



Winchendon Public Schools

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Date Approved/Hold:

School Committee Chair

School Committee Meeting

April 6, 2023 – 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice-Chair; Larry Murphy; Alicia Jordan; Karen Kast-McBride; Angelina Dellasanta, Student Representative; 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: None

4. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

G. Vine moves to accept the minutes of the February 6 and March 2, 2023 minutes as presented. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

G. Vine moves to move 9a. New Business prior to number 6, Superintendent's Report. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

5. New Business:

a. Winchendon Police Department – Body Worn Cameras

T. King states that he and the chief have had some conversations about the Winchendon Police Department having recently acquired body worn cameras for their staff, and they have discussed WPS SRO wearing one during the school day. We do have an MOU/MOA that we work with the police department on, and we're going to incorporate the body cameras as part of that. The chief is here to talk about that, how it will operate, and the instances when the camera might be activated.

Chief of Police, Dan Wolski, approaches and provides details on body worn cameras. The public has demanded more transparency within law enforcement, and that has what has drawn the advent of the body worn camera. Many departments are going to that, several locally including Ashburnham, Templeton, Fitchburg, Leominster and Lunenburg. Winchendon got the cameras about a month and a half ago, and all patrolmen have been outfitted with them. This is largely for the sake of transparency and accountability on the part of the officers, but it also protects the public and the police. Special considerations must be made for operation within the schools, so while the patrolmen have their cameras on all the time, the School Resource Officer

would not have their camera on all the time. The Chief reached out to the Lunenburg PD because they already have a policy in place, which is accredited with the Massachusetts Accreditation Commission for Police. Those parameters include that the SRO wears the camera, and the device would only begin recording when the officer activates it by pushing a button. The policy from Lunenburg, which the Chief would like to mirror for Winchendon, states that the officer would turn on the recording in case of suspected criminal activity or when assisting school personnel with matters that may result in disorderly or otherwise disruptive behavior in the school environment. This includes but is not limited to any violent interaction with or between students or staff, when an intruder enters the district building or grounds, when engaged in a criminal investigation in accordance with the Department, a call for help or any disturbance that requires immediate police intervention, any use of force that the SRO applies. It also spells out instances when it would not be turned on, such as casual encounters or conversations with citizens or members of the school community that do not correspond with the above noted circumstances.

G. Vine thanks the Chief for bringing the topic to the committee and providing an update. He asks if the committee might be provided with a copy of the memorandum between the police and the district. He asks whether the officers go through some sort of training before they get the cameras. Chief Wolski confirms there is an online training and the department has training on its own policies and reviews and tests its staff on the policies. L. Murphy asks if any legal background has been investigated. T. King states the district did check with legal counsel and there are no restrictions, other than the advice to inform parents ahead of time that our SRO will be wearing this within the schools and explain how it's operating. A. Jordan asks if there are repercussions if the person neglects to hit the button to record. Chief Wolski states that he would take high stress situations into consideration as sometimes things unfold rapidly, and the officer is thinking of the safety of the kids and themselves first and foremost, but in some situations, he would look at disciplining if they failed to turn on the camera. K. Kast-McBride asks to see a copy of the Lunenburg policy, and she questions the wording of the policy where it mentions suspected criminal activity as that can be subjective. Chief Wolski states the reason they word it that way is to protect the presumed innocence of everyone. G. Vine asks if parents have been notified. T. King states that they would be notified after the meeting this evening. He explains that the district currently has cameras all over and everything has been recorded except within classrooms. The difference here is that the officer is wearing a camera for direct interactions that may result from some activity. Within a school building, the SRO is there as community support n engaging the community and students and they are not suspicious of police activity. The SRO within the buildings is a very collaborative approach to how we work with students and families. Additional discussion is had regarding situations in which the SRO may or may not use a body worn camera, the point of this discussion being transparency. R. Forsythe wraps up, stating this topic is not for the committee's vote as it is not a school committee policy but that of the police.

6. Superintendent's Report:

a. Budget Update:

A. Babinski presents budget summary year-to-date through March 31. The budget transfers that were presented a few weeks ago were taken care of by the town accountant today, so they will be visible in the next budget update. The district is currently working to clean up any outstanding purchase orders and get some idea of where we're at. Some meetings are scheduled with each department principal to look at anticipated expenditures through the rest of the year so that we can complete any necessary projects that may require funding. Some of the sub line items are negative due to some long-term subbing. Typically, long term subs have been put into the salary line item of that person, but that is not how we report

them to the Department of Education. We actually report short term and long-term subs separately at the end of year report, so just making sure that we're charging those sub line items.

b. District Reorganization Update:

A timeline was set for having boxes available for packing and shredding of confidential materials. We have received a lot of boxes, and those will be delivered next week to teachers. Shredding was a concern brought up by several teachers, so the district is going to have shredding containers with locked lids for confidential materials to be shredded, then the district will contract with a company to shred on site. G. Vine asks if districts are required to keep records for a certain amount of time. T. King confirms that there is in fact a required length of time to keep certain records. K. Kast-McBride asks if the district needs to come up with a policy for getting rid of these types of documents each year so teachers feel secure. T. King describes the use of confidential shredding bins and it is something the district will pursue going forward.

c. Disposal of Materials:

T. King explains the need for the district to dispose of textbooks, old supplies, science products, materials that are no longer aligned to the current standards that the teachers do not want to move. He asks for the committee's blessing to work with a company that would come and drop off containers to take those materials and recycle them or send them to others who can use them. There would be a sheet to record what we were disposing of. This would give teachers more time to sort through their materials. Discussion is had about the types of materials that the district is hoping to dispose of, including text books from the 1980s, science materials that have dried up, nothing valuable or antique in nature. R. Forsythe states that this does not require a vote, but it is a practice the school committee would support.

7. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta gives updates to student activities and events, spring picture dates and instructions, awards assembly for the middle school, update on the tournament of plays. The junior class took the prize with their play, *A Cut Above the Rest*. The MHS choir participated in Clark University's regional invitational performance of Mozart's *Requiem* on March 27. March 24, students attended the student government day at the Boston State House. The Spring NHS conference sponsored by MSAS was held at the College of the Holy Cross. Mr. Larry Murphy was recognized as a friend of the NHS for his years of service. Students presented a workshop about Wreaths Across America. The Murdock chapter of NHS was recognized as well. Angelina was awarded student of the year for the central district along with a \$500 scholarship and the Everett Masters. Students will be attending MASR conference in Marlborough on April 8. The CDM Student Council Spring Conference will be held on April 13. The MHS travel club leaves for Italy on April 13. The Murdock Food Pantry is seeking donations. The Office of the District Attorney is presenting on the dangers of vaping at the middle school on April 11. Junior/Senior prom will be May 19. Spring sports updates are also presented.

K. Kast-McBride asks for clarification on prom ticket prices. Stephanie Rondeau approaches to explain the Murdock Trust fund and the grant from the District Attorney's office were used to offset the price of tickets for students, which is actually \$140 per person. A free formal wear event was held last week for students as well.

8. Subcommittee Reports:

a. 2023-2024 District Calendar:

G. Vine moves to approve the 2023-2024 district calendar as presented. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. R. Forsythe asks for discussion. It is determined that the graduation date of June 2 will be added to the calendar. Discussion is had about the number of half days for next year.

Several were removed, and others were moved to the beginning of the year before school starts. Vote is unanimous. Calendar is approved with the assumed acceptance of the addition of graduation.

b. Policy Subcommittee:

The policy subcommittee met on March 17. Mrs. Heroux gave a presentation regarding new Special Education policies that were necessary because of changes that happened at a state level. Those needed some additional information and were to be cleaned up by Mrs. Heroux and will be sent to the subcommittee. The subcommittee also went over the campaigns that have come out from the MASC. It was necessary for the subcommittee to be aware of the changes made through MASC. Those updates will be presented at a future school committee meeting and put to a vote.

c. Joint Committee on Cost/Revenue Sharing:

T. King states this committee has been dissolved. G. Vine states that everything was done prior to the meeting with Fin Comm. He would like to see a draft of the MOU between the town and the district regarding disbursement of override funds. K. Kast-McBride agrees we need something in writing. T. King explains that he and the town manager are working together, and the Joint Committee agreed to have the town manager come up with a plan outlining the commitment to get to 5% above net school spending and what that project looks like. What the district did receive last year was solar override, which was about \$65,000, but we did receive the 2.5% override in our current fiscal year. Currently, the district has \$50,000 in the budget this year for the override amount for FY24. The town manager and the superintendent will work together to create a rough draft of what that might look like going forward. Let the record show that the Superintendent has worked with the town manager as the Joint Committee asked them to do and has resulted in a document that is in the hands of both the town and the school indicating the agreement for FY24 is not permanent and will be re-negotiated for future fiscal years.

9. New Business:

b. 2023-2024 School Choice Seats:

T. King describes the School Choice process. Each year, the district votes by regulation on the number of seats available through School Choice. By state regulation, every district is School Choice, but we do have the ability to vote on the number of seats available by grade level and program. So, in working with the principals and asking that they envision the seats they have available based on the numbers of teachers, class sizes, social dysregulation of a particular class. Presented tonight is the number of seats that the district would like to make available to outside communities. We do not have School Choice in PreK. In many instances, based on the class numbers, there are zeroes in certain places. R. Forsythe asks if we have a sense for the numbers of students that would be in classes if all School Choice seats were filled. T. King replies that it is hard to do in the high school. The biggest classes that would generally be impacted would be something like an English class. We have six periods in the day, so there are six sections a day or six classes of English a day, so even if you got to 120 total enrollment, there could still be 20 students in the classroom.

G. Vine moves to approve the 2023-2024 School Choice seats as presented. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

R. Forsythe introduces an item that was unknown to the committee before the agenda but is timely and needs to be shared. A letter from the Office of the Attorney General was sent and received this morning. In December of 2022, a complaint was filed against the Winchendon School Committee for violating Open Meeting Law. The AG's office received the notification and the response from the committee in January 2023, that was within the time boundaries of

what the law allows. Since January 10, the AG's office has been allowing for a period of time that is required by law for the complainant to appeal or provide feedback based on the committee's response. As of March 20, that period has expired. The individual chose not to further the complaint against the School Committee and instead, by omission of a response has accepted the committee's response to her. Today, April 6, the letter arrived, and the matter is now closed.

10. Old Business: None

11. Future Agenda Items:

- a. Student Opportunity Act Report
- b. School Safety Presentation from Police
- c. Monty Tech Presentation
- d. Conditions for Learning Survey Results

12. Closing Comments:

A. Jordan thanks Chief Wolski for presenting on the cameras for the SRO. She congratulates Mrs. Rondeau and Angelina for their exemplary work as well as the NHS.

G. Vine thanks Chief Wolski for his presentation. He congratulates Larry and Angelina and thanks Mr. King and his staff for their ongoing efforts with the reorganization and the work done on the budget.

L. Murphy thanks the Chief for his presentation. He felt proud to be an alumnus of his high school today as the awards kept coming and praise for our NHS students was amazing. He thanks Mr. King for coming to the NHS presentation.

K. Kast-McBride congratulates all the great talent in the room. Larry, Mrs. Rondeau, Angelina, and all the other students for all the hard work they've done, as well as those who worked on the Tournament of Plays. She thanks Thad for going to the awards ceremony and was disappointed for not being invited as well. She thanks the Chief for being here. She asks again if the committee can have their packets emailed to them by Monday because getting them emailed the day of the meeting does not give enough time to read everything. The Board of Selectmen get their packets on Fridays before their meetings.

A. Dellasanta thanks everyone for their kind words about the awards for NHS. It always makes her happy when MHS gets recognized. She thanks Mrs. Rondeau and acknowledges that she definitely deserved the award

13. Adjournment:

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

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

Documents Attached: None