

Board of Education  
September 10, 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, September 10, 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; Judy Keane, President of the *Keane Foundation*; Caroline Fazzina, Director of the Keane on Kids After School Program and the Keane Hands-On Science Program and WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda. Members of the public were also present.

### **1. Pledge of Allegiance**

WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Caroline Fazzina, Director of the Keane on Kids After School Program and the Keane Hands-On Science Program provided an update regarding programs for this school year.

The Foundation spent most of the summer working on the application for additional ARPA funds with the much-appreciated help from Mrs. Dastoli. The Foundation hopes to hear a decision soon.

There are 78 programs being offered this fall (which is 16 more than last fall), and new partners are being sought. There will be STEM programs, a LEGO program, and the Foundation will include the Connecticut Science Center with some programming.

Members of WPS music team are also involved. There is a program that will allow participants the opportunity to learn how to mix music.

Harford Stage is returning as a partner with Keane Foundation with programs offered this fall for grades 3 and 4.

Dates for the spring musical rehearsals and performances are being planned. Other logistics are being coordinated as well.

A teacher from WHS will be teaching Spanish in an after-school program at all five (5) elementary schools, and some teachers within the elementary schools are going to be doing some programming.

Ms. Fazzina plans to send reminders through social media, through communications in the schools and with school PTOs. regarding the Keane on Kids After School Programs. She has spent time with the school social workers the past week to discuss scholarship opportunities for students to attend the after- school programs. Ms. Fazzina has met with the five (5) Site Coordinators who are ready for the programs to begin.

Feedback on the programs has been positive, and those letters are available on the Keane on Kids After School Programs website.

Keane's Hands-On learning program in the schools returns for a fourth year. The feedback from teachers has been positive.

Ms. Fazzina provided Board members an invitation to attend an event on September 26<sup>th</sup> that will showcase Keane's enrichment programs. The event (with giveaways, food, and performances) is part of the "Lights on After School" nationwide celebration of after school programs. Wethersfield school district is one of more than 8,000 sites across the nation sending the message that afterschool programming is key to our children's success and that we must keep the lights on doors on after school. This message is key for securing ARPA grants.

Sally Dastoli, School nurse supervisor, school Principals were thanked for all their help and support of the enrichment programs in Wethersfield.

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

#### **a. August 20, 2024 Board of Education Regular Session Meeting**

Mrs. Di Roberts MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Session Meeting of August 20, 2024, as submitted. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters and VOTED unanimously.

#### **b. August 20, 2024 Board of Education Special Session Meeting**

Mr. Weiner MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Session Meeting of August 20, 2024. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters. Mr. Carey made a Point of Clarification pertaining to the meeting minutes being amended. **No Vote was Taken.**

Mr. Reilly made a correction to Page 2, Paragraph 10. The paragraph is to read “Bobbie commented that when the community *knows*, it helps considerably, and they were not presented with enough of these facts last time.”

Mr. Weiner MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Session Meeting of August 20, 2024, as amended. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters and VOTED unanimously.

### **4. Public Comment**

Ms. Sally Keating of 109 Church Street (PAC Co-Chair) commented favorably of the three-day STEAM program her granddaughter was enrolled in this summer. She explained that she and many in her neighborhood are concerned with vehicles speeding and traveling through stop signs in the vicinity of Church and Garden Streets. There is also a concern that no substitute crossing guard is currently filling in for the crossing guard who is regularly stationed at the Church and Garden Street intersection. She commented on the public expectation of transparency in the process and reasons for choosing or not choosing the various options of the new or renovate as new school building plans that the committees are reviewing. She commented on the roofing project at Highcrest School and the length of time it has taken to start

the project. She raised concerns of the potential for increased costs of that project due to the heavy rains in August, as well as the project being scheduled to be completed during off hours. She stressed the importance of maintenance and having necessary safety/security measures in all the school buildings. She noted the PAC is excited to move forward with politics aside and with support from TSKP, the Building Committee, Wethersfield Board of Education, and Town of Wethersfield for purposes of selecting the plan for the WPS elementary school buildings.

## **5. Communications**

Mr. Emmett mentioned that the Calendar Committee is creating calendars for school years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. The calendars will include **tentative dates for graduation**. He thanked the WASA Union and Wethersfield Federation of Teachers Union for their input in consideration of contractual implications. These calendars will be brought before the Board at its next regular meeting on Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Emmett indicated the schedule of dates/times for the upcoming Open House sessions in the Wethersfield Public Schools is posted on the WPS website.

Mr. Emmett noted the 4000 and 5000 Series policy updates appeared on the meeting agenda this evening for the First Read. The updates, vetted by the Policy and Planning Committee and approved by Shipman & Goodwin, reflect new rules/regulations pertaining to Title IX.

Mr. Emmett commented that in his final year as WPS Superintendent, he has visited the schools twenty-six times. In that time period, he 1) witnessed the new reading curriculum being taught at Charles Wright School Grade 1; and 2) visited Kindergarten classrooms, SDMS, and WTA. WTA has students currently involved with the community, and some students are working in the Stillman Building

SDMS students told Mr. Emmett that having no access to cellphones in school is not a problem. He noted that he looks forward to hearing reports from WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda, about life at WHS.

Mr. Emmett stated that student mental health was discussed (today) during the State Education Commissioner's back to school meeting at the CT Science Center in Hartford. There was a presentation by Charlene Russell Tucker, and Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director for CAPS

noted that the average duration of a school superintendent's tenure is approximately four years. Mr. Emmett thanked the Board for the stability it has provided over the past 13 years.

Mr. Emmett informed BOE and the public that the September 24th Board of Education's Regular Meeting will be held at Silas Deane Middle School auditorium rather than in Town Council Chambers due to technology upgrade installation.

Mr. Emmett had communicated to the community on Friday that Highcrest School is getting the roof section completed. Materials are expected in two to three weeks. The intent is to work at a time period outside of the school day until it is dark and perhaps on a Saturday.

Mr. Emmett noted the engineer and architect are currently working on the design for the Air Handler and Chiller project with the anticipation of the project being completed next spring.

Mr. Emmett also noted fire drills have been completed in the schools. Mr. Baribault has completed the safety plan submission as required by the State of Connecticut by November 1<sup>st</sup>. Cameras on the back of the building facing DiCiccio Field are being installed. He mentioned that WPS continues to work with WPD and the Crest Team for drill and crisis training.

Mr. Emmett recognized tomorrow as marking the 23rd anniversary since 9/11 and noted that our flags will be flying at half-mast tomorrow to recognize/remember Mr. Keane, Mr. Bittner, Mr. Winton, as well as all others lost that day.

## **6. Action Items**

There were no Action Items.

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

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

#### **1. First Read of Recommended 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. The 4000 and 5000 Series policies pertain to Title IX (prohibition of sex discrimination, including sex-based harassment having to do with personnel and prohibition of sex and discrimination including sex-based harassment having to do with students). He thanked the Policy & Planning Committee

for their hard work of reviewing the policies. Final action by the Board regarding the policy updates will be taken at the Board's next regular meeting (September 24, 2024).

## **8. Board of Education**

### **a. Meetings Held**

Policy & Planning Committee (08.28.24 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mr. Laccavole reported the model policy updates brought from Shipman & Goodwin were discussed. The updates pertain to Title IX. Discrimination including sex-based harassment having to do with students, discussion centered around the type of investigation (unified or bifurcated) that would result from one of these incidents occurring. Our superintendent, along with our Title IX Coordinator, would decide upon which type of investigation such an incident would necessitate based upon factors of the incident and their professional judgment. Administrator training on this topic was scheduled. Mr. Laccavole, Mrs. Dastoli, and Mr. Karzar attended a three-hour webinar training on this topic. The Committee unanimously approved to recommend the updates for Board consideration. Cell phone and bullying policies will possibly be reviewed at the next meeting of the Committee.

Board of Education Special Session Meeting (08.30.24): Mr. Weiner reported that the Board met to approve the motion for TSKP to be approved for the consultant services pre and post referendum. Thoughts were provided about all the interviews, Building Committee Chair – Russ Morin commented as to why TSKP is the right choice for Wethersfield. The Committee voted and passed the motion in favor of TSKP. Last week, Town Council approved TSKP to continue forward with the pre/post referendum.

### **b. Meetings Scheduled**

Human Resources & Personnel Committee (09.16.24 @ 6:00 p.m.); CREC Council (09.18.24 @ 11:30 a.m.); Community & Public Relations Committee (09.18.24 @ 6:00 p.m.); and Finance & Operations Committee (09.24.24 @ 6:00 p.m.)

## **9. Public Comment**

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

## **10. Board Comment**

Mr. Laccavole reiterated comments made at the Board of Education Special Session meeting on August 30<sup>th</sup>. He thanked the entire Building Committee for their work on the referendum thus far. In particular, he thanked Mr. Weir for his work as liaison between BOE and Building Committee. Additionally, he thanked Building Committee Chair, Russ Morin. He commented that he sees differences in the process this time around and believes the process is moving in the right direction.

Mr. Reilly thanked everyone on the Building Committee for this hard work. Mr. Reilly said he wanted to clarify a perception that the BOE has full authority over the school buildings, including the future elementary school project. He noted that in April 2024, Town Council made the Building Committee responsible for planning/oversight/construction of any new or renovated elementary schools. The Building Committee has ultimate authority with decision making in decision making for the school project. The Board of Education voted on various build options. A request for proposal (RFP) for the elementary school project was changed later by the Facilities and Maintenance Committee. The RFP was then again changed by the Building Committee. Two (2) months later, the original RFP was retroactively called a draft. He explained that going forward, anything that is a draft must be identified as such before the vote so the process is clear to everyone. He stressed that the size and scope of the elementary school project is a huge and costly undertaking affecting every stakeholder in Wethersfield and that there is a need to provide maximum transparency for the sake of students and taxpayers alike.

Ms. Callan-Carson commented favorably of the Grade 7 two-day Orientation session at SDMS and thanked SDMS staff who worked on the program over the summer. She also commented favorably of the First Day the Eagle Way and thanked the leadership group at WHS along with the Eagle Crew, etc. who worked on that program over the summer. Mr. Emmett was thanked for volunteering in the dunk tank. She commented favorably about her experience reading *The Anxious Generation* and participating in the book club discussion online. She was impressed with the level of participation and described the material as eye-opening and life changing in her use of technology. She mentioned that what has been learned can help parents navigate technology use with their families. She encouraged everyone to read the book and noted there is another book club meeting on November 19<sup>th</sup> (information is forthcoming). She mentioned that the book club discussions could also help with understanding controls and policies for cell

phones as well. She commented favorably of a WSPC meeting she attended last Thursday. A districtwide night at Hartford Athletic is being planned for a date in October. Each school's PTO is selling tickets for the event. A family tailgate at Hanmer School prior to that game is also being planned.

Mr. Weiner noted that at the Building Committee meeting last night, TSKP presented their timeline of events for the referendum. There will be a lot of community involvement with this project, beginning with TSKP presence at the Cornfest this Saturday on the Broad Street Green. TSKP plans to work through PTO groups and Open Houses at the schools. He encouraged the public to attend Building Committee meetings and to email BOE with questions/comments about the referendum. He commented that all four consultants confirmed that having the Building Committee stand united with BOE and Town Council was the right move to get the referendum process going. He noted everyone should keep in mind that two years ago we had the same idea of the necessity for new learning environments for our children and suggested that moving forward, we should all keep that in mind when the referendum is discussed.

Ms. Walters commented favorably of a brief seminar she attended over the summer regarding cell phone usage. The information learned may assist with cell phone policy. In terms of policy, she's keeping in mind Impacts to 1) the Vision of the Graduate, 2) the Safety and Emergency Plan, 3) potential overloading to our Superintendent, 4) creation of a keeper's dependency that might create difficulty with managing an emergency, 5) flexibility responding to an emergency due to rigid or inflexible process creation.

She reiterated questions/concerns she had from the building committee meeting that she noted as important for the town. She is concerned with having a fractionalized representative on the elementary school project. She was glad to hear that Jon communicated there will be a dedicated staff. She noted that it had been stated that a dedicated staff would just handle Wethersfield and not be pulled away to do a "dog and pony show." She anticipates a timeline.

In terms of the roof project at Highcrest, she is concerned about the three-week arrival of materials as the daylight is now growing shorter. Additional concerns are that students are in the building for after school programs, and whether there is an estimate as to how long it will take to complete the roof project.

She inquired if TSKP is going to all of the schools, how would it be known what is being shared. Would it be feedback being sought or would expectations be set?

Mrs. Granato gave a shout out to children's author and Wethersfield native, Catherine Gorski O'Connor, and commented that the more children read, the better they write and learn. She commented favorably of the book, *The Anxious Generation*. She commented favorably of the Town and BOE joint effort in moving forward for the future project of building or renovating as new our elementary schools. She also commented favorably of Town Council's unanimous approval to replace the roof over the Highcrest School Media Center. She noted the message is being heard that our elementary schools are in desperate need of new buildings or serious renovation. Information by TSKP and the PAC regarding the project for our elementary school buildings will soon be available online to the public, in the schools and at town events. She asked the public to communicate its concerns and to support the project.

WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda commented favorably of First Day the Eagle Way and enjoyed being on the Planning Committee for that event. She also commented favorably of the Eagle Crew, a group of students who helped guide freshmen students during orientation. She noted that Blue Eagle News has begun its ninth season with great ideas (resurgence of *Crosswalks* series). Various events, including Culture Night, were discussed at the Spanish National Honor Society meeting. Language testing opportunities (C for Literacy) were also discussed. The WHS community is looking forward to WHS Varsity Football's first home game this Friday evening.

#### **11. Unfinished Business**

There was no unfinished business discussed.

#### **12. Proposed for Executive Session**

Mrs. Granato MOVED to leave public session and enter into an Executive Session at approximately 7:54 p.m. for purposes of a) communicating the status of the reorganization of the Finance/HR Department; and b) discussing and evaluating the three (3) proposals from Superintendent Search Groups. The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Callan-Carson and VOTED 8-1 IN FAVOR OF.

**Yea:** M. Callan-Carson, J. Di Roberts, C. Hernandez-Williams, B. Granato, M. Laccavole,

J. Reilly, E. Walters, J. Weiner; **Nay**: C. Carey

**Present for executive session:**

M. Callan-Carson, C. Carey, J. Di Roberts, C. Hernandez-Williams,  
B. Granato, M. Laccavole, J. Reilly, E. Walters, J. Weiner

Mr. Laccavole MOVED to leave executive session and re-enter public session at 8:29 p.m. The motion was SECONDED by Mr. Weiner and VOTED unanimously.

**13. Adjournment**

Mr. Laccavole MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

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Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary