is not appropriate for 10 year olds to be bussed with 17 and 18 year olds. Playgrounds are also a concern, as the Toy Town playground was recently updated, making this seem like a waste of money for taxpayers. Mrs. Maine also expresses concerns about staffing. She believes the schools should be focusing on education and not switching schools.

4. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

R. Forsythe introduces the Consent Agenda. G. Vine moves to approve the minutes as presented. Seconded by L. Murphy. R. Forsythe asks for a roll call vote. K. Kast-McBride abstains from voting as she was not present for the meeting. Vote is unanimous.

5. Superintendent's Report:

a. Budget Update:

T. King introduces new Director of Finance & Operations, Ms. Babinski. He notes several items on the year to date budget report, first reminding the committee that the town still has no town accountant, therefore the reclassifications that the school department needed to do have yet to be completed. The maintenance lines are further depleted than he would like at this point in the year; however, part of the reason for this is that the town accountant would normally aid the school department in moving those expenses to the HVAC line. He states that the town has an agreement with the former town accountant to come in about once a week to complete these types of accounting needs. L. Murphy questions the rubbish line item. T. King explains that that amount is encumbered because the district knows what the dollar amount will be at the beginning of the year. T. King explains the heating fuel line item, reminding the district that they brought the budget up on heating fuel, anticipating a cost of around \$5 per gallon; however, the district is currently locked in at \$2.90 per gallon for heating fuel. Discussion is had regarding the Toy Town electric line. Ms. Babinski explains that electricity rates have increased, and because the use at Toy Town is slightly different, there is a difference in the rate. Additionally, the solar credit is not as high at Toy Town because the building uses a lower amount of energy. She intends to investigate the solar credit a bit more at a later date. T. King states that he would like to bring the solar share up at the next tri-board meeting. R. Forsythe questions the salary percentages and the differences in some of the amounts spent on them. Ms. Babinski states that as some of the contracted employees are compensated from

July 1 through December, so those line items would be roughly at 50% spent. Instructional salaries begin in September, so they are only a quarter of the percentage spent.

Ms. Babinski gives an update on the governor's budget, noting that the district's Chapter 70 formula spreadsheet and municipal contribution are estimated to come out the second week of March, which is very late. The state will be realizing another ⅓ of the Student Opportunity Act this year. After examining a very rough estimate for Winchendon, the district should see a significant increase in its foundation budget next year, approximately 10%, as it was for the current fiscal year. She explains the purpose of the Student Opportunity Act is to help districts provide the resources they need to economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and younger students. The district is expecting an increase in Chapter 70 as well as in the foundation budget. R. Forsythe asks for clarification on how these estimates were obtained. Ms. Babinski explains that the state gave anticipated rates and obtained those estimates using the rates based on last year's Cherry Sheets and the Chapter 70 formula.

G. Vine asks if the committee might expect to see a draft of next year's budget by late January or early February. Ms. Babinski replies that the good news is the district's contracts are all negotiated, and they would need to consider what initiatives and goals the committee has, as well as funding challenges. She states that most of the obligations will be done closer to March. T. King states that he believes the district can present a draft earlier, as the salaries are known, and that contributes to around 80% of the budget.

K. Kast-McBride asks that these types of details be put into a presentation in the future. T. King agrees.

6. Subcommittee Reports:

R. Forsythe asks for any updates from any subcommittees. The only update given is that the policy subcommittee will be scheduling meetings in the coming weeks for the purpose of doing the annual policy review and update. The date will be announced as soon as it is known.

7. New Business:

a. Early Childhood Literacy Center and Schools Reorganization Proposal:

T. King introduces a proposal to create an Early Childhood Literacy Center in Winchendon in combination with a reorganization of the schools. The Early Childhood Literacy Center would be housed at what is now Toy Town Elementary, and it would consist of PreK and Kindergarten. He proposes an elementary housed at the current Memorial School, and it would consist of grades one through four. Grade five would also be moved to Murdock Middle School, which would then contain grades five through eight. The high school would remain as is. He states that he wants to be very clear, that this proposal is not about finances or reducing costs or utilizing space. It is 100% focused on the most basic needs of the PreK and K learners and what is best for our students, in their most critical age when

learning actually begins.

Currently, PreK and K share the attention of an entire building, the behaviors, the administration, the teachers, etc. across four different grades. The proposal is to focus and create a premier early childhood learning center. T. King states that it is widely recognized that there is a relationship between poverty and academic achievement. Winchendon's poverty rate has increased by 15%, bringing the percentage of impoverished families to 59% last year. Additionally, there is a 20% difference in the number of Winchendon students who can write their names as they enter Kindergarten. This proposal would aim to prepare students for Kindergarten and first grade as they go forward.

T. King addresses the question of why the Early Childhood Literacy Center would be housed at Toy Town instead of Memorial. He states that Memorial School is 20,000 square feet larger than Toy Town, so it is much better positioned in terms of a space capacity to house those four grade levels as opposed to Toy Town. He states that there are 7,000 additional square feet in the actual classrooms at Memorial. Additionally, this move would put grades one through twelve on a single campus and would open up opportunities for internships for high school students at the elementary school.

Looking at the pros of the Early Childhood Literacy Center, the curriculum is more closely aligned between PreK and K, as both have an emphasis on play being a part of learning. First grade does not; it has a different type of curriculum and begins to focus much more on literacy. The district would continue to have specialists in the buildings to provide an introduction to specials specifically for PreK students. Today, PreK students do not receive any specials, like music, art and gym. The district would be looking to continue those opportunities for Kindergarten as well. Bussing is another issue which has come up for Kindergarten students. The law requires that a bus driver has eyesight to drop off a student from the bus. This is often challenging for bus drivers, especially in knowing which students are Kindergarteners and which are first graders, especially if there is a substitute bus driver. In the ESSER grant, the district budgeted for approximately \$300,000 for playground updates, which would be used for a PreK and K playground. CFCE playgroups would be included in the Early Childhood Literacy Center and would be integrated into this particular capacity. Also, early literacy professional development would be provided to teachers and staff, offering grade level specific professional development since what these individuals do is very different from grades one through four. Finally, Memorial School has air conditioning. The district has been approved for a grant to conduct a needs assessment on the Toy Town building, after which it would hope to go out to bid to install mini split systems that draw in fresh air and provide air conditioning to the classrooms. The opening of this center would allow an opportunity for expansion of the PreK program with the addition of full day PreK.

Challenges include ensuring that Kindergarten staff receive professional development that is also aligned with the upper grades so as to maintain vertical alignment.

Elementary, One through Four pros include the alignment of the curriculum with a true focus on literacy as the play component diminishes. This would also allow for more focused professional development and encourages a stronger vertical alignment across math and ELA programs. It would also allow for scheduling flexibility, allowing for a common planning time for staff. Challenges include combining staff from two different buildings with different routines and cultures. Scheduling can be considered a challenge, as there will be more details to work out.

Middle school pros include the opportunity for fifth grade students to participate in the middle school extracurricular activities, such as arts, theater and athletics. This would also provide smoother transitions from grade five to grade six. Fifth grade will not use the Summit platform as the rest of the middle school grades do. They would continue to have the same team structure as they currently do at Toy Town.

Challenges include fifth grade students being in the same building as the high school. This will be addressed the same as it is with grade six, as the students are never left alone. They are escorted from class to class and have their own bathrooms, which are near the middle school office. Bussing would be handled similar to the way it is now. Middle school students are required to sit in the front of the buses, while high school students sit in the back; however, the district will consider separate bussing if necessary.

Jessica Vezina, Murdock Middle School principal, discusses the current practices of middle school students, including recess, which the district would like to return to offering to sixth grade students, using the softball fields. Structured activities would be offered to students. Grants have also been considered for use in building a middle school playground. T. King states that offering recess to middle school students is a topic of debate throughout the state. Some schools offer it and others do not.

T. King outlines district wide pros of this proposal. There will be fewer impactful transitions for students. Having grades one through twelve on one campus will be a benefit because more funds will be spent toward that campus, and it gives high school students the opportunity to intern at the elementary school even if they do not have a car. Additionally, this proposal would allow WPS to align more closely with the Department of Education. Certifications are moving toward this style of placement.

Operations/facilities challenges include moving classrooms, technology, phones and projectors. Pros include operating a premier early childhood literacy center in Winchendon, the likes of which do not exist in our region. This could allow for more students to attend the program from other towns and pay tuition to attend the program. The school reorganization would allow room for expansion. Restrooms have been evaluated and measured. The Director of Facilities measured the height of every toilet in both Memorial and Toy Town, and all toilets across all

Winchendon school buildings are 16.5 inches in height. It was confirmed twice that the toilet sizes are the same at Memorial and Toy Town and Murdock. Bussing changes are addressed as well, listing the number of students currently enrolled at Memorial versus what the projected enrollment will be next year with this program in place. The total enrollment at Memorial would be less, making parent pick up and transportation in general more easy for families. There will also be no reductions in staff across bargaining units. The proposal does not include staff reductions.

T. King states that he is asking for the committee's support for this proposal. There is nothing legislatively that requires a vote to approve the proposal, but he believes it is good practice. If approved, he would begin by going to staff meetings to answer questions, creating steering committees, one for each building, which would consist of staff, parents, community members and union representatives.

G. Vine thanks the Superintendent for the thorough presentation, stating that he thought of just about everything. His initial reaction is positive but he is open for discussion. He believes that closing the learning gap is very important.

R. Forsythe asks A. Jordan for any comments. She states that it was laid out clearly and has no questions.

L. Murphy states that there appears to have been some very guided thought on how to address the needs of Winchendon students. He states that as so much information has been provided this evening, that the committee delays the vote until the steering committees have been created and concerns are brought forth. He states he is not ready to vote on this tonight. He suggests that the committee direct the superintendent to go forward but not vote yet until he hears from the stakeholders.

K. Kast-McBride states she believes something of this level does require a vote of the school committee, despite what the Superintendent stated. She states this is something that needs to be researched because it involves a lot of moving parts. She believes this was handled very poorly as it was sent out in an email, and although it is not the fault of the Superintendent that the presentation was not posted on the town's website, it should have been posted to Facebook, the district's website or any of the other multiple ways it could have been sent out ahead of time, not just to those who have a winchendonk12 email address. She states this should have been sent out to parents, families and the community. She states it was handled poorly in the way in which it was sent out, and had a community member not posted it to Facebook, parents would not have been aware of it and could not have come and spoken tonight. She states this is a problem for her, as she is a member of the communications chair committee. She apologizes for not being involved in the last three meetings, but this was handled poorly and she feels it needs to be addressed. She states that the presentation contains no data, nor does it explain why this is being done. She states that it is nice that the district wants to do an Early Childhood Literacy Center and cut down on transitions, but that it is not really cutting down on transitions because there is not a huge transition that is

being cut out. As it is now, if a student begins PreK or Kindergarten in Winchendon and stays to twelfth grade, they transition from second grade to third grade, then from fifth grade to sixth grade. From then on, they are at the same building. She states that it does not matter where the buildings are and that this proposal does not actually cut out any transitions but only changes where the transitions take place. She states that as a Special Ed advocate, there are social emotional concerns with this proposal. She states that looking at other Early Learning Centers in towns she has lived in before, the children that attended them missed out on the behavior modeling and the social emotional pieces that they lacked because they were not with older children. She states that the committee could not possibly direct the Superintendent to go forward to do any work on this proposal. She believes that we should do the work and have communication with the community, parents and the actual staff who will be expected to take part in the project and that the Superintendent is taking it for granted that the staff will stay if he makes all these moves. She suggests that they take time to digest the proposal and then come back to it to give people a chance to look at it. She asks that going forward, an effort be made to reach out to the stakeholders before a proposal is made like this and give her the data behind it. She states that there are a lot of great suggestions here, and she is not saying she is against it. She comes from districts where they had K through 12 schools, and she believes they are great. She asks why we don't put all of the students in the same place and think about whether there is enough space to do that, to talk to parents about that. She questions whether the district could put an Early Learning Center in the same campus and then have a premier campus setting all in one space, maybe except for the pickup. She knows that would be horrendous but asks that the district think about it. She would like to work with her communications committee on how to do this better, and she did not receive enough input. She requests that the Superintendent never make a proposal like this before the holidays because families cannot handle it.

R. Forsythe states that this proposal is a focus on literacy, on the most vulnerable youth in a town that does not have a great deal of privilege, to have students coming to us with great reading and phonics ability as they are entering their first year of school. He is thrilled to see that the district is following its strategic plan and focusing on literacy. He is pleased to see that there would be minimal effects to the budget. The school committee has few responsibilities, and one of them is the budget; therefore they have to be able to provide a vote and feedback in a way in which the funding that comes into the district is spent on the district. This proposal would not affect their decision making in that way. He states that including stakeholders in the decision making process is the right thing to do, and he would like to hear more about how parent pickup would work. He reminds all that today is not the day that the schools merge; that this presentation is merely a beginning of the work. If the project moves forward, it will include some of the things that have been mentioned tonight.

T. King thanks the committee for its feedback and assures them that the district will follow the guidance and will not pursue this in another way without the approval of the committee. He states that whatever the committee decides going forward is what will be respected in this district.

L. Murphy moves to direct the Superintendent of Schools to do a research fact-based study involving all stakeholders that would be affected by the proposal and then report back to the committee his recommendations as to whether the proposal should move forward or not. G. Vine seconds. R. Forsythe asks for discussion. G. Vine states that there are indeed questions that need to be answered, steps that need to be taken, but the committee hired Mr. King to do what he thought was best for this district and to handle it in the best way possible. He trusts the district's administration to have the best interest of the children and the community at heart. He states that he is willing to vote yes on the motion.

K. Kast-McBride states that she would be willing to support the motion because we need to put the focus on the students and all the studies say that impoverished students are the reason for putting together the Early Learning Center. T. King replies that it is the sole reason, not necessarily the driving reason but a contributing factor which is very important to consider. K. Kast-McBride states that we need to focus on not just those students, but she would like to see the data for where we stand, what our percentage rates are when the next meeting takes place. She states that as much as we may want to make a premier facility that may draw people to us for a PreK through K Early Learning Center, there is no guarantee that once we get them here that we keep them through twelfth grade unless we make sure that we are also enhancing grades one through twelve. She would also like to see cost estimates for different things in writing. She states she would be willing to go along with the motion as long as the committee has that information.

G. Vine asks what sort of lead time the district would need to get this going for the 23-24 school year. T. King states that is his only concern. If we wait too much longer then the district will not have enough time to play it and lay it out in a productive way.

L. Murphy states that the purpose of his motion was to allow the Superintendent to get started on the necessary planning and research and that he can always pull back and wait another year. His intent was to allow the Superintendent to move forward but allow the committee some wiggle room in case it was decided that this approach was not the best.

K. Kast-McBride states that the motion needs to be clarified because the motion made was to have the Superintendent actually do the research and reach out to the stakeholders, and her understanding of that was that they would be working toward getting answers on whether this is feasible, not going forward with bids. L. Murphy states that that is how they will figure out how much it will cost, but he wants the Superintendent to do the research. K. Kast-McBride states that she did not ask for the exact numbers because she knew he could not give her those.

R. Forsythe asks L. Murphy to state his motion again for clarity. L. Murphy moves to direct the Superintendent of Schools to do the research and fact based approach

to his proposal by soliciting feedback from the stakeholders and from any other direction that he needs to go to provide the committee with the information needed to take a vote, then make a recommendation to the committee. Seconded by G. Vine. L. Murphy states that if Mr. King feels he needs to send some bids out in order to gather information, he can do that. His hands are not tied. K. Kast-McBride asks if L. Murphy is going to withdraw his original motion. R. Forsythe states that the committee will stick to Robert's Rules and state the motion, then there will be an opportunity for discussion. The motion is to direct the Superintendent to do research and take a fact-based approach to the proposal by soliciting feedback from stakeholders and provide information to the school committee can take a vote. K. Kast-McBride states that if they are sticking to Robert's Rules of Order, that is a new motion, so L. Murphy needs to withdraw the original motion. She states that if they are only going to stick to Robert's Rules of Order when she makes a comment to ask for clarification, then they are going to stick to them all the time. G. Vine states that he wishes the committee had K. Kast-McBride at every meeting to tell them how to run. L. Murphy withdraws the original motion.

R. Forsythe re-reads the new motion to direct the Superintendent to do research and take a fact-based approach to the proposal by soliciting feedback from stakeholders and provide information to the school committee so the school committee may take a vote. Seconded by G. Vine. R. Forsythe asks A. Jordan for comments. She states that it is a good idea to get more information from stakeholders outside of what was presented tonight so the committee can make a well-informed decision. R. Forsythe asks if the process that is laid out in this motion takes until February, would that be too late for the school committee to provide what he thinks was correctly identified as an appropriate vote. T. King states that he will need to think on it. He says that part of that is rolling this out in consideration of the budget as it will have budgetary impact in terms of the way the district plans. He states that trying to do those things together was sort of the spirit of bringing this forward now, so as not to rip up the budget process and create undue work and delay budgets. R. Forsythe asks for roll call vote. Vote is unanimous.

b. Board of Health Update:

Keith Kent approaches and presents an update from the town Board of Health regarding COVID-19, vaccination rates in the town and viral positivity ratings. L. Murphy asks whether the positivity ratings seem to spike when family events and gatherings take place. K. Kent states that he cannot vouch for that.

c. Graduation Discussion:

L. Murphy states that he likes to know what the plan for graduation is, and he truly enjoys the traditions of graduation week in Winchendon. He hopes to brainstorm a way to involve the community in senior week, the senior reception and the grand march. T. King describes the graduation festivities before the pandemic. K. Kast-McBride asks for details on what the alumni banquet consists of. L. Murphy states that it is a dinner and dance for the graduates. Stephanie Rondeau approaches and gives details for graduation, which is typically held the first

Sunday in June depending on the last day of school. Friday night before graduation is prom, but as of right now, prom is scheduled for May 19 because they are taking the kids on a Spirit of Boston Harbour cruise for prom. She describes the events of previous years and those who normally assist in planning. She states that she is happy to work with the members of the Alumni Association to plan a dinner if that is something they would like to do.

