

Board of Education
March 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, March 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 Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum & Instruction, Sally Dastoli; WPS Director of Special Education, John Karzar; WPS Director of Security & Residency, Michael Baribault; WHS Technology Education Teacher, Susan Coco; WHS Student, Sam Charbonneau; WHS Student, Dylan Cyr; and WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda. Members of the public were also present.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

WHS Technology Education Teacher, Susan Coco; WHS Student, Sam Charbonneau; WHS Student, Dylan Cyr; led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Student/Staff Recognitions/Presentations

WHS Technology Education Teacher, Susan Coco commented on a youth design contest offered through the CT Homebuilders and Remodelers Association that was recently held at the CT Convention Center. The contest included representation from sixteen (16) schools, and eight (8) WHS students participated in the contest. WHS students, Sam Charbonneau and Dylan Cyr each commented on their experiences from the competition and presented their home architectural projects to the Board members and meeting audience. Sam Charbonneau, who placed 2nd in the competition, received a \$600 prize, as well as a \$750 scholarship.

Board Comments: Mr. Laccavole, Ms. Hernandez-Williams, Ms. Walters, and Mrs. Granato commented.

3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

a. February 25, 2025 Board of Education Regular Session Meeting

Mr. Weiner MOVED to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Session Meeting of February 25, 2025, as submitted. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts and VOTED unanimously.

4. Public Comment

Paul Lisella, 32 Hartford Avenue, commented about his five (5) children attending WPS and stated that he was present to speak about his 17-year-old child's education in WPS. He explained the experience of his family continually advocating for servicing from WPS while incurring legal expenses throughout his child's school years (PreK through high school). He commented that once his child met goals, there was no additional service and that the family incurred additional to identify dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, which he believes gave WPS a foundation to build from in the special education program. He indicated that WPS is now recommending to cut services that not only benefitted his child, but would benefit many in WPS. He noted that the Board and administration needs to rethink the special education program because not everyone can afford \$34K+ that his family has paid independently to have their child read beyond a 5th grade level.

Caroline Fazzina, 19 Fairmont St, (who is the Director of the Keane Foundation's enrichment programs in WPS) provided flyers to Board members which noted the first of five (5) musicals, one production of each being performed in each of the elementary schools. *Shrek* will be performed by Highcrest School students at the school on Friday, March 14th at 7PM and Saturday, March 15th at 2PM. Tickets can be purchased at the door or can be purchased in advance through *Venmo*. She noted her return to a Board meeting soon to report on all the great things happening with the musicals, as well as with the Keane Hands on Science and After School programs.

5. Communications

Mr. Emmett noted he and Mrs. Dastoli had a Staff Focus Group meeting today at Charles Wright School to obtain feedback for the selection of the new Principal for that school. Friday, there will be a meeting with students for that same purpose. There are over fifty (50) applicants, and the expectation is to have a new Principal for Charles Wright School in place for July 1st. There is a meeting with the hiring team scheduled for tomorrow for round two in the process of hiring, as soon as possible, a new IT Supervisor for WPS.

Mr. Emmett commented favorably of the UConn PEP program meeting he attended last week and noted he enjoyed meeting this new group of members. He is looking forward to their projects, as well as their graduation ceremony this spring.

Mr. Emmett indicated Governor Lamont and CT Attorney General Tong will visit WHS on Thursday at 11:00 a.m. in the school library to speak about cell phone usage, including decreasing usage in schools. Mr. Emmett, the WHS team, and Mr. Baribault have been working on the logistics/plan for that day and requested Board members to notify him of their attendance at the event.

Mr. Emmett noted he enjoyed attending the WHS student performances of *Hello Dolly* and noted it was really interesting to hear the questions/comments from the students during the Q&A session after the dress rehearsal for the SDMS theatre group. He also noted that as part of the transition to middle school, SDMS students are performing *Beauty and the Beast* two (2) days this week before Grade 6 audiences, and those days will include lunch and a tour of SDMS.

Mr. Emmett commented on the students expressing the impacts of their achievements and congratulated them on their architectural, theatre, and sports endeavors.

Mr. Emmett indicated a heating pump failure occurred last evening at Hanmer School. Other repairs involving the failure have been made, and the valve will be replaced tomorrow.

Mr. Emmett noted a revised agenda has gone out and that there is a Community and Public Relations Committee meeting tomorrow evening at the Stillman Building. The meeting time has been changed from 6:00 p.m. to 5:40 p.m.

6. Action Items

a. Recommended Motion: Approval of Healthy Food Certification Statement for 2025-2026

Ms. Callan Carson MOVED that, the Wethersfield Board of Education, pursuant to C.G.S. Section ~~12-21-F-5f~~, certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeteria, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups; and **FURTHER MOVED** that, the Wethersfield Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met:

1. The sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend;
2. The sale is at the location of the event; and
3. The food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store.

An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsal, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales. The motion was SECONDED by Mrs. Di Roberts.

Mr. Carey MOVED to amend the above motion to fix a correction. The statute is to read “CGS Section **10-215f**”, as to adhere to CGS Section 10-215f (rather than Section 12-215f as stated by Ms. Callan Carson). The Amended motion was seconded by Ms. Callan Carson and voted unanimously.

b. Recommended Motion: Presentation and Approval of the 2025-2026 Operating Budget

Mr. Emmett made a presentation pertaining to the operating budget proposed for the 2025-2026 school year that reflects input from district staff and current economic conditions.

Mr. Laccavole MOVED that the Wethersfield Board of Education approve the Superintendent's proposed Operating Budget. for the 2025-2026 school year, in the amount of Sixty-Eight Million, One-Hundred Fifty-Three Thousand, Three-Hundred, Thirty-Nine (\$68,153,339) Dollars.

The motion was SECONDED by Ms. Walters and VOTED IN FAVOR as follows:

Yes: M. Callan Carson, J. Di Roberts, C. Hernandez-Williams, J. Weiner, M. Laccavole, and B. Granato; No: Mr. Carey, Mr. Reilly, and Ms. Walters.

Board Comments: Ms. Callan Carson, Ms. Hernandez-Williams, Mr. Carey, and Mr. Laccavole commented.

[The BOE approved operating budget will now be forwarded to the Town by March 15, 2025. A presentation of this operating budget will be made to Town Council on March 17, 2025. A public hearing regarding the entire Town Budget (town and education budget allocations) for 2025-2026 will occur on April 21, 2025, and Town Council will notify the Board of Education of the education budget allocation by May 15, 2025.]

7. Reports/Discussion Items

a. Announcements/Information

None.

8. Board of Education

a. Meetings Held

Board of Education and Wethersfield Town Council Joint Meeting (02.27.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mrs. Granato reported BOE leadership, Mr. Emmett, and Town Councilors recapped details of the previous meeting and discussed shared services. The meeting continued with discussions on the budget and the Building Committee. Mrs. Granato noted Minutes from the meeting are available. She also noted the next meeting is Thursday, March 27th at Town Hall and that the public is invited to attend; However, the public cannot comment during that meeting.

Human Resources & Personnel Committee (03.03.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Ms. Hernandez-Williams reported the Committee discussed the previously mentioned Code of Stability as a way to more effectively communicate., and Town Council is invited to the Committee's next conversation. It has been noted that many public buildings have a Code of Stability to promote appropriate communication. It was noted that having a code of stability was an idea that came about in a committee meeting. Ms. Hernandez-Williams clarified that the Committee's meeting agendas

were taken from topics done before and that the topics were not created by her. The Committee plans to place the topic of discussing secondary school surveys on the next meeting agenda. The Committee hopes to meet with the business manager (at an earlier time as to accommodate their schedule) in order to discuss updates regarding staffing, hiring, absences, and leaves of absence. The professional development calendar was also discussed.

Student Programs & Services Committee (03.04.25 @ 6:00 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts reported the Committee heard the School Improvement Plans for Emerson-Williams School, Hanmer School, and Webb School. Emerson-Williams School reported they are working to more closely align their work on supporting student behavior and social emotional growth to their academic SRBI process. Courageous Conversations, Hispanic Heritage event held last fall, Black History Month projects, and Cultural Night are other ways the school is enhancing education in the school and community. EW Teachers, Rheya Emmanuel and Jen Kardys reported on their professional goal of empowering students and fostering student leadership in the Grade 5 and Grade 6 Student Council through projects, Safety Patrol reinstatement, and restorative circles. Hanmer School is working toward their goal of their goal to ensure positive School climate and culture through collaborative planning time to benefit student learning. Students have initiated a School Kindness Committee. A grant from NASA was received for students to visit the CT Science Center. Webb School teachers chose a targeted inclusion goal for students in the LEAP program in the unified arts classes in order to learn how to best deliver their curriculum. March 19th, Webb School will host “Screenagers” for the Wethersfield parent community to institute the “Wait Till 8” movement (hold off providing children with smartphone until 8th Grade). As part of an empathy goal, some teachers at Webb School are collecting stories from students, families, and staff in order to create a story on a slide deck called “Our Webb Story.” This story would be shared with the community. Mrs. Di Roberts thanked the teachers for presenting. She also noted Ms. Hernandez-Williams is on Wethersfield’s Traveling Tribute Walls Committee that is working with the Wethersfield Chamber of Commerce to bring the walls to Wethersfield from September 10th through September 12th. Curriculum leaders have been put in touch with the Wethersfield Chamber of Commerce Director to discuss student involvement with the event.

Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative (WECC) (03.10.25 @ 5:30 p.m.): Mrs. Di Roberts reported the word is out for caregivers to register their children for kindergarten before May 1st.

Screening information questions can be answered by visiting the website. Other programs available this summer are: 1) Transition to Kindergarten program being held at Emerson-Williams School; 2) Play dates for kindergarten readiness (held August 1st, 16th, and 30th) will be held at all five (5) elementary schools. The “Human Library” program is March 29th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. with fourteen (14) people available as human books – sharing stories and dialogue about experiences related to prejudice. Webb School will be screening “Screenagers” and will be shown for parent audience on March 19th at 7:00 p.m. Mrs. Di Roberts also noted that Chelsea Kent, owner of Turnpike Laundry Room in Wethersfield, shared with the group her interest in contributing to the Wethersfield community by hosting playdates and providing a gathering space at her business.

Advisory School Building Committee (03.10.25 @ 7:00 p.m.): Mr. Weiner reported he is now Chair of the Committee and looks forward to working with the community, Board members, and the administration. He noted it is great to see the public and hear comments from all sides of the argument regardless of opinion. TSKP presented their tentative schedule to reach a referendum date of September 23rd, and the lengthy schedule will be posted on their website with all the Minutes from last night’s meeting. The Building Committee will receive an initial plan on April 14th. On April 22nd, TSKP and the Building Committee will make a presentation to the Board of Education

Last night, TSKP presented the concepts of a plan for their Phase 1 of a two (2) part referendum which included 1) what the new Hanmer School would look like on the Stillman property and 2) what Webb School would look like as a renovated 5-6 Academy (which included the auditorium renovation), and 3) Charles Wright School renovation as new plan. Mr. Weiner indicated there will be a meeting in the near future. There is no date yet scheduled with the Historic District Commission. This meeting will be an exploratory meeting between TSKP, the Building Committee, and the Historic District Commission. This is a meeting to get their requirements (what they want to see if we were to build on that property).

Mr. Carey inquired if the meetings will be videotaped. Mr. Weiner indicated last night’s meeting was videotaped, and that going forward, most of the meetings are going to be held here (Town Council Chambers). He mentioned, however, there is some talk about trying to figure out if there can be a more informal setting for our building committee meetings, with recordings. Mr.

Weiner noted that recordings are very important and that we want to make sure recorded, but the nature of the Building Committee is a collaboration with the community with it. Therefore, he noted, they're trying to figure out if this space stays. There are some scheduling conflicts with this space on most nights, so different options are being looked at. Mr. Weiner indicated he's working with Sally Katz and Facilities to do that.

b. Meetings Scheduled

Community & Public Relations Committee Meeting – (03.12.25 @ 5:40 p.m.), CREC Council – (03.19.25 @ 11:30 a.m.), Finance and Operations Committee Meeting – (03.25.25 @ 6:00 p.m.):

9. Public Comment

Paul Lisella, 32 Hartford Avenue encouraged everyone to go back and listen to the public comment section of yesterday's meeting. He noted that because there is a growing and extremely organized opposition to the placement of the swing school at Hanmer, passage of the overall project referendum is threatened. He explained his experience with expectations from Wethersfield Historic District Commission with conformity in the neighborhood. Additionally, he noted the state Office of Historic Preservation and state archaeologist will also be involved with looking at the location in Old Wethersfield. He noted that when considering the above factors, a risk to providing renovated schools in town is posed. He questions why Kycia farm is dismissed as an option for a swing school since townspeople voted on having Kycia farm used for recreation sports fields, open space, and municipal purposes. He commented that at the November 19, 2024 Town Council meeting November 19th, the consultant commented favorably of Kycia farm as a building opportunity representing a big flat site with good access on a couple of public roadways. He noted the Hanmer location proposed is too small. He also mentioned that when the consultant was questioned as to why Kycia was not further being considered, the response was that the community was unsettled with what to do with the property. Mr. Lisella indicated there is a Wethersfield resident who works for TSKP and asked if that person is involved with the group "Friends of Kycia" or if that person is influenced by their neighbors about the proposals (questioning conflict of interest). He reiterated the need for new schools and cautioned that placing the swing school by Hanmer as currently proposed will result in failure due to red tape, possible litigation, etc. He asked for more transparency from the Building Committee, Town Council, and Board of Education in this building project's process, as well as

more certainty with the 10-year plan for the building project (the contemplation of all implications from building phases made in subsequent referendums).

10. Board Comment

Ms. Walters gave a shout out to the Wethersfield Transition Academy (WTA) and commented favorably of their business “Cards for All” as she showed Board members samples of the cards being offered at \$3.50 each (with payment by *Venmo* being also accepted). Last week, Ms. Walters worked with the WTA on a pitch deck project. The intent of a pitch deck is to help the students prepare on how they will inform the investors/potential businesses about who they are, what they do, what they’d like to do to grow business, and where they might be able to put their card corrals to generate sales. She encouraged donations that she’d gladly take to the group, noting a cry cut machine, paper, tools, and plastic bags for the cards they create are needed. She also commented on the school building project. She commented favorably of all the public engagement and believes Wethersfield is behind a supported new schools/renovation project and hopes matters can be worked out to ensure referendum success, especially considering the concerns raised. In terms of the 25-25 Board Budget, she does not support and wishes to remove from the proposed budget: the proposed addition of an EL Director (\$110-\$150K) and the proposed addition of an in-school suspension resource at SDMS. She would like to see five (5) security guards added to the proposed budget instead of (3) three as well as an additional Math Interventionist (than what was proposed).

Mr. Laccavole thanked Board members and Mr. Emmett for their hard work on everything they do, including their voicing of opinions. He also spoke his appreciation of the public speaking and offering input. He mentioned that it might not seem like they are not been heard, but they are.

Mrs. Di Roberts spoke in favor of the proposed addition of an EL Director to the budget. She commented it would serve the students to have someone who has the authority to ensure quality instruction and can be responsible for the immense amount of paperwork required by the government. She further commented this director would be someone who is available to guide and support staff, retain good teachers, and see that identification is correctly made for El students.

Mrs. Di Roberts commented favorably of the Charles Wright School PTO group. They've run a fundraiser by collecting a variety of items to bring to *Savers* on the Berlin Turnpike, and *Savers* pays for the items. Wethersfield Library donated many CDs. Kim and Steve Bobin, along with Polly Moon, helped transport the many items to *Savers*. The PTO has also trained 6 Graders to help run the Hawk Shop.

Ms. Callan Carson commented favorably of the WSPC parent or caregiver volunteer of the Year award and noted nominations are currently being sought with the link to the nomination form going out through every school's PTO group. Anybody can nominate someone they think is deserving and who's done a really good job with helping their school community. She gave a shout out to all those people who are doing so much for the community and noted that while they may not be getting all the kudos, the Board of Education sees them. She also noted that WHS production of *Hello Dolly* was amazing.

Mr. Reilly noted the Wethersfield Transition Academy is trying to open up a storefront on the Silas Deane Highway. He also commented that budget process was cooperative and that he appreciated everyone's efforts. He concurred with Ms. Walters that security is a priority and noted that with the elementary schools not being built for several years to come, he'd prefer to shore up the security sooner rather than later.

Mrs. Granato also thanked volunteers who help keep WPS running. She commented favorably of the WHS production of *Hello Dolly*. She also commented favorably of all the hard work going into the SDMS production of *Beauty and the Beast* as well as this upcoming weekend performances of *Shrek* at Highcrest School. Mrs. Granato indicated a group will be working all day on Sunday with regard to the search for Superintendent of WPS. There will soon be an update on the progress of this search.

WHS Student Representative, Anxhelika Deda commented favorably of the very well attended Culture Night event at WHS that took place on Wednesday, February 26th from 5-7 PM in the WHS Cafeteria. She noted the WHS Drama Club's performance of *Hello Dolly* was amazing. She mentioned WHS DECA members competed in the state competition and that there were many finalists. Two (2) finalists are going to Florida in April to compete at the national level. Last week, Mr. Moger took a group of WHS seniors to help build houses with Habitat for Humanity in its spring session.

Mr. Carey noted WHS Boys Hockey won today 4 to 2 and now advance onto the quarterfinals on Friday night. This is the team's first time advancing since they won the championship three (3) years ago. WHS Girls Hockey loss to New Canaan on Saturday evening in the semifinals. WHS Girls Basketball lost their game in the first round. Today, WHS Dance Team is competing in a championship, and WHS Cheer Team is competing in a championship this weekend.

Mr. Carey noted that in his ten (10) years on the Board of Education, there has never been a budget vote not be bipartisan. He mentioned he felt as though the republicans were invited to the table and not was listened to. He also mentioned a very thoughtful counter proposal was submitted and was not taken seriously by the democrats. He believes that the Board could have arrived at a budget that all members could have agreed on. He noted that safety was the number one concern [with five (5) security guards in that budget]. He stated that people have said to him that Town Council will probably cut, and he expressed his hope that the Board will have another chance to get it right. Mr. Carey shared two quotes. The first one was shared by Ms. Walters "Take time to enjoy the simple things in life." - *Henry David Thoreau*. The second quote "If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow. Education is not preparation for Life. Education is life itself. The primary purpose of education is not to fill the mind with facts but to teach one to think." - *John Dewey*

11. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

12. Adjournment

Mrs. Granato ended the meeting with a quote that she described as about a hardworking Board of Ed: "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself." – *Henry Ford*

Mr. Carey MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary