November 8, 2021

Dear Worthington community members:

Last year the School Committee began a new practice of writing to the community twice during the school year to keep you all informed about school committee activities. As chair of the committee, I want to take this opportunity to share some of our news.

**New Member**
In May we thanked Susan Warner for a job well done. She was a steady and calm presence on our committee for 3 years. Now she brings her energy to other town committees. Pam Thompson was re-elected for another term and we welcomed Deb Clapp to the committee. Amanda Brooks-Clemeno and Cai Walkowiak continue to serve. It is a pleasure to work with such a committed and thoughtful group of people.

**Activities**
Thanks to improved state resources and support for a return to in-person learning, we have happily not had to focus on developing policy for remote schooling, school closures, and other COVID complications this year. Safety is, of course, still on our minds. We continue to get regular updates from the school nurse on COVID testing and the presence or absence of cases, and we have reviewed and approved plans developed by the superintendent and school nurse to comply with masking mandates and COVID testing programs issued by DESE and the vaccine mandate established by the Selectboard. But we have been pleased to be able to focus more on the regular activities of running a school district.

In addition to our normal monthly business, this summer the school committee got training from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees on conducting an effective superintendent evaluation, and from the district's counsel on Open Meeting Law. We reviewed our progress on previous years' district goals and updated our goals for this year. One of those goals is to continually assess whether Worthington is adequately addressing educational equity: that all students are getting what they need to thrive in their learning. We asked the superintendent to establish an Equity Advisory Committee made up of community members who have participated in a facilitated dialogue about what equity means and that will, in coming months, begin to advise the district on our town's particular needs. We look forward to hearing their recommendations.

This fall the committee established a policy subcommittee to review new and revised policies from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, to ensure our district policies are complete and appropriate. The committee will be spending portions of our meetings this winter reviewing revisions and additions recommended by the subcommittee.

On the budgeting and financial planning front, we have provided input as the superintendent developed, with the assistance of the Hampshire Regional grant writer, a plan for using the significant ESSER II and ESSER III COVID relief funds available to the district for specific COVID-related expenditures. We are grateful for these additional funds to make improvements

to our building, our programming, and our teacher training that cannot be accommodated in our regular budget.

After the winter holidays the Committee will dive into our annual budget season, reviewing, revising, and approving the Superintendent's budget requests and meeting with the Finance Committee and Selectboard to discuss the proposed FY23 budget. This year that process will include negotiating with school staff for an updated salary schedule for the school paraprofessionals, as the current schedule ends in June.

**Communication**
Another of our ongoing school committee goals is to communicate as well as we can with community members and other town boards and committees: we want everyone to be fully informed about our activities and decisions and we want everyone in town to provide feedback and input, ask questions, and help us address any concerns.

To that end, we have put several new practices in place. We have added an additional public comment period at the end of our meetings, on top of the one we've always had at the beginning of the meeting. We are recording every school committee meeting and posting the recordings in the same Google Drive folder that holds the documents discussed in those meetings. We encourage anyone unable to attend meetings to email comments to the committee. We've begun having listening sessions, scheduled opportunities for community members to come chat with a couple school committee members outside of our regular meetings. The first listening session was September 17th, and the next one will be January 6th. We plan to hold these sessions a few times per year.

To stay in touch with the activities of other boards and committees, school committee members are attending Selectboard meetings, and we're providing regular updates to the Finance Committee about the status of the district budgeting process during budget season. New this year, the Worthington School Committee now has a non-voting seat on the Hampshire Regional School Committee. Cai Walkowiak is currently serving in that role and keeps our Worthington committee informed about Hampshire Regional news. In the past, we have had two student representatives from Hampshire Regional attend our meetings and speak to the needs of our town's secondary students. We are currently seeking two high school students to serve in that role. Interested students may speak to Gretchen Morse-Dobosz.

**Community**
We've seen a lot of news coverage lately about increased volatility at school committee meetings around the country. We are glad to see more Worthington interest recently in the school committee activities and we are grateful that Worthington community members participate in our meetings in an engaged and civil manner that preserves our sense of shared community. Thank you. And please share your thoughts with us!

Warmly,
Alison Todd
Chair, Worthington School Committee