8. Old Business: None

9. Future Agenda Items:

- a. ELA Curriculum Update
- b. Update on Reorganization/Early Childhood Literacy Center
- c. Update on MASC Conference
- d. Mid-year Review of Superintendent

10. Closing Comments:

A. Jordan expresses gratitude for the faculty and staff and for everything they do to provide to our public schools. She looks forward to a productive and healthy and thoughtful 2023.

L. Murphy echoes those sentiment and wishes everyone a happy holiday season.

K. Kast-McBride reiterates that COVID has not gone away. She will not tell people whether to be vaccinated or not, but she will likely wear a mask at all times. She hopes everyone has a healthy and happy holiday and thanks everyone for all their hard work.

R. Forsythe thanks everyone and wishes all a wonderful, happy holiday.

11. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn by G. Vine. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous.
Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted: Liz Latoria
Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: WPSD Age Vaccinating Statistics - Winchendon Board of Health

WPSD Age Vaccinating Statistics

Mass Dept. of Public Health – Dec. 20, 2022

Children and Adults, both Partially & Fully Vaccinated

Ages 0 – 4 = 516 children, 5% partially & 2% fully

Ages 5 – 11 = 838 children, 27% partially & 24% fully

Ages 12 – 15 = 486 children, 50% partially & 46% fully

Ages 16 – 19 = 402 teenage, 60% partially & 52% fully

Ages 20 – 29 = 1,276 60% partially & 53% fully

Ages 30 – 49 = 2,637 63% partially & 57% fully

Ages 50 – 64 = 2,631 86% partially & 80% fully

Ages 65 – 74 = 0,952 >95% partially & >95% fully

Ages 75 + = 0,630 >95% partially & 89% fully

Total Pop. = 10,364 & 10,500 including homeless/uncounted

Females = 71% partially and 63% fully vaccinated 3,033 of 5,163

Males = 63% partially and 56% fully vaccinated 2,980 of 5,201

Winchendon overall = 67% partially and 61% fully vaccinated.

W.P.S. District — town SARS-CoV-2 / Covid-19 positivity rates during the Academic Y-T-D beginning 09/01/2022.

09/01/2022 = 6.04% positivity
09/08/2022 = 8.68% positivity
09/15/2022 = 11.11% positivity
09/22/2022 = 11.43% positivity
09/29/2022 = 11.76% positivity
10/06/2022 = 10.91% positivity
10/13/2022 = 11.07% positivity
10/20/2022 = 12.02% positivity
10/27/2022 = 10.5% positivity
11/03/2022 = 7.85% positivity
11/10/2022 = 7.80% positivity
11/17/2022 = 9.62% positivity
11/24/2022 = 9.74% positivity
12/01/2022 = 9.86% positivity
12/08/2022 = 13.01% positivity
12/15/2022 = 10.12% positivity



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Massachusetts SARS-Co-V2 Vaccination Data per Mass DPH

Total Massachusetts Population =	6,860,000
Total residents fully vaccinated =	5,603,895
Total residents partially vaccinated =	6,529,689
Total residents with at least a 1st booster dose =	3,434,516
Total residents with at least a 2nd booster dose =	1,467,390

These are the states with the highest full vaccination rates per U.S. News & World Report as of December 14, 2022.

1. Rhode Island (87.1%)
2. Vermont (85.0%)
3. Massachusetts (83.6%)
4. Maine (82.8%)
5. Connecticut (82.6%)
6. Hawaii (81.1%)
7. New York (80.2%)
8. Maryland (79.2%)
9. New Jersey (78.6%)
10. Virginia (76.1%)

N. H. which borders Winchendon to our north comes in 20th nationally at 71%.

All data tracked and presented as a 2022 year-end calendar update to the W.P.S.
School Committee & District Central Office, on December 20, 2022 by:

Keith Kent :

Chair, Board of Health

Town of Winchendon