

Board of Education
March 12, 2024

The regular session meeting was live streamed on COX channel 16 or Frontier channel 6101 and may also be viewed on: YouTube® Channel, “Wethersfield Government Access TV” at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfuf-C0gYVVxmD5iIfFTnsQ>

The Wethersfield Board of Education met in regular session Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was streamed from Town Council Chambers, Town Hall, 505 Silas Deane Highway. The following Board members were present: Ms. Callan Carson, Mr. Carey, Mrs. Di Roberts, Ms. Hernandez-Williams, Mr. Reilly, Ms. Walters, Mr. Weiner, Vice Chairperson Laccavole; and Chairperson Granato. **Also present were:** WPS Superintendent of Schools, Michael Emmett; WPS Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum & Instruction, Sally Dastoli; WPS Business Manager, Matt Kozaka; WPS Director of Security & Residency, Michael Baribault; WPS Director of Special Education, John Karzar; WPS Instructional Supervisor SPED PK-6, Elizabeth Freitas; Charles Wright School Principal, Glenn Horter, Hanmer School Principal, Patrick Cone; WPS K-6 Instructional Supervisor, Dawn Campbell; Wethersfield Mayor Ken Lesser; WPS Family and Early Childhood Coordinator, Kim Bobin; Emerson-Williams School Math Interventionist, Michael Macaluso; Hanmer School EL Teacher, Alexis Mollica; Hanmer School EL Teacher, Heather Leonardi-Fichera; Student Presenters from Hanmer School (Dea, Jon, Mahamic, Mustafa, Amber D., Muhammad, and Alisa); and WHS Co-Student Representative, Mary Dunn.

Members of the public were also present.

Motion to Table 03/12/2024 BOE Meeting Agenda Item 6. a.

Mr. Laccavole MOVED to **table** motion 6. a. (**6. a. Recommended Motion:** Approval of WHS Class of 2024 Graduation Date) on tonight's (Tuesday, March 12, 2024) BOE Meeting Agenda, for further discussion, the motion concerning approval of Class of 2024 Graduation Date.

The Motion was seconded by Mr. Weiner and voted 6-3 IN FAVOR as follows:

Yes: Ms. Callan Carson, Mrs. Di Roberts, Ms. Hernandez-Williams, Mr. Weiner, Mr. Laccavole, and Mrs. Granato; **Nay:** Mr. Carey, Mr. Reilly, Ms. Walters

1. Pledge of Allegiance

The WPS Elementary Kid Chairpersons to the Board of Education led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Student/Staff Recognitions/Presentations

A. WPS Elementary Kid Chairpersons to the Wethersfield BOE:

The WPS Elementary Kid Chairpersons to the Wethersfield Board of Education were introduced and welcomed. These students are the winners of the essay contest held in each of the five (5) elementary schools of WPS. The WPS Elementary Kid Chairpersons are as follows: Layla Lopez of Charles Wright School, Emma Alamprese of Webb School, Brady Schaff of Emerson-Williams School, Weyland Smith of Highcrest School, and Claire Weiner of Hanmer School. Board of Education Chairperson, Mrs. Granato commented favorably of their writing and ideas in the essay submissions. She explained that each Kid Student Chairperson will return at a future meeting of the Board of Education, sit next to Mrs. Granato at that meeting, and will read their essay.

Board Comments: Mrs. Granato commented. Mr. Emmett also commented.

B. Hanmer School ELL Presentation:

Hanmer School EL Teachers, Alexis Mollica and Heather Leonardi-Fichera commented about the McGraw Hill Wonders curriculum that is being used in the elementary schools. Hanmer School student presenters Dea, Jon, Mahamic, Mustafa, Amber D., Muhammad, and Alisa made a presentation about information they have learned from the lessons.

Board Comments: Ms. Hernandez-Williams and Mrs. Granato commented.

3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

a. February 27, 2024 Board of Education Regular Session Meeting

Mrs. Di Roberts made the following corrections:

Page 7 of Item **8. Board of Education a. Meetings Held: WECC.**

Add the following language in the last sentence on the page after the word, September: “1st age cutoff date more firm.”

Page 8 of Item **8. Board of Education a. Meetings Held:**
CREC Council. “Emily Zell” is to be changed to “Emily Zambrello”

Page 9, Section **10. Board Comment.** Change February 24th to January 24th.

Mr. Carey made the following correction (after clarification from Mr. Weiner):

Page 8 of Item 8. **Board of Education a. Meetings Held:**
Facilities & Maintenance Committee. Remove 01.24.24 and
change it to 02.21.24

Page 10 Item **11. Unfinished Business** – move Ms. Callan Carson’s comments
To Page 10 Item **10. Board Comments.**

Mr. Laccavole MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Session Meeting of February 27, 2024, as corrected. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Callan Carson and VOTED unanimously.

4. Public Comment

Leigh Moran of 104 Church Street read an email she recently sent to the entire BOE, WPS Superintendent of Schools, Michael Emmett; WPS Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum & Instruction, Sally Dastoli; and WHS Principal Siobhan O’Connor. She thanked Ms. Callan Carson and Mr. Emmett for replying, and noted how pleased she was to be a part of the capstone project panel at WHS. She thanked Mrs. Di Roberts and WHS Kristen for their work on the panel and encouraged all town stakeholders to enjoy viewing a capstone presentation.

Carrie Hill of 117 Randy Lane commented favorably of the community budget meeting held by Mayor Lesser and BOE Chair, Mrs. Granato that she recently attended. She spoke about the need for the Math Interventionist positions in the schools, provided rationale (that included SRBI process, ELA department collaboration, and student performance index result increases) and attributed the Math Interventionist positions as critical resource for both teachers and students to maximize educational achievement. She requested that said positions remain in the BOE budget.

Liz Prunier of 11 Rhodes Circle requested Wethersfield Board of Education to set the graduation date for the WHS Class of 2024 as the Friday before the last day of school. She commented on factors for having both the Graduation and the Safe Grad Party on a Friday (increased

volunteerism, easier set up/cleanup pre/post events, and parent work schedule as factors) in consideration of this matter.

5. Communications

Mr. Emmett commented favorably of the time he spent at WHS today when participating in instructional rounds during math periods. He was impressed with the level of student discourse and collaboration that went on and the connection teachers brought to the table from their prior learning. Additionally, there was a group of Central Office and school-based administrators at the secondary level that went to three (3) different classrooms, and that group provided feedback for WHS administration to utilize moving forward.

Mr. Emmett reported the district continues to monitor the weekly CCHD data, and norovirus continues to be the chief illness. However, WPS continues with a stable attendance rate. School administrators and staff continue their work of ensuring the best attendance rate possible.

Mr. Emmett commented about the matter of setting the graduation date on a Friday. The district obtained a legal opinion today about the matter. WPS cannot schedule the Friday before the last day of school as the graduation date because, in doing so, WPS would only end up with 178 days and not the **180 days as required by law**. Mr. Emmett explained there have been WHS graduation ceremonies held on weekdays historically and noted he would be happy to discuss alternatives.

Mr. Emmett noted the BOE meeting agenda notes there are recommendation policy updates for Board consideration and that the Policy and Planning Committee has been asked for a meeting about two (2) policies for further review.

Mr. Emmett also noted he would be presenting the Operating Budget during tonight's meeting. He noted there are potential budget impacts that the district was not anticipating. These include excess cost that was not funded at the intended tier, as well as a promise of a 58% cap on magnet school tuition which, in the Governor's proposed budget, has been eliminated. Those two (2) impacts alone account for almost the entire seven (7) Math Interventionist positions.

6. Action Items

a. Recommended Motion: Approval of WHS Class of 2024 Graduation Date – *Tabled*

MOVED that the Wethersfield Board of Education set the graduation date for the Class of 2024 as Wednesday, June 12, 2024.

b. Recommended Motion: Approval of Recommended Policy Updates

Mr. Laccavole MOVED that the Wethersfield Board of Education approve the recommended policy updates. The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Carey and VOTED unanimously. Board Comments: Mr. Laccavole commented.

c. Recommended Motion: Presentation and Approval of the 2024-2025 Operating Budget

Mr. Emmett made a presentation pertaining to the operating budget proposed for the 2024-2025 school year that reflects input from district staff and current economic conditions.

Mr. Laccavole MOVED that the Wethersfield Board of Education approve the Operating Budget for the 2024-2025 school year, as presented by the Administration, in the amount of Sixty-Five Million, Eight-Hundred Eighty-Four Thousand, Two-Hundred Seventy (\$65,884,270) Dollars. The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Carey and VOTED unanimously.

Board Comments: Mr. Carey, Ms. Walters, and Mrs. Granato commented.

Mr. Emmett and Mr. Kozaka also commented.

The BOE approved operating budget will now be forwarded to the Town by March 15, 2024. A presentation of this operating budget will be made to Town Council on March 18, 2024. A public hearing regarding the entire Town Budget (town and education budget allocations) for 2024-2025 will occur on April 15, 2024, and Town Council will notify the Board of Education of the education budget allocation by May 15, 2024.

7. Reports/Discussion Items

a. Announcements/Information

Chairperson Granato reviewed the items in Board Members' packets and reminded Committee Chairpersons/Board members to review their calendars with scheduled dates and times pertaining to upcoming meetings and note changes to committee meetings. She advised Board members to verify their attendance at Committee Meetings with the Committee's Chairpersons, the Administrative Chairperson, Mr. Emmett, and Executive Secretary-Dio Markopoulos. The use of email by Board members for communicating meeting attendance and ensuring a quorum for committee meetings was encouraged.

b. New Kindergarten Start Date Presentation

WPS Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum & Instruction, Sally Dastoli made a presentation pertaining to the new CT state law for kindergarten eligibility. She explained that that beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, children need to turn **five (5) years old on or before September 1st** in order to be automatically eligible for kindergarten. This new eligibility date is a change from the current kindergarten cutoff date of January 1st.

Board Comments: Mrs. Granato, Mrs. Di Roberts, and Ms. Walters, commented.

8. Board of Education

a. Meetings Held

Facilities & Maintenance Committee (02.28.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mr. Weiner reported the Committee discussed a referendum for new elementary schools or renovating elementary schools. The focus was to think about the sequence of events that need to take place for a referendum to be presented to the public. the very first item that we really wanted to approach post ad hoc committee was a survey out to the public. He noted that coupled with BOE Communications Committee chair, Ms. Callan Carson, there will be a survey going out to the public in the near future that will provide good data points as the Committee begins the approach to working with consultants, town councilors, building committees, etc. as part of the Committee's next steps.

Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative (WECC) (03.11.24 @ 4:30 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts noted the meeting was cancelled for this month and that the next meeting is April 15th.

b. Meetings Scheduled

Board of Education Special Session Meeting (03.13.24 @ 3:00 p.m.); Community & Public Relations Committee (03.13.24 @ 6:00 p.m.); Human Resources & Personnel Committee (03.18.24 @ 6:00 p.m.); Student Programs & Services Committee (03.19.24 @ 6:00 p.m.); CREC Council (03.20.24 @ 11:30 a.m.); and Finance & Operations Committee (03.26.24 @ 6:00 p.m.)

9. Public Comment

Mary Kay Jensen of 23 Quail Hill is not in favor of eliminating the Math Interventionist positions. She commented favorably of Melissa Johnson of playing an important role of Math Interventionist at Highcrest School. She is not in favor of scaling back on education resources and not supporting

teachers. She also noted the elementary school buildings are in great need of renovation/rebuilding.

10. Board Comment

Mr. Weiner echoed public comments made about possibly eliminating the Math Interventionist positions. He agreed with his colleague, Ms. Hernandez-Williams, that if action is not taken now, the district will settle for noting later. He encouraged everyone to write to the state legislature regarding education/education budget matters. He thanked Mr. Laccavole for providing guidance regarding the Town and Board Budgets. He let the public know that he is reading their emails.

Mr. Laccavole commented favorably of the Board being united in their vote pertaining to the WPS Operating Budget 2024-2025. He elaborated on the large amount of work that has gone into the process and some of the obstacles (excess cost tier funding, magnet school tuition, insurance premium increase, math interventionist positions, social worker position). The discussions with town councilors and legislators are ongoing and comments from the public are understood.

Mrs. Di Roberts explained that what Wethersfield is experiencing with its education budget is not unique as compared with other towns. She noted that a budget is needed to allow the schools to move forward with the vision of seeing our students have unlimited possibilities in whatever the future may hold. This includes having schools required to provide needed services and supports of the communities they serve. She further commented on the need for education to be fully funded and that the government, at both the state and federal levels, needs to realize/accept/deal with what it actually takes to educate each student in each generation. The matter makes the job of education boards become more difficult each year.

Ms. Hernandez-Williams commented favorably of the Math Interventionist at SDMS and the positive experience her son has had. She is concerned about large classroom size in terms of teaching and learning. She noted that as a member of the HR Committee, staff morale continues to be an important focus.

Ms. Callan Carson suggested that the Board and Administration discuss scenarios each year/look at what other school districts are doing pertaining to the scheduling of WHS graduation day to

prevent disappointing/surprising people. She commented favorably about capstone presentations she viewed/graded and gave a shout out to Principal O'Connor, and all who organized the program. She mentioned that opportunities to be a part of the panel are available for April presentations, as well as more in the future for 270+ WHS Juniors. She also commented favorably of the WHS drama performance *Mystery of Edwin Drood* which she attended this past weekend at WHS. She noted that the WSPC annual Community Volunteer Awards will soon occur and that a link is available to nominate a person (parent or volunteer, not employee) from your school community.

Ms. Walters echoed the comments made by Ms. Callan Carson regarding the scheduling of a graduation date. She noted that she'd like the Board to set some expectations with the public as to when they can get an answer.

Mr. Carey noted that he would be attending the CAFE's Day on the Hill tomorrow and hopes that some other Board members would join him in speaking with legislators about the impact their decisions are having on WPS. He stated that the public should know that the Board has no control of what happens to the Board budget from now until Town Council approves it. He cautioned that if money does come back, Town Council historically has cut the BOE budget by that number. As such, he urged the public to hold Town Council to their promises of not cutting the education budget that was presented to them. He informed the public that all Board members read emails. However, it is Board Policy that no Board of Education member, except the Board of Education Chair, is to respond to emails. He noted his disappointment in that the graduation date was not set during tonight's meeting and commented on effects of scheduling graduation on a date that conflicts with the last day of school for teachers according to their contract.

Chairperson Granato noted there was a Keane of Kids Coalition meeting held via *zoom* March 7th. Caroline Fazzina reported there are 732 enrollments in the After School Programs. All five (5) elementary schools are putting on a spring musical with the help from Hartford Stage Theatre. Refer to the website for additional information. <https://keanefoundation.org/about-the-foundation/> The Keane Foundation has also helped with bringing the *Encore* program, an after-school program at SDMS which helps students with social and emotional needs, academics, homework, and teaching students to advocate for themselves.

The Keane Foundation has also secured grant funding for a Summer School Program will be organized by WPS. More information will follow.

There are two (2) upcoming fundraiser events: The Keane Foundation/UNICO Golf Tournament - May 20, 2024 at 10:30 a.m. @ Wethersfield Country Club (please sign up on website)

23rd Keane Foundation 5K Annual Walk/Run - Sunday, June 3, 2024 at 11:00 a.m.
Standish Park, Wethersfield (check website for info.)

Wethersfield Education Foundation is having an exclusive apparel sale available solely to past/present donors and Wethersfield employees. The fundraiser is for a limited time to showcase your commitment to Wethersfield with vintage varsity design, and 100% of the proceeds from the sale of the garments from this campaign go directly to the *WEF*. Refer to the following link for more information: <https://www.wethersfielddeductionfoundation.org/>

WHS Student Co-Representative, Mary Dunn noted there were three (3) performances of the *Mystery of Edwin Drood* at WHS this past weekend. The WPS community is looking forward to the next stage performance (which will support The Cancer Foundation), Cabaret for a Cause, that will be coming up in the spring, and auditions were held last week. The WHS community is proud of WHS Varsity Boys Swim and Dive Team, and WHS Cheer Team, who were named CCC Champions. WHS dancer, Sarah Iallanardo was named 2024 Dancer of the Year. WHS DECA team members competed and had several 1st and 2nd Place winners at the State Conference last Wednesday. The National Art Honor Society Youth Art Month Members' exhibit continues through April 5th and a reception this Thursday at 5:30 p.m. The NAHS will also partake in the Empty Bowls Project with bowls for sale at a soup dinner on March 21st to benefit hunger. WHS students continue their work to support the community. Books, pet items, and hygiene items are being collected for drives to benefit Connecticut Humane Society and a domestic violence shelter for women. WHS students are looking forward to the start of spring sports and a new quarter.

11. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business to discuss.

12. Adjournment

Mr. Weiner MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 p.m.

The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts and VOTED unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary