

Board of Education  
February 11, 2025

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, February 11, 2025 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 Chair Laccavole, and Chairperson Granato.

**Also present were:** WPS Superintendent of Schools, Michael Emmett; WPS Asst. Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum & Instruction, Sally Dastoli; WPS Director of Security & Residency, Michael Baribault; WPS Director of Special Education, John Karzar; WPS Instructional Supervisor of Special Education, Liz Freitas; Webb School Social Worker, Melissa Perry; and Hanmer School Social Worker, Kim Cheever. Members of the public were also present.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Ms. Sally Keating led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Student/Staff Recognitions/Presentations**

WPS Director of Special Education, John Karzar; WPS Instructional Supervisor of Special Education, Liz Freitas; Webb School Social Worker, Melissa Perry; and Hanmer School Social Worker, Kim Cheever presented on the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Social Emotional Learning: The Building Blocks of Equity. The multi-tiered system of supports (academics, behavior, social emotional development) is utilized to provide students with the supports they need to succeed. There is ongoing collaboration in the schools with teachers, administrators, and the SRBI team, across the five (5) elementary schools. The schools utilize consistent definitions to drive interventions for supporting students. Tools such as the *Educlimber* data system help with intervention tracking, combined workflows, efficacy reporting. **Board Comments:** Ms.

Walters, Mr. Reilly, Mrs. Di Roberts, and Mrs. Granato commented. Mr. Emmett also commented.

### **3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings**

#### **a. January 22, 2025 Board of Education Special Session Meeting**

Ms. Callan Carson MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Session Meeting of January 22, 2025, as submitted. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts and VOTED unanimously.

#### **b. January 28, 2025 Board of Education Regular Session Meeting**

Mr. Weiner MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Session Meeting of January 28, 2025, as submitted. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters and VOTED unanimously, with Mr. Carey abstaining.

#### **c. February 1, 2025 Board of Education Special Session Meeting**

Ms. Walters MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Session Meeting of February 1, 2025, as submitted. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts and VOTED unanimously.

### **4. Public Comment**

Sally Keating, 109 Church Street thanked both the BOE for their countless hours of work on behalf of students and the Building Committee for expertise it has provided to the Town. She commented favorably of the chance she has had to attend many meetings of the Building Committee to hear the opportunities and constraints of each school and of potential sites for new schools. As a resident of Old Wethersfield, she is in full support of building a new school on the Stillman property. She noted that property was quit claimed to the town (December 13, 1923) and quoted “for the purpose of school buildings and school grounds.” She noted that Standish Park would not be touched. She commented unfavorably of the condition of the five (5) elementary schools and encouraged a yes vote for the referendums put forth as the right thing to do for our children and our town.

### **5. Communications**

Mr. Emmett commented favorably of his visits to six (6) of seven (7) WPS on Global Play Day held Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> and of Principal Mori’s videoclip of Highcrest School’s enjoyment

of that day. He said that it was great to see creative environments that were fun, energetic, and where children were collaborating and learning. He gave a shout out to teachers, administrators and parents who made that day a success.

Mr. Emmett thanked everyone who has attended the past two (2) budget workshops and noted the third workshop is on Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>. The work continues to craft a responsible budget that meets the needs of WPS students.

Last Thursday, WPS saw its first snow day. Mr. Emmett was thankful for the support he received from students in making the decision to close school, and he wants to let everyone know that when there is a snow day, an additional day is added to the end of the school year. At this time, two (2) days have been added to the end of this school year (the snow day and the day WPS had off to honor fallen Firefighter Sharkevich). Monday, June 16<sup>th</sup> is currently the last day of school., and the graduation date for WHS Class of 2025 remains as Tuesday, June 10, 2025. In the future, there will be a recommended motion listed on the agenda of a BOE Regular meeting for the cancellation of the June 10, 2025 meeting due to the graduation ceremony occurring on that date.

Mr. Emmett noted the decision to look at Webb School as a school for Grades 5 and 6 creates a whole new layer of challenges. Therefore, Central Office Team, WPS Instructional Supervisor of Special Education, Liz Freitas (overseer of the LEAP and ABA programs); and Principal Craig met with TSKP to discuss space standards, office space, student collaboration space, etc. WPS Director of Security & Residency, Michael Baribault will be meeting with WPD, Town staff, and TSKP to talk about what the ramifications of running two schools simultaneously in the neighborhood may look like.

Mr. Emmett indicated that he spoke at Wethersfield's State of the Town – Annual Breakfast event about the need to for the school buildings to be addressed.

## **6. Action Items**

There were no Action Items.

## **7. Reports/Discussion Items**

### **a. Announcements/Information**

Board of Education Sub-Committee Schedule, 02.07.25

## **8. Board of Education**

### **a. Meetings Held**

Community & Public Relations Committee (01.29.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Ms. Callan Carson reported BOE member, Liz Walters presented a document “Board of Education Roles” that was discussed and determined to be added to the website. Communication of the elementary school building project, including ideas on how to better inform Committee members and the public (i.e. FAQ document to share with the Building Committee) was discussed. The idea of creating a newsletter distributed quarterly or twice a year was also discussed.

Board of Education Special Session Meeting – Budget Workshops (02.01.25 @ 9:00 a.m.) (02.08.25 @ 9:00 a.m.): Mr. Laccavole reported the Board has had the first two (2) of its three (3) budget workshops, both of which were held on Saturdays at the Stillman building. The first one went for about 2 hours, and the second one went for about 3 hours. There were many ideas from board members, as well as many people working in the schools who are in charge of certain departments. There was a great discussion and a lot of information was learned. Numbers and line items were discussed, and eventually a consensus will be reached to benefit as many students as possible while keeping taxpayers in mind. Together, the hard work will continue.

Human Resources & Personnel Committee (02.03.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Ms. Hernandez-Williams reported the Committee discussed a code of civility, ideas that would allow BOE, WPS staff, Wethersfield Town Council, and Wethersfield community members to have positive communication. School surveys for the secondary schools (with timelines for gathering data and make positive changes, celebrate great things happening) were also discussed. An update from the HR Department was provided by email. The Committee, in order to better support the schools, is trying to improve communication with Central Office HR by scheduling meetings to accommodate schedules and encourage attendance from Central Office HR staff.

Student Programs & Services Committee (02.04.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts reported representatives from Charles Wright School and Highcrest School reported more in depth about the School Improvement Plans for their schools. Charles Wright School has increased opportunities for staff to collaborate to better target intervention approaches in order to support

all students in all areas of their development. The collaboration has streamlined the SRBI process for social emotional and behavior support. *Wethersfield Education Foundation* grants to create calm-down centers throughout the building have been utilized. There is progress with the phonics programs in Grades K-3 and bookworms is an engaging vehicle for developing vocabulary background knowledge, oral language fluency, and comprehension. Grades K-3 are also using the decodable text series GEOD for targeted small group instruction, and exploration of strategies from teachers to engage students is ongoing. A *Wethersfield Education Foundation* Grant to purchase OZBOTS to Foster technological literacy and to build problem solving collaboration and perseverance skills.

Highcrest School reported positively on the newly adopted literacy program and shared a few writing samples from 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Teachers have made information available to parents as to how they may support their students at home. Teachers are happy to now have an additional 45 minutes of collaborative planning time a week called D-Day. Teachers also reported that play-based instruction has engaged kindergarten students in the learning process and in developing social skills. The kindergarteners were excited to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Day of School, Global Play Day and Read Aloud Day.

#### **b. Meetings Scheduled**

CREC Council (02.19.25 @ 11:30 a.m.); Board of Education Special Session Meeting – Budget Workshop (02.22.25 @ 9:00 a.m.)

#### **9. Public Comment**

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

#### **10. Board Comment**

Ms. Walters noted that she wished to read the following communication she sent to the full Board of Ed and to make sure that the public was aware of the communication. It read as follows:

“Hello, at the end of the February 8th (Saturday's) budget Workshop, we discussed the importance of providing a clear picture of budget needs in a way that resonates with the Town Council who are not in the weeds of Education like we are. To that end, we decided that we should supplement Michael's budget ask in front of the Town Council, with us advocating for

particular categories such as cost avoidance, security, special education, and more. If you don't already have a topic or category, please select one of your choosing that you're willing to advocate for at upcoming meetings. The schedule of the meetings is forthcoming. Please see below for my notes on the categories we agreed to advocate for during the budget presentation on February 8th to supplement, in more detail, Michael's presentation. Let's turn up the heat and advocate for WPS!

The dates that we had identified that still need to be confirmed (but that's what we're working with). The next budget session the workshop is February 22<sup>nd</sup>, and at that point, we'd like to practice our talking points that we'll be using in front of Council.

The next Board of Ed meeting is the 25th of February. At the March 11th the Board of Ed meeting, we were thinking of using that as somewhat of a dress rehearsal for our talking points--where we'll go in front of the Council to support Michael on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

For the week of April 21st when the budget workshops take place for the town (not sure yet) --when Michael will go in front of the Town (but just calling that out for that week, and again, just assuming that Michael presents during that week). On March 15th the Board of Ed budget does go to Town Council. We have the townwide budget hearings on the week of the 21<sup>st</sup> (April), and the Town Council decision on the Board of Ed budget is completed by May 15th

The last item here was that the Board of Ed members agreed to draft talking points and advocate for the following during the session: cost avoidance, special ed grants, security, democratic process and societal issues. and comparisons of Wethersfield to the other towns in our DRG.

We have opened up the option to pick a category to advocate for during the budget presentations to the entire board; and something that you know--for those who are comfortable doing that, we would move forward with that. Thank you.”

Ms. Walters stated there has been a lot of work done on the building plan for the elementary schools. She also noted she is in full support of pushing the project forward for the sake of the children and the town even though she may not be overly happy with having Hanmer as the swing school location. She mentioned that like many, she is concerned about the increase in taxes coming up with the mill rate, the assessments, and the discussions of the Building Committee. She is looking forward to finding out what those financial impacts are to learn what

the financial impacts are (for example, on years one and two) so that informed decisions can be made. She explained that continuing not to follow through with a building plan for the schools will make situation worse for the students and the taxpayers.

Ms. Callan Carson gave a shout out to everyone who attended the budget workshops and noted it was great to hear from school staff and administrators who explained the needs for their schools. She noted the increasing need of social workers and of special education resources and commented on a State Legislative session she and Mrs. Di Roberts attended wherein Governor Lamont spoke about providing more State money towards special education. Ms. Callan Carson commented favorably of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Night held at WHS and noted that SDMS and WHS do a great job with helping students with their transitions to those schools.

Mr. Carey commented favorably of the WHS Girls Basketball Team game held last evening and noted that despite losing the game, there was a nice celebration honoring three (3) seniors and a senior manager. Mr. Carey also commented favorably of the WHS Hockey Team fundraiser event in honor of fallen firefighter, Robert Sharkevich, who died in the line of duty on October 22, 2024. Senior Night is soon approaching for both boys and girls WHS Hockey Teams. Both teams are having great seasons.

Mr. Weiner thanked the public and everyone else who attended the Building Committee meeting on Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. After reviewing the pros and cons of the three (3) sites possible for a swing school building, the Committee decided the swing space will be on the Stillman property by Hanmer School. The data points from consultant TSKP regarding swing spaces in Wethersfield, as well as minutes from the February 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, can be found on the TSKP website. He noted he will advocate to the Building Committee for the new building constructed to be the new Hanmer School and the old building being to be used as swing space. The Building Committee will now have to determine how the referendum will be presented to the Board and, ultimately, to Town Council. He looks forward to the continuation of this work.

Mr. Reilly commented favorably of the Career Advisory Board (CAB) meeting he attended last week. The breakfast event held last month and the Career Fair scheduled in April were discussed.

Mrs. Granato provided an update on the search for the new School Superintendent. The Board has received applications that are due February 12<sup>th</sup>. The profile of a superintendent, which was created from input obtained by survey data from the community survey, as well as Board focus groups, has been received. Applications will be reviewed by the Board with Cooperative Education Services (CES) consultant, David Irwin. The first round of interviews will start at the end of February. The second round of interviews will occur in March, with an elected superintendent March or April. She noted the Board thanks all whom participated in the process as the Board collected information for the profile of a superintendent. She also noted the Board thanks Wethersfield citizens for their keen interest in this selection. She encouraged everyone to follow the Town's big project with the Building Committee in order to stay informed with project decisions by utilizing all the websites that are dedicated to the project. Mrs. Granato also encouraged everyone to be on the lookout for informational flyers pertaining to the *Wethersfield Education Foundation* (a funding resource for WPS) that will be placed at businesses all over Wethersfield. She gave a shout out to WHS Teacher, Joanne Campbell for helping with the creation of the flyers and to WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda for her assistance with increased social media presence for the *Wethersfield Education Foundation*.

Mrs. Granato commented favorably all WPS partaking in the Global Play Day on February 5<sup>th</sup> and quoted *Albert Einstein* "Play is the research of children."

## **11. Unfinished Business**

**a. Recommended Motion:** Approval of the Future Placement of a Therapy Dog through Blue Path Service Dogs at Webb Elementary School

Mrs. Granato MOVED that the Wethersfield Board of Education Approve a commitment with Blue Path Service Dogs for the future placement of a facility therapy dog at Webb Elementary School.

**Discussion:** Mr. Weiner, Mr. Reilly, Mr. Laccavole, and Mrs. Granato.

The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters and VOTED unanimously.

## **12. Adjournment**

Mr. Carey MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:04 p.m.

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



Respectfully submitted,

---

Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary