

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – May 11, 2022

A Regular Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at 5:30 P.M.

Present:

Chris Ryan, Chair (absent)
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Jeanne Downs
Jessica Polizzotti
Kim Reichelt

Also present:

Dr. Omar Easy
Superintendent

Parry Graham
Assistant Superintendent

Ellen Whittemore
Director of Finance & Operations

1. Welcome & Call to Order:

Vice-Chair Ellen Grieco convened the regular session at 5:33 p.m. and announced that according to the revised Open Meeting Law, the School Committee is meeting remotely. The meeting was recorded by WayCAM and will be broadcast later on WayCAM.

2. Public Comment:

Several people called in to support adding Lunar New Year to the school calendar, as it is considered to be the single most important holiday in the Asian culture, which is the largest minority group in Wayland.

MJ Li's son Justin Cho is a student at HH and made a public comment. Justin commented that families could watch the dragon dance and lion dance in Boston's Chinatown if the Chinese New Year was an official school holiday which would give everyone extra good luck and more knowledge about the Chinese culture. Families could bond if the Chinese New Year was an official school holiday.

As a mother and advocate, Nan Li teaches the Chinese language and commented that Lunar New Year is a celebration for the whole Wayland community to celebrate peace, joy and unity in this inclusive and diverse town. Mrs. Li feels that Wayland should work harder to improve the quality of different backgrounds because two Jewish holidays are recognized as school holidays as should Lunar New Year. Wayland has a very high Asian population with about 20% students in the schools. This holiday will promote the students' mental health and disruption will be minimal since the next two holidays fall on the weekends.

Reva Datar is the Class of 2025 class president and a representative of the student body. Lunar New Year as a school holiday has received the support of the student body and has brought awareness to the Asian culture. All cultures should be respected in order to have an inclusive environment for everyone in Wayland. She and others have learned much about the Jewish culture given that two Jewish holidays are on the school calendar. By recognizing Lunar New Year in Wayland, families will feel validated and appreciated. On behalf of the student body, Reva asked the School Committee to make Wayland a more culturally aware and inclusive place by recognizing Lunar New Year as an official school holiday.

Mr. Tang is a member of the Wayland Human Rights Diversity and Inclusive Committee. In April 2020 this Committee passed a motion in support of having Lunar New Year become a school holiday in Wayland. Lunar New Year is similar to the Christmas holiday to the Asian culture in America. An official school holiday would allow the entire student body to have an understanding and experience the culture.

Marchella Lee commented that the Wayland Public Schools all have core values and mission statements. She recited the Middle School mission statement - BERT (Belonging, Empathy, Respect, and Trust). Ms. Lee feels that the Wayland schools have failed in accomplishing its mission, particularly her three children and the Asian population. Lunar New Year is considered the single most important holiday for many East Asians and Southeast Asians. She described her family's celebration that includes a bountiful dinner on Lunar New Year's Eve. Her children and others do not want to

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miss school even when they are up very late celebrating, as they are forced to choose given that the holiday is not currently recognized. The Jewish community is valued because two holidays are recognized, and Lunar New Year is just as important, given that the Asian population is the largest minority group in Wayland. Mrs. Lee urged the School Committee to take action in approving Lunar New Year as an official school holiday.

Tanas Kazlas, a sophomore and student body representative, thanked Eunjee and Jordynn for asking him to speak in favor of the resolution and recognized their hard work to further this cause. He is hopeful that the School Committee will vote to make Lunar New Year an official school holiday because no one should have to worry about completing their school work during a time of significant celebration. Wayland should be a place where students can experience their cultural identities while also excelling in academics, adding that everyone should feel represented within the Wayland school district.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Joshua Liu, an 11th grader at Wayland High School, in which he expressed his support for Jordynn's and Eunjee's efforts to gain recognition for Lunar New Year in Wayland, as it is one of the most, if not the most important celebrations in Asian culture. It is only in the Mandarin classes that the celebration is recognized as an important one. The High School has a very high demographic of Asian students and claims to pride itself on diversity and empathy for others. However, the culture of its Asian students is not recognized even when other cultures are recognized.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from the Tam family in which Ewah said that his family has always celebrated Lunar New Year and his children ask why they don't have the day off from school making it difficult to answer the question. Lunar New Year is a widely celebrated holiday in the nation and in Wayland, given the high Asian demographic. This holiday should become an integral part of the Asian culture in Wayland where everyone can feel proud of their heritage.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Robin Fitch, a WHS English teacher, in support of Morgan and Jordynn Lee's request for the Wayland Public Schools to recognize Lunar New Year. Ms. Fitch supports their efforts and applauds their willingness to engage in public discourse and asked the School Committee to consider their request.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Tony Eep in which he acknowledged his support for the observation of Lunar New Year, as he celebrated this holiday as a child in Hong Kong. As an adult, each year he looks forward to celebrating this joyous holiday with family and friends. The living experience for all in Wayland will be enhanced if Lunar New Year is recognized as an official holiday.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Katy White, a WHS freshman, and has many friends who celebrate Lunar New Year. She expressed her support for the petition advocating that Lunar New Year is properly acknowledged. She did not have much knowledge about this holiday before this year and was surprised about how much she didn't know. Katy acknowledged that many other Christian and Jewish holidays are celebrated with time off from school and is surprised that Lunar New Year is not celebrated given the high Asian population in Wayland.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Samantha Lee, a WHS freshman. As an Asian-American and vice president of her class, she believes that Lunar New Year should be recognized in the Wayland Public Schools with a day off to celebrate. The 15-day holiday is filled with many traditions. This will allow those who celebrate to connect with family and for those who do not, it would help them understand more about the culture and traditions.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from Irene Rideout in which she expressed her support for the petition to add Lunar New Year to the Wayland Public Schools official calendar as an observed holiday with no school. Her family celebrates in the traditional way, including a ten-course banquet of many traditional dishes. It is difficult to celebrate on the Eve of Lunar New Year if there is school the next day, as many Asian families prioritize education first. This is the most important holiday in the Asian culture and it should be celebrated to its fullest extent without the concerns of missing school. Lunar New Year should be recognized as are many other holidays, including the Jewish holidays.

Ellen Grieco read a public comment from WHS Mandarin teacher Chang Liu in which she supports the effort to recognize Lunar New Year as a school holiday. It will allow the Eastern Asian heritage students to celebrate with their families, recognize their own culture, and get to know their families' traditions on the biggest and most important holiday in East Asia. This will also help the entire Wayland student body and community to understand what this holiday is about and why it is so important.

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Ellen Grieco announced that this meeting was the last for Kim Reichelt, a wonderful, passionate and well-respected member of the School Committee. She has been dedicated to what she cares about and has spent much time and effort in this regard. Ellen thanked her for everything she has contributed over the years.

Dr. Easy also expressed his thanks and appreciation to Kim for all she has contributed and her dedication, particularly during his first year as Superintendent of the Wayland Public Schools.

Jeanne and Jess also expressed their appreciation to Kim for her service and efforts throughout the years.

3. Superintendent Update:

(a) Discussion regarding Adding Lunar New Year to the School Calendar:

Jordynn Lee and Eunjee Kang presented their petition to add Lunar New Year to the school calendar. First, they talked about their negative experiences this year as only a sticker of a tiger was on the daily slideshow at school. Also, they showed up to school in traditional and cultural clothing as a way to celebrate their culture but was not recognized by the WHS administration, staff or students. They felt unimportant, insignificant, unaccepted, and disrespected. Because they had many school projects and homework during their holiday, they couldn't participate with the family preparations for the holiday.

To prepare for this effort, Jordynn and Eunjee wrote a letter to Ms. Han asking for her guidance, created a petition that received more than 750 signatures, including 7% of the WHS student and staff population, appeared on WSPN, created a Facebook page, and met with Mr. Gass and Dr. Easy.

Lunar New Year is the most important holiday in most Asian cultures, and some believe that what they do on the first day of Lunar New Year affects their luck for the rest of the year. It is very important to celebrate and connect with family and friends which is a combination of their New Year and Thanksgiving. Some celebrate for 15 days, and in China, the majority of factories are fully closed for 2 to 4 weeks. Some of the holiday preparation includes cleaning, decorating, preparing red envelopes for the children, getting haircuts to cut away all the bad luck from the previous year, buying new clothes, and preparing food for multiple dinners which closes out the year.

The students recited some of the actual traditions to close out the old year with family and to open the New Year that includes watching the CCTV New Year's Gala, watching and performing the lion dance and staying up late "to keep watch over the year." However, it is difficult for students to stay up late when it is expected that they will be in school the next day.

Many school districts in other states celebrate Lunar New Year, such as New York, California, and New Jersey. In Massachusetts, the Brookline Public Schools recognizes Lunar New Year as a Category One holiday, Hopkinton recently made it a no-school holiday, and students in Newton and Wellesley are pushing to make Lunar New Year an official holiday. Although Wayland has 14.9% Asian population, 19.5% of students at Wayland High School are Asian. It is similar in Brookline and Hopkinton.

According to MA General Laws, Chapter 151C, Section 2B, requires schools to make reasonable accommodations to the religious needs of students and employees in observance of religious holidays. Excusing individual absences for Lunar New Year just isn't adequate. There is also proposed legislation to make Lunar New Year the 12th federally recognized holiday in the United States. Asians are the fastest-growing population in the United States and among the four largest racial and ethnic groups according to the census.

There are two options: declare Lunar New Year a no school day or eliminate homework or test assignments on Lunar New Year which ultimately adds additional stress for the students. For the next two years, Lunar New Year falls on a weekend, and the students asked for no homework assignments on the Friday before the holiday. A short video was presented in which students shared their support.

The School Committee asked about the impact to the school calendar and the completion of 180 school days. A discussion followed that included conducting a survey of students and families of the holidays that are actually celebrated throughout the year. Caroline Han added that if Lunar New Year is added as a no school day, the School Committee is acknowledging the ever increasing Asian population in the schools and in the town. It's not just about numbers, but about students belonging. Dr. Easy will conduct a survey. The School Committee will continue its discussion and vote at the next meeting on May 25.

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(b) COVID-19 Update:

Parry reported on the number of positive cases in the schools. During the week of May 5 to May 11, there were 161 cases and had significantly increased from the prior week when there were 50 cases. During the last seven days, Happy Hollow had 48 cases, Claypit Hill had 29 cases, Loker had 19 cases, the Middle School had 25 cases, and the High School had 40 cases. Parry pulled 15 random students to see if they had COVID before and this was the first time for all, adding that it appears that cases being reported now are new cases. Parry described the heightened COVID protocols during this time, including asking parents to test on a daily basis.

Dr. Easy noted that in his weekly message, he strongly recommended that masks are worn in the school buildings, particularly in the classrooms that had 10 or more cases. Dr. Easy also surveyed other districts and about 20 districts, such as Arlington, Belmont, Bellingham, Dover-Sherborn, Millis, Mendon-Upton, Norfolk, Natick, Needham, and Norwood responded that they have seen an increase in positive cases, but they are not making changes to the COVID protocols.

A discussion followed and Kim noted that the CDC has indicated that Wayland is an area of high numbers of COVID and data shows that it is spread throughout members of families in the entire home. She feels that ventilation should be increased in the buildings, students should be outside whenever possible, and masks should be worn. Ellen Grieco agrees with Kim's comments. Masking is inconsistent outside of school buildings, particularly in public places. Parry confirmed which protocols no longer exist in the schools, such as close contacts and contact tracing, and in certain situations masking has been recommended in close contact situations.

Dr. Easy asked for guidance and authorization from the School Committee allowing him to make decisions around mitigation and protocols when the positive cases reach a certain number. A discussion about how to move forward ensued.

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Jeanne Downs, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to delegate authority to Dr. Easy in consultation with the Health Department to make whatever rules he feels is necessary to protect students in classrooms through the end of the year. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Chris Ryan, Chair | absent | |
| Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs | X | |
| Jess Polizzotti | X | |
| Kim Reichelt | X | |

4. **Administrative Matters:**

(a) Discussion regarding Climate Change Resolution:

Kim met with Ellen Tohn about introducing a Climate Change Resolution from the School Committee in terms of the Committee's commitment around teaching climate change in the schools. This will be discussed at a future meeting.

(b) Continued Discussion of Superintendent Evaluation Process and Timing:

The School Committee discussed alternate dates to proceed with the Superintendent's evaluation.

(c) Review of Open Meeting Law Determinations:

Kim Reichelt reported on a few OML determinations. A complaint was issued for the Tewksbury School Committee because the chair whispered something and it was not audible. This was not a violation according to the Attorney General because it was not said to the quorum. In Swansea, the School Committee held meetings in locked buildings and the public did not have access. This was a violation because people need to be able to access meetings even if the buildings are locked.

New School Committee members need to complete an OML certification within two weeks of being qualified for office, and in the Hawlemont Regional School District this was a violation because it was not done. In Leicester, the Committee was not in violation even though the Assistant Superintendent's contract, prepared by the Superintendent, was not approved in open session. This contract is the Superintendent's responsibility, not the School Committee's.

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- (d) Discuss Remarks for Town Meeting:
Ellen and Jeanne will write the remarks for the Town Meeting.
- (e) Discuss and Possibly Vote on Revised 2021-2022 School Year Calendar:
The School Committee discussed the changes to the Middle School calendar, given that the students and staff will be in school until June 22 and 23.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to revise the 2021-2022 school calendar to have the Middle School's last day of school for students on Wednesday, June 22. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Chris Ryan, Chair | absent | |
| Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs | X | |
| Jess Polizzotti | X | |
| Kim Reichelt | X | |

5. Financial Matters:

- (a) Review of Q3 Results:
Ellen Whittemore noted that Q3 extends from the beginning of the fiscal year through March 31, 2022. As of the end of March, 60.18% of the School Department's personnel budget was expended, and 82.48% of the non-personnel budget was encumbered or spent. As of the end of Q3, Ellen is projecting a year-end balance of \$47,441 and anticipates that this balance will shift and change during the last three months of the fiscal year due to substitute teachers, leaves of absences, special education placements and additional contracted services, transportation, legal services, custodial overtime, and unanticipated maintenance repairs that will all impact the remaining balance. Budget reviews and monitoring the budget will be done weekly through the end of the year.
- (b) Discussion regarding Funding for the Wayland Festival on June 4, 2022:
Dr. Easy has proposed holding a Wayland Festival on June 4 in an effort to bring together the Wayland and Boston communities. This event will be co-sponsored and co-funded by the Boston Parent Council, METCO HQ, and Wayland METCO. The School Committee is in support of this event.

6. Policy Matters:

Discussion and Possible Vote to Put Policies Out for Public Comment:

- AC – Non-Discrimination Policy, including Harassment and Retaliation
- AC-R – Non-Discrimination Policy, including Harassment and Retaliation
- ACAB – Sexual Harassment
- JICK – Harassment of Students
- GCF – Professional Staff Hiring
- IMDC – Religious Policies

Kim and Jess commented that half of the policies do exist now and some are revised versions from MASC. Kim explained further, adding that some would replace existing policies. Kim noted that Policy IMDC was on hold around giving rights to students in terms of tests and homework when holidays do arise. The Policy Subcommittee's recommendation is not to make changes to Policy IMDC, with the possibility of deleting it.

7. Consent Agenda:

- (a) Accounts Payables Warrant:
- Wayland Public Schools Accounts Payables Warrant, dated April 27, 2022, in the amount of \$397,896.92.
- (b) Approval of Minutes: April 13, 2022:
Ellen Grieco, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the consent agenda. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

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| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Chris Ryan, Chair | absent | |
| Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs | X | |
| Jess Polizzotti | X | |
| Kim Reichelt | X | |

8. **Matters not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair:**
None.

9. **Executive Session:**

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to enter Executive Session at 8:05 p.m. for the purposes of a) discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Wayland Teachers Association (WTA), as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; (b) discussing strategy related to collective bargaining with Wayland Educational Secretaries Association (WESA), as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3), as a discussion in open session may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the School Committee; and (c) approving the following executive session minutes, as permitted by M.G.L. c.30A, §22: April 13, 2022. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Chris Ryan, Chair | absent | |
| Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs | X | |
| Jess Polizzotti | X | |
| Kim Reichelt | X | |

The School Committee will be joined by Dr. Omar Easy, Superintendent, Parry Graham, Assistant Superintendent, and Diane Marobella, recording secretary.

The School Committee will adjourn in Executive Session and will not reconvene in open session.

10. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Ellen Grieco, seconded by Kim Reichelt, the School Committee voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn at 8:50 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

| <u>Roll Call</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Chris Ryan, Chair | absent | |
| Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair | X | |
| Jeanne Downs | X | |
| Jess Polizzotti | X | |
| Kim Reichelt | X | |

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Omar Easy, Clerk
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda
2. Climate Change Education Resolution Template
3. Climate Change Resolution Ideas to Consider
4. FY22 Q3 Financial Report
5. Wayland Festival Flier

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6. Policy GCF – Professional Staff Hiring
7. Policy IMD-IMDA – School Ceremonies & Observances
8. MASC Policy AC
9. MASC Policy AC-R
10. MASC Policy ACAB
11. MASC Policy JICK
12. Accounts Payables Warrant
13. Draft April 13, 2022 Minutes
14. Executive Session Motion