

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

OCTOBER 9, 2024

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 6:03pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, Ms. Donnelly, and Mr. Frassica. Mayor McCarthy was not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mr. Frassica, to move to Executive Session at 6:04pm for the purposes of conducting strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and / or to conduct negotiations with nonunion personnel - Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services and conducting strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel - Internal and External Task Manager, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater and Dr. Mendonsa and to return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:00pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, Ms. Donnelly, Mr. Frassica, and Mayor McCarthy. Mayor McCarthy presided.

Mr. Tarallo led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor McCarthy announced the meeting was being recorded by WCAC.org.

PUBLIC INPUT

There was no one who requested to speak to the Committee.

STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT

No students were present at the meeting.

SCHOOL
COUNCIL/PTO/
SEPAC/BELPAC
INPUT

There was no one from these groups who addressed the School Committee.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Mendonsa presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on September 18, 2024;

Resignations:

- Marissa LaRosa, Waltham High School, Paraprofessional - effective 09/27/2024;
- Allison Villali, William F. Stanley Elementary School, Special Education Para - effective 09/23/2024;
- Melody Hansen, Waltham High School, Special Education Para - effective 10/04/2024
- Gilda Villani, Kennedy Middle School, Teacher - effective 10/11/2024

The Committee was informed of a very generous donation, in the amount of \$4,000., to McDevitt Middle School that was made as part of the Kleenex 100th Anniversary contest.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to approve the Consent Agenda. All in favor.

COMMUNICATION

There was nothing new shared in this category.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Kathleen Dowcett, Grants Manager, Central Office - effective 9/23/2024;
- Joji Ruccio, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 9/23/2024;
- John Hall, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 9/25/2024;
- Jennifer Paul, Food Service - Cafeteria Worker 5.5hrs, Waltham High School - effective 9/25/2024;
- Nancy Hall, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide, effective 9/25/2024;
- Rachel Estremera, LTS Transition Specialist, District-Wide - effective 10/8/2024;
- Marcia Prucha, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 9/25/2024;
- Daisy Cartagena Perez, Lunch Monitor, Whittemore Elementary - effective 9/23/2024;
- Sandy Pedroza Rodriguez, TASC Paraprofessional, Stanley Elementary - effective 09/23/2024;
- Jean Benoit, LTS Paraprofessional, Northeast Elementary School - effective 9/24/2024-11/27/2024;
- Kenzie Demeo, Substitute Teacher, Plympton Elementary School - effective 9/27/2024

Transfers and Promotions:

- Abigail Torres, LTS Grade 3 ESL Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 09/16/2024;
- Jacqueline Browne, ESL Paraprofessional, Whittemore Elementary - effective 08/26/2024;
- Ashley Marston, Special Education Paraprofessional, Whittemore Elementary - effective 08/26/2024;
- Shaina McMahon, .5 ESL at Whittemore and .3 ELL Coach on Title 3, Whittemore Elementary - effective 08/26/2024;
- Caren Martinez, LTS ESL Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Jessica Mullaney, TASC Paraprofessional, Stanley Elementary - 08/26/2024;
- Anthony Marcuccio, Math Teacher, Waltham High School 1.2 - effective 09/25/2024;
- Nicholas Kaempf, Math Teacher, Waltham High School, effective 09/25/2024;
- Sarah Van Auken, Math Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 09/25/2024;
- Zirui Xu, Math Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 09/25/2024;
- John Brokish, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Thomas Duca, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Emily Duvall, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Mary-Jo Delorey, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 8/26/2024;

- Kathryn Pfeil, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Jessica Crusco, Special Education Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/26/2024;
- Paul Fleming, Maintenance Worker, Dual Language School - effective 09/30/2024;
- Harvi Galicia, LTS ELL Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 09/26/2024-11/26/2024;
- Samnang Ly, Cafe Worker, Kennedy Middle School 5.5hrs - effective 09/10/2024;
- Daniela Tobar, 3.5 Lead Cook, Whittemore Elementary 7hrs - effective 09/09/2024

b) Information

Stemming from a request at the last meeting, Waltham High's CTE program enrollment numbers were provided to the members.

Dr. Mendonsa shared that representatives from more than sixty colleges and universities were in attendance at the recent college fair held at Waltham High School.

Mr. Tarallo asked if CTE courses have a minimum enrollment to run. A conversation with Mr. Tarallo, Dr. Mendonsa, Mayor McCarthy, and Mrs. AlJammal ensued about program retention, earlier program promotion to students, barriers that may impact students' ability to continue in the programs, and a path to college. The current schedule was noted as a possible deterrent for juniors and seniors as it typically does not allow for CTE students to take electives and / or AP classes. Dr. Mendonsa indicated the district just enrolled in a program that will analyze the high school's schedule for positives and negatives. She also confirmed administrators will solicit feedback from upperclassmen who left CTE programs.

The dates, times and locations for Dr. Mendonsa's upcoming Community Forums were shared with the Committee.

c) Monthly
District
Enrollment

The monthly district enrollment report displayed enrollment at just over 5,600 students, which is slightly lower than the original projection.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Frassica, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to hear from off-committee members. All in favor.

**CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION**

a) Spotlight on
Fine and
Performing
Arts Dept.

Fine and Performing Arts Director Blake Siskavich addressed the members and provided a breakdown of the staff's composition. He emphasized the program's focus on integrated learning objectives, student-centered learning and data-driven decisions and also read the department's shared vision. Mr. Siskavich highlighted some recent program successes: grants awarded last year, the implementation of the SoundTrap software, the expansion of community partnerships, and the opening of the amazing new high school which will increase opportunities for students. He also noted a few challenges the department has been facing: the lack of space, particularly at the elementary level, for the increase in instrumental music interest and, as a result, the lack of instrument inventory for students in need.

Members thanked Mr. Siskavich for his presentation and questions were answered. The positive, long-term benefits of the K-12 drama program were highlighted as being unique for Waltham students.

b) Spotlight on Special Education Dept.

Director of Special Education, Secondary, Alyssa Bourque began with an overview of the 375 staff positions that support the more than 1,000 students on IEPs in the district. She listed the six specialized SPED programs that are available for WPS students. Ms. Bourque highlighted the focus areas for this year: specialized new teacher meetings, rollout of the new IEP, quarterly compliance monitoring, a deeper focus on student outcomes, and increasing staff retention from year to year.

The director emphasized some big wins and proud moments and also noted some consistent challenges that the department is attempting to tackle.

Mr. Zanghi inquired about the AAC iPads and was informed that they have greatly enhanced students' ability to communicate with others, have expanded learning options and even allow students to track their own progress.

Mrs. Coleman asked about special education support at the high school, in comparison to the lower grades. Ms. Bourque explained the process for parents to follow if they are questioning the services and support being provided within special education.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was nothing new shared in this area.

a) MSBA - Waltham High School Project

b) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Dr. Mendonsa shared that the first meeting to discuss the upcoming equity audit will be taking place soon.

c) Dual Language School Model

Nothing new relative to the Dual Language School Model was discussed.

d) Reutilization of 617 Lexington Street

There was no new information provided.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Security Measures in Waltham Public Schools

Following the serious incidents at Waltham schools over the last month, a number of parents have asked Mayor McCarthy about metal detectors and wands at the high school and middle schools. The Mayor confirmed she would like to explore these additional safety measures for our students.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mr. Frassica, to explore the implementation of metal detectors and wands at the high school and middle schools. All in favor.

Mayor McCarthy also indicated it is time to re-evaluate whether another campus monitor and / or SRO are needed at Waltham High now that the new school is up and running.

b) Approval of
2025 School
Committee
Meeting
Calendar

A proposed 2025 School Committee Meeting Calendar was provided to the members for review and approval. Mrs. AlJammal questioned the deviation in the meeting schedule for October, 2025 and Dr. Mendonsa advised the change in schedule is due to a religious holiday.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Frassica, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to table the approval of the 2025 School Committee Meeting Calendar. All in favor.

FISCAL MATTERS

a) Bills on
Warrant

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to pay the bills on warrant. All in favor.

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

Mr. Tarallo asked for the School Committee to have access to the contracts for all staff who are on individual contracts.

Mayor McCarthy referenced the former Evening School Program that used to run and noted she would like to explore its return to the district to be located at 617 Lexington Street.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Frassica, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to explore bringing back the Evening School Program and to have it held at 617 Lexington Street. All in favor.

The conversation shifted to the WHS NHS students who have been assisting with the community tours of 554 Lexington Street.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mr. Frassica, to recognize with a citation from the School Committee, the National Honor Society students and advisors for their assistance with the community tours of 554 Lexington Street. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 8:20pm. All in favor.

Dr. Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk