WINOOSKI SCHOOLS
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Winooski School Board of Trustees

Regular Meeting
Wednesday, October 14, 2026, 6:00 pm
WSD Library Learning Commons or via Google Meet
Google Meet Link: meet.google.com/szx-gwkh-oee

Policy Title 1.0 Ends Statement: All students will graduate from the Winooski School District (WSD) college and career ready at a cost supported by a majority of the Winooski community. WSD students will lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community.

Board Member Attendees: Nicole Mace; Elom Essiba; Katie Livermore; Robert Millar; Emily Bowers; Barakit Gyi, Student Member, **Merger Buddies**: Bryn Oakleaf, Deputy Mayor; Judy Lance; Kamal Dahal; Liz Cross; Annie Schneider; Jess Lukas, **WSD Staff**: Sarah Haven, Dir. Operations; Erik Johnson, District Office Manager; Cheyne Racine, Dir. Facilities; Sulley Adinan, IT Technician; Miriam Greenfield, Dir. Communications (online), Catherine Burbo, Library Assistant (online), **Community Members**: Aki Fairbanks (online)

1. **Call to Order** (5 Minutes)
    a. Nicole Mace calls the meeting to order @ **6:00pm.**

2. **Agenda Review and Adjustments:** (5 Minutes)
    a. Consent Agenda Changes
        i. Nicole Mace shares that in anticipation of having guests join and lengthier meetings, wanting to be strategic about time together. The following changes will be happening:
            1. Monitoring Reports from the Board, if we are in compliance and there's not a lot of new changes in interpretation, we are just going to include them in part of the Consent Agenda.
            2. Wilmer's monitoring reports will be treated similarly as long as there is no objection from anyone or noncompliance or new interpretations.
            3. Second reads of policy with no substantive changes will also move to consent
            4. This would be the time for any board member to pull an item from Consent Agenda
        ii. Nicole Mace added item 7B3: Appoint a representative to the Regional Advisory Board for Tech Centers
        iii. Nicole Mace would like special topics reordered: merger buddy introductions, followed by Act 170 merger committee timeline and values trade-offs, finish with the budget presentation.

3. **Announcements and Recognition**
    a. World Teachers Day (October 5)

i. Acknowledged teachers across the district; City Council passed a resolution

b. Global Diversity Awareness Month
   i. Robert Millar spoke, noting the month's connection to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that it celebrates diversity broadly. October also includes Filipino American History Month, Italian American Heritage Month, and National Pizza Month.

c. City-WSD Joint Meeting on Monday, October 19
   i. Reminder shared for this coming Monday at **6:00 PM** at **City Hall**

d. Other Announcements and Recognitions
   i. None Provided.

4. **Public Comments:** This item is reserved for comments and questions on topics that are not included on this agenda. Time for public comment is included by default for each item below.
   a. ***None Provided.***

5. Consent Agenda: (5 Minutes)
   a. Minutes of Meetings
      i. Regular Board Meeting: September 9, 2026
   b. Policy Title: 2.3 Financial Condition and Activities
      i. Approval of Bills
   c. Policy Title: 2.7 Compensation and Benefits
      i. Announcement of Attrition Incentives FY 2028
   c. Policy Title: 4.1 Governing Style
      i. Discussion/action: Internal Monitoring Report
   d. Policy Title: 4.2.2 Create Written Governing Policies
      i. Policy Second Read and Approval for Adoption
         1. C2 Student Drugs & Alcohol
         2. C6 Home Study Students
   e. Nicole Mace looks for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda
   f. Katie Livermore - "So Moved."
   g. Motion Passes.

6. Special Topics (Budget and Act 170)
   a. Discussion: Merger Buddy Introductions
      i. Merger buddies are community volunteers serving as a bridge between board merger study conversations and the wider community
         1. Merger buddy attendees tonight included: All school board members, along with Bryn Oakleaf, a city council member (nearly 6 years), Liz Cross(parent, resident), Kamal Dahal (former board member, 4–5 years), Judy Lance (35+ year Winooski resident), Jess Lucas(resident, part of pool rebuild committee), Annie Schneider (multilingual teacher and WEA vice president), and a student board representative, Barakit Gyi.

2. Buddies are expected to attend as many board meetings as possible, ask questions, provide feedback, and carry information back to their networks — and bring community input back to the board
3. WSD is unique among the 3 districts in using a merger buddy model, building on the prior "budget buddy" program
4. Winooski was asked to present this model at a VSBA lunchtime webinar.
5. A vote is set to take place on Town Meeting Day, March 2028.

ii. To view 6a.i_Merger Study Update (Presentation).pdf

b. Presentation: Budget Context 1
   i. Current FY27 budget: ~$35 million, a 4.59% increase from prior year; passed with 72% approval.
   ii. Current homestead tax rate: 1.16, down from 1.24 previous year and 2.16 before the new weights took effect
   iii. WSD's tax rate is below the regional average of 1.33
   iv. WSD has the smallest operating budget among regional neighbors; spending $14,896 per weighted pupil vs. regional average of $15,344
   v. Weighted student enrollment jumped from ~900 to 2,157 in 2024 due to Act 127 (recognizing higher per-pupil costs for multilingual learners and students from poverty); WSD is the only minority-majority district in Vermont
   vi. Key budget pressures :
      1. Negotiated salary increases: licensed staff +5.25%, non-licensed +4.5%, plus step increases.
      2. Health insurance projected ~7% increase; building insurance ~5%
      3. Inflation (September: 3.9%) impacting utilities and supplies.
      4. Out-of-district special education placements (currently 16 students); tuition costs are significant.
      5. Pre-K at capacity with 12 students still on the waitlist.
      6. No longer identified as a school needing Comprehensive Supports: In FY26, we used $600K from that; This year, we will use about $350K. That does fund a FTE and some programs, like summer school. We will need to budget for that if we want to continue. We used up the remainder of the funds this year from two years ago.
      7. Anticipated Medicaid revenue loss due to state-level changes.
      8. Phone system replacement, transportation contract renewal, gym floors/bleachers replacement.
      9. USDA loan, continue to fund the reserve account.
   vii. WSD has reduced 21 positions over the past 2 years; further cuts are increasingly difficult.
   viii. Key budget dates: December 1 state letter (yield + CLA); board budget adoption target January 13; budget vote Town Meeting Day.
   ix. To view the 6b.i_FY 28 Budget Context (Presentation).pdf

c. Presentation: Act 170 and Merger Committee Timeline
   i. WSD is required to study merger by Act 170, but is not required to merge

ii. Winooski's merger study group includes Burlington and South Burlington
iii. Assigned facilitator: Craig Ahrens-Martin (Boston area, 20+ years in public education)
iv. Nicole Mace has been appointed as WSD's representative to the merger study committee; a second rep may be needed depending on the other districts' representation decisions based on weighted student population.
v. 4 mandated areas of study: Educational opportunities (including regional middle-high schools and Career and Technical Education access), financial and operational impact, governance, and long-term sustainability.
vi. First merger study committee meeting: Next Tuesday, 4:00–5:30 PM, hosted at Winooski.
vii. Study committee timeline: First meeting by October 15 (law requirement); report due September 1, 2027; state review by December 2026; potential Town Meeting Day vote March 2028; new district effective July 1, 2029, if approved.
viii. The committee makes the recommendation and determines which districts are "necessary" for a vote; all necessary districts must vote yes for merger to proceed.
ix. Board policies would not bind a new merged district; policy alignment (e.g., library materials, ends policy) would be part of articles of agreement discussions
x. A WSD project page on the Winooski website has links to merger study, CESA, and Act 170 topics
xi. Hear the discussion regarding Act 170 and Merger Committee Timeline

d. Discussion: Values and Tradeoffs Activities with the Public
i. Nicole Mace shares how the Board is a Policy Governance Board. Policy 4.4, act on behalf of our community, referred to as owners, as a whole rather than advocating for a specific population or interest group. Gather data that reflects the diversity of our ownership. Before the merger proposal gets down the road, think about what values we bring to the conversation, what we care about. Values are hard to clearly define, as sometimes they are in conflict with one another. Shares an activity the Board used during their Retreat. Invites public, merger buddies to see if it's something they want to do with people in their network.
    1. Values & Trade-Offs Worksheet
ii. Board shared a slide of 5 values identified: academic opportunity, local control (governance), cost (required by law), plus relational opportunity and belonging and safety (community values)
iii. Robert Millar shares his experience when partnered with a student representative from the Board. Putting the values against each other.
iv. Emily Bowers shares the Board were pretty similar in lines they wouldn't cross. Interesting to see what compromises were willing to be made.
v. Barakit Gyi - Good to see how values fit into scenarios and which values can be combined, and how these could affect students.

vi. Katie Livermore shares that Winooski is not coming from a place of scarcity but more of what we would love to have for our students. This can affect the funding formula.
vii. Meeting open to the public via Zoom link on the WSD board page.
viii. The meeting will be recorded (Google recording; Media Factory unavailable).

7. Governance Processes (Policy Section IV): (60 Minutes)
    a. Policy Title: 4.2.1 Community Engagement
        i. Discussion: Recent Community Activities by Board
            1. Nicole Mace shares that the Board did a great job with getting merger buddies. Thank you for getting people to recruit and connect.
    b. Policy Title: 4.2 Board Job Description
        i. Discussion: CESA Update
            1. The state Agency of Education's FAQ responses were minimal; many technical questions deferred to legal counsel.
            2. Chairs meet every month.
            3. The link above "CESA" available on our website with updates, meetings, etc.
            4. Discussion about promoting the Act 170 project page via district social media to increase public awareness. Stating a "thank you" to merger buddies and to follow the CESA link on the website.
        ii. Discussion/Action: Appoint Rep for Upcoming VSBA Business
            1. Nicole Mace would like to appoint Robert Millar. He has attended in years past on our behalf. This is where members vote on resolutions. Nicole looks for a motion.
            2. Emily Bowers- "So Moved."
            3. ***Motion Passes.***
    c. Policy Title: 4.2.2 Create Written Governing Policies
        i. Action: Public Hearing and Adoption of Policy
            1. This has been tabled until next month. This was not on the original agenda and did not make it into the Board's packet.
        ii. Discussion/Action: Policy Second Read and Approval for Adoption
            1. [approved via Consent Agenda 5.d.i]
        iii. Discussion: Policy First Read
            1. C10 Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying (HHB)
                a. Wilmer Chavarria shares this is a very important policy and set of procedures because it is something principals and staff deal with on a daily basis. It is very scripted and has to follow a very specific process because it is mandated federally. Also, the state level adds its own additional requirements, in addition to the federal. State model policy had not been updated in 11 years; the updated version includes new federal Title IX sexual harassment investigation alignment and additional procedural

requirements. Wilmer recommends adopting the model policy as issued (including model procedures) without modification, given its legally prescriptive nature, leaving it for his office to handle. Keep it all together, leave it how the AOE issued it, given the seriousness.

b. Nicole Mace- The purpose for this is ensuring families have an avenue and can bring forward a complaint, knowing that both parties will be treated fairly and the district is responding in a timely way, given the seriousness of the situation. Hazing, Harassment and Bullying are defined in statute. Memo from Heather Lynn is where her time was focused as she is the expert in the state training leaders and administrators, helping write procedures with the agency. After 20 years, realizing that some areas needed more clarity.

c. Wilmer Chavarria shares that this now the new policy adds significant staff workload; current Title IX coordinator role (held by Sarah Haven) is described as unmanageable under the new requirements even without her other responsibilities. Need to think of a new model moving forward, Second read to follow.

8. Executive Limitations (Policy Section II): (30 minutes)
    a. Policy Title: 2.2 Treatment of Staff
        i. Discussion/Action: Internal Monitoring Report
            1. Wilmer Chavarria shares first-ever teacher performance data by rating and indicator produced using the new evaluation system. Graphs are very telling. Updated EMS transport numbers we have had, the no trespass numbers have been updated – it's a new thing - we have about five people not allowed on campus. Two major incidents last year that required real emergency presence. Interpretation remains the same. The evaluation process involves 3 different administrators observing each teacher at different points in the year to reduce bias. Evaluation cycle is now 4 years; data represents a rotating cohort (roughly 1/3 of staff), not all teachers. Shout-out to Maybelline Lopez for spearheading the evaluation tracking effort
            2. Clarification of graphs and percentages was discussed along with the process of evaluation for educators.
            3. Nicole Mace looks for a motion to approve Internal Monitoring Report
            4. Elom Essiba - "So Moved."
            5. ***Motion Passes.***
    b. Policy Title: 2.3 Financial Conditions and Activities
        i. Discussion/Action: Spark Center and HVAC Update

1. Wilmer Chavarria-Spark Center: Architects have been revising proposals after multiple rounds were deemed too expensive. They are close to sharing a proposal to bring to the Board. Current direction: a renovation rather than full tear-down and rebuild — expected to meet original mission goals at a more reasonable cost to the public, though with less additional capacity than we originally had hoped for. Board to receive the revised proposal within the next few days for review (cannot be discussed via email due to quorum rules)
2. Sarah Haven- HVAC Update. Not much of an update from the last time the Board was updated. Spaffords is actively doing diagnostic and repair work (raising pumps, testing water quality); cost of repair scope still being determined; We are still in the problem identifying phase. Insurance company (Visbit) has been involved but has not yet concluded its investigation or clarified coverage. Active conversations with Cheyne Racine.
3. Wilmer Chavarria reminds the Board about AC system failures at the start of the school year were traced to heat exchanger/screen issues, well issues, water quality, and sediment. Who is accountable for the repairs? How do we ensure this doesn't happen again?
4. Nicole Mace expressed frustration at two months without a clear timeline or liability assessment. There may be a big decision regarding Spark and the Board can't make that decision until they understand where we are with the HVAC. Nicole Mace clarified Sarah Haven's question regarding if the Board is questioning the cost of the repairs which is known, but not the insurance responsibility. Actively being worked on.
5. Wilmer Chavarria shares that it sounds like the Board may have more of an interest in specific information, more concrete, more often as we approach budget more more key things moving forward. A suggestion is to give a bit of that role to the Finance Committee, where you can have discussions on what to bring to the board.
6. Robert Millar makes a motion to authorize Nicole Mace to speak to our insurance company for a requested update on the timeline.
7. ***Motion Passes.***

c. Policy Title: 2.8 Communication and Support to the Board
   i. Discussion/Action: October Superintendent's Report to the Board
      1. Nicole Mace shares that many aspects of the Superintendent Report have been discussed earlier in the meeting.
      2. Wilmer Chavarria shares the budget graphs, indicators of teacher evaluations, updates from different departments and schools.
      3. Barakit Gyi shares an update that they have received a lot of feedback on school lunches and student opinions. We are making a

survey- what do they want to work on? What students want to see more of? Also, working on a school Mascot.

4. Wilmer Chavarria shares that while we may get what the students want to have for lunch; It is important to educate them as to why we can't have everything, some things are out of our control. If we can improve the food we should. Parallel conversation will be important.
5. Nicole Mace looks for a motion to approve the Superintendent's Report to the Board.
6. Emily Bowers - "So Moved."
7. ***Motion Passes.***

9. **Executive Session:** 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a) (1) (A) "Premature Public Knowledge"

   a. Action: The board finds that "premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage."

      i. Nicole Mace looks for a motion to enter executive session for the purpose premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage.

      ii. Robert Millar - "So Moved."

      iii. Motion Passes.

   b. Action: Enter Executive Session for the purposes of discussing "superintendent evaluation"

      i. Nicole Mace looks for a motion purposes of discussing "superintendent evaluation"

      ii. Emily Bowers - "So Moved."

      iii. Motion Passes.

   c. *Board returns from Executive Session after having a discussion regarding evidence that was provided to the Board over the course of the year. We determined that based on the evidence presented to the Board, the superintendent has demonstrated satisfactory performance. Thanks Wilmer for his service to the District.*

   d. *Robert Millar moves to authorize the board president to enter formal negotiations with Wilmer for a new contract.*

   e. *Katie Livermore - "So Moved."*

   f. *Nicole Mace- "Seconded." Wilmer's contract expires on June 30, 2027.*

   g. Motion Passes.

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10. **Adjourn**
    a. Nicole Mace looks for a motion to adjourn.
    b. Emily Bower raises hand.
    c. Meeting adjourned.

Upcoming Important Dates:

October 16 - Veggie Van Go
October 19 - City-WSD Joint Meeting Date
October 20 & 21 - Early Release - MHS P/T Conferences
October 22 & 23 - No School