

Board of Education
November 26, 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 on Tuesday, November 26, 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; Town of Wethersfield Social/ Youth/Senior Services Prevention Coordinator, Carissa Peckrul; Bonnie W. Smith, MPH, CPH, CPP-CEO, B. Weyland Smith Consulting LLC; and WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda. Members of the public were also present.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Wethersfield District IT Technician/Webmaster, Jim Sutton led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Student/Staff Recognitions/Presentations

There were no Recognitions/Presentations.

3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

a. November 12, 2024 Board of Education Regular Session Meeting

Mr. Carey made a correction to Page 6, Paragraph 1: delete “and adjourn the meeting”

Mr. Carey made another correction to Page 6. After the word “unanimously” add the following language:

“13. Adjournment

Mrs. Granato MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Carey and VOTED unanimously.”

Mrs. Di Roberts MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Session Meeting of November 12, 2024, as amended. The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Carey and VOTED unanimously.

b. November 19, 2024 Board of Education Special Session Meeting

Ms. Walters made a correction to Page 3, Conclusions/Take Aways. Change the language of the last bullet point to read as follows:

- “The Kycia Farm property is a great location to build a school, as Mr. Scott of TSKP mentioned. He noted, however, that TSKP did not further explore the site due to the community being unsettled about the future for that property.”

Ms. Walters also made a correction to Page 4, Paragraph 3, Line 1. Remove the word “higher” and replace it with the word “lower”

Mr. Weiner MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Session Meeting of November 19, 2024, as corrected. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts and VOTED unanimously.

4. Public Comment

There were no comments made by the Public during this portion of the meeting.

5. Communications

Mr. Emmett commented on the underground leak in the fire suppression system at Emerson-Williams School and noted work is being done to determine the leak’s origin and to repair it accordingly. E-W Principal, Neela Thakur has sent a communication to parents about the matter, and there will be a firefighter staff member at the site tomorrow to monitor the situation. Bus traffic will not occur in the bus loop tomorrow, and Mr. Baribault, Mrs. Dastoli, and a member of WPD will be present at the site to monitor the situation.

Mr. Emmett noted that the roof near a Grade 2 classroom at Hanmer Elementary School is leaking after the recent rainstorm. Custodial Maintenance Supervisor, Juan Salazar of Wethersfield Physical Services is in contact with Tremko regarding the matter and will keep Mr. Emmett posted about next steps.

The WPS community had the opportunity to gather last Wednesday evening for the annual Superintendent's Awards Ceremony. The event is held to recognize students, support staff members, and parents for their contributions to WPS. WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda and Wethersfield District IT Technician/Webmaster, Jim Sutton "Superman Sutton" were congratulated for receiving awards. Mr. Emmett said a special thank you to members of the WPS administrative team who made a presentation for him that he found heartwarming and humbling. The administrator spoke of all the things accomplished over the past 13 years (17 total in district).

Mr. Emmett reminded everyone of tomorrow evening's Thanksgiving football game between the Wethersfield Eagles and the Newington Nor'easters. Kickoff is 6:00 p.m. at Cottone Field. A very large crowd is expected, as Newington's record is 9-0 (playoff contention in class DM/Wethersfield's record is 8-1. WPS has been working with WPD and Wethersfield Physical Services Department for adequate staffing with this event. Carpooling is encouraged. WHS Marching Band, WHS Dance Team, and WHS Cheerleading Team will be there as will Newington High School's Marching Band.

Mr. Emmett extended happy and healthy Thanksgiving wishes to all WPS students, staff, and family members.

6. Action Items

a. Recommended Motion: Approval of the administration of a We Hope Parent Survey through the Town

Ms. Callan-Carson MOVED to approve the administration of a We Hope Parent Survey through the Town. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts.

Discussion: Wethersfield Social/ Youth/Senior Services Prevention Coordinator, Carissa Peckrul explained that the survey proposed is a follow up to the survey administered in November 2023 and taken by students in Grades 7 through 12 (SDMS and WHS). Now the consultant is looking to conduct the adult community survey. Results of the survey would provide knowledge and perspective regarding substance use and at-risk behaviors within the town, and the data will best be used to guide future planning provide prevention programs and promote overall community awareness regarding the issues.

Bonnie W. Smith, MPH, CPH, CPP-CEO, B. Weyland Smith Consulting LLC explained that her company provides evaluation and survey services to organizations (such as Town of Wethersfield) who have the drug-free communities Grant. After discussions with Wethersfield Social/ Youth/Senior Services Assistant Director, Erica Texeira; and Wethersfield Social/ Youth/Senior Services Prevention Coordinator, Carissa Peckrul; it was determined that all adults, not just parents in the community, can be asked about their perceptions around mental health and substance use, including their perceptions of barriers, in order to help educate adults on becoming more aware on how to get care. This is the rationale for this survey. The process for the dissemination of the survey was explained. It was noted that currently, Wethersfield has a 5-year, drug-free communities grant through the CDC which concludes at the end of September 2025. Data is needed to apply for a second competitive round (grant for an additional 5 years) which will need to occur in early 2025.

Board Comments: Ms. Callan-Carson, Ms. Walters, and Mrs. Di Roberts commented. Mr. Emmett also commented.

The motion was VOTED unanimously.

7. Reports/Discussion Items

a. Announcements/Information

There were no announcements/information matters.

b. First Read of Proposed Policy Updates

Mr. Laccavole noted the Committee forwarded a series of policy updates (required by statutes) prepared by Shipman & Goodwin as a First Reading to the Board this evening. There were eighteen (18) updates in total from four (4) different series. The Board now has more autonomy to decide what to do with any year-end budget. Also, any student who is also a parent can now request permission from the Board of Education to attend Adult Ed classes. Title IX non-discrimination procedures were made consistent across all series. Education Boards are now required to provide special education services to homeless youth until age twenty-two (22). The maximum number of consecutive days for an in-school suspension is decreasing from 10 to 5. The maximum number of consecutive days for out of school suspension is also decreasing from 10 to 5 for Grades Pre-K through 2. The legislature decided to hold off on implementing

legislation requiring high school graduates to complete the FAFSA. It was noted during the meeting that policy updates concerning employee background checks, admission to schools prior to the age of five (5). and suicide prevention and intervention ultimately had no bearing in WPS as there are recommendations that have been implemented or stronger policies already in place for those matters.

8. Board of Education

a. Meetings Held

Student Programs & Services Committee (11.18.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts reported the Wethersfield Transition Academy (WTA) provided an update of their program and how it is helping students ages 18-23 with life and work skills. WTA Program Coordinator/SPED Teacher, Kim Fitzner and Para Educator, Renee Soderberg reported on how the students are making/selling dog treats as well as taking on the creation/production/selling of greeting cards. These cards are \$3.00 each. Card racks can be found in all of our schools, as well as at Central Office. Monies earned from the sales will go towards supplies and field trips. WTA staff and students would like to investigate the possibility of having their own storefront as a next step. During this meeting, there was also an update from teachers at the Webb integrated preschool program, and they reported that enrollment this year is expected to exceed that of last year. TLC preschool program has identified students for screening eligibility. There are seven (7) active referrals and five (5) additional referrals anticipated. The preschool staff provided information about AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) devices and equitable access to same. There is a growing population of students that can benefit from using said devices, and there is a substantial amount of training (PD) time needed for staff to learn the technology

Board of Education Special Session Meeting (11.19.24 @ 5:00 p.m.): Mrs. Granato reported that TSKP Architect, Michael Scott (from consultant group for WPS Elementary Building Project) gave a presentation on the research and information TSKP has gathered up to this date. Mr. Scott provided information on the schedule, community outreach, webpage, and on information obtained to date. Mr. Scott commented on a “Maintain Only” scenario for the elementary schools which carries a cost of \$56.5 million that would solely reset maintenance items of major systems in the elementary schools and will not add any educational resources or programs to the schools. Mr. Scott spoke of the opportunities and constraints for each school with the

overall takeaways and scenarios. Upon conclusion of the question and discussion period, the Board directed TSKP to continue researching on the building plans, which does include two plans to create a 5-6 Academy. Mrs. Granato reminded everyone that the Board, the building committee, and TSKP are in constant communication with each other. She recommended the public watch the presentation to BOE from TSKP made this evening and to visit the website to keep up to date with information regarding the project.

Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative (WECC) – Annual Meeting (11.19.24 @ 5:30 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts reported there were break out rooms that hosted discussions about developing device-free activities for children. Each room focused on a particular age group, and discussions included how adults can teach children responsible use of technology, as well as different ways the community can encourage play and adult gatherings. There was a good discussion about what a community is and being role models for developing a community.

Policy and Planning Committee (11.21.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Refer to **Item 7. b. First Read of Proposed Policy Updates**, as reported by Mr. Laccavole.

Finance & Operations Committee (11.26.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mr. Laccavole reported the district is currently \$145,000 or 0.22% (twenty-two hundredths) under budget and that the district is spending more this year than anticipated on substitutes. There is a good amount of savings due to salaries of new hires costing less than resignations and retirees salaries. The potential for a future reforecast that is even more under budget may exist due to State excess cost reimbursements. However, the district will likely use that money to pay for salary increases given to district secretaries, paraeducators, tutors, and clerical staff bargaining unit that has a contract likely to be ratified soon. Mr. Laccavole noted that Board members will soon hear about the scheduling of workshops to be held in January and February 2025 to work on the 2025-2026 Board of Education Budget.

b. Meetings Scheduled

Human Resources & Personnel Committee (12.02.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Student Programs & Services Committee (12.03.24 @ 6:00 p.m.), Facilities & Maintenance Committee (12.04.24 @ 6:00 p.m.)

9. Public Comment

There were no comments made by the Public during this portion of the meeting.

10. Board Comment

Mrs. Di Roberts noted that she forgot to mention that the WECC Annual Meeting's break out groups was a culminating activity, as there had been a series of book club meetings for the book, *The Anxious Generation*. [The reading of the book has sparked conversations about how mental health of children has been adversely affected by technology overuse.]

Mr. Laccavole commented favorably of the Superintendent's Awards Ceremony. He noted his leaving that evening as feeling hopeful (akin to graduations), happy and in a good mood. He also noted it was nice to see Mr. Emmett getting recognized so well that evening.

Ms. Callan-Carson commented favorably of the WECC Annual meeting she attended and noted her participation in a group she helped facilitate that discussed the issue of trying to reduce screen time for ages 9 to 18. She remarked favorably of the diversity of the group and acknowledged Kim Bobin, Jessica Coelho, and Sally Dastoli for making a great event. She encouraged everyone to read *The Anxious Generation*.

Ms. Walters commented favorably of the Superintendent's Awards Ceremony and congratulated WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda who received a Superintendent's Award. In terms of the WPS Elementary School project, she expressed the desire to see more information on the options and noted it doesn't feel right that the Board is not asking TSKP to look further into the Kaycia Farm property even though TSKP Architect, Michael Scott mentioned that Kaycia Farm (High Crest North) is a great spot for a school. She recognizes that there is some unsettlement within the community on the issue, but noted TSKP has been hired to give their best opinion, and more should be heard from TSKP, including any pushback concerning the matter.

Mrs. Granato commented favorably of the Keane for Kids coalition meeting she attended on Thursday, November 6th. There was a report regarding the fall season (programs). 31 scholarships (after school programs) have been provided to students with social workers and EL tutors having been instrumental in getting families registered/kids participating. Hands-On science lessons began in the schools.

The musicals have been planned at each of the elementary schools with co-directors from Harford Stage Productions having been hired.

A new after school program (Play and Create) was developed by Keane After School Program Director, Caroline Fazzina as a product of the book club discussions from The Anxious Generation. More information will follow as it begins next session.

Mrs. Granato thanked Judy Keane and The Keane Foundation for funding programs such as ENCORE at SDMS and obtaining grants such as the grant for the CLASS program.

Mrs. Granato noted the BOE is working with consulting group CES on the search for a new superintendent of schools. The creation of 8 to 10 focus groups for townspeople to work with CES has begun with January meetings that will be held virtually through *zoom*. Mrs. Granato will be reporting on the search process at each 2025 Board of Ed meeting

She expressed gratitude to all who work hard to create a nurturing and enriching environment in WPS and wished peace, joy, and time to reflect on life's blessings to all as she wished a Happy Thanksgiving to everyone.

WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda reported that WHS students, their teacher advisor, Mr. Moger, and some WHS staff members spent November 13th at a building site to volunteer for a Habitat for Humanity house building project. The group had a fundraising goal of \$800 for the organization as well. This past Friday, the DECA group had their final day of food donation collection for Thanksgiving. Mrs. Ricardi and students were able to bring the donations to the Wethersfield Food Bank on Saturday. WHS students are currently securing donors for the Blood Drive that will occur this winter. Try outs for the WHS Drama Club production of *Hello Dolly* are soon approaching. The Spanish Honor Society is planning a Culture Night event, and the National Honor Society is planning a chapter-wide fundraising event.

12. Adjournment

Mr. Carey MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m.

The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Reilly and VOTED unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary