

Wellesley Middle School PTO Meeting
Friday, March 20, 2015 Minutes

Catherine Mirick welcomed everyone to the PTO meeting and had a few quick announcements:

- Tee shirt order forms for the mini-marathon must be turned in today; today is the last chance to get form in as the shirts are being ordered on Saturday, March 21st.
- The date for the April PTO meeting, which will focus on available after school activities (both activities and athletics) for students at the middle school, is still being finalized.

Guest Speaker: Dr. David Lussier, Superintendent of Wellesley Public Schools

- School Year Calendar – The early start to the school year has been helpful given the difficult winter that we have had. This was the type of scenario that the District had in mind when they put the earlier start date calendar into place. The last day of school right now is scheduled for Friday, June 19th. We are in much better shape than many other communities.
- Staying Positive -- At meeting with other superintendents yesterday, question was asked “how do you stay positive in school given the type of winter we have had?” One colleague gave a great answer and said that there are so many wonderful things going on in school, i.e., performances and athletics – that those things keep you positive. Those things anchor you in the dead of winter. “Little Mermaid” performance yesterday at WMS was awesome. There are great events also at the elementary schools and at the High School which keep us positive and give us hope and renew our energy.
- Facilities – This is a big year for facilities. We have developed a master plan of work for various school buildings that we are looking to have done over the next ten years. WMS will be having work done this summer and there will be work done at Fiske and Schofield as well. Key decisions need to be made with respect to Hardy, Upham and Hunnewell. Specifically, a decision needs to be made as to whether these three buildings will be renovated or will be consolidated? Will there be a new school on North 30? There is a lot going on right now and many things that need to be sorted. From concept to actually walking into a new school building is a long process so we need to move through the preliminary steps quickly.
- Middle School Window Project – 300 windows at the WMS dating back to 1950s are being replaced. Replacement of the windows is an expensive endeavor but School District applied for and was awarded a grant from the State so some of the costs will be eligible for some reimbursement. The bulk of this work will happen this summer but probably some will spill over to summer of 2016. In addition, this summer, Kingsbury Road will be renovated. There will be a neighborhood meeting for those in this area who will be affected by the street renovations and

windows project at the middle school. (Others interested can attend the meeting as well.) The cost of the window project is \$4.9 million and the School District hopes to get a 30% reimbursement from the state.

- Middle School Auditorium Seats – The auditorium seats at WMS were replaced and are wonderful. Town meetings will now be held here at the Middle School.

Any questions on facilities work?

Q: When they do the work on Kingsbury Road, will they put granite curbing which will impact where parents drive for drop off?

A: There will be granite curbing. There will be a combination of curbing done for safety as well as bicycle painting in the road to remind drivers that they are sharing the road with others. The Kingsbury Road design will be presented at town meeting and we will announce the date of the hearing.

- Happenings at Middle School – There are lots of great things happening at the Middle School – 1:1 initiative here at 6th grade and 7th grade next year. Always anxious when there is a new rollout but it is wonderful to see how the technology is being used in the classroom. The rollout has been seamless and technology is being used when appropriate. Teachers are excited about new way to engage kids.
- Curriculum – Science – We have made changes in the science curriculum across the District this year. At the Middle School, curriculum is very different than what we had in prior years (i.e., 6th grade --earth science and 7th – biology). The learning units are much more hands on. Science across the District is taking on a very new and different look and happening sooner than we had planned. Teachers are collaborating to create the new curriculum.
- Fiscal 2015-2016 School Budget – We are about a week away from town meeting and the continuation of the budget process. We are always in a budget cycle – always thinking about needs and asking what we are doing now and what will we need next year. We are always looking a fiscal year ahead. This is not an override year so budget process feels different. Budgets tells stories and one big story from this budget cycle is that *costs continue to increase* – We have had to ask for additional monies to meet obligations with respect to special education costs incurred this current year. We have been asked to cut the METCO budget twice this year which was especially difficult to do given that this program has never actually kept pace with its actual cost. In fact, just this past February, we were asked to cut \$44,000 from that budget which is a significant amount of money to cut. This program really relies on transportation – which allows METCO kids to participate in after school programs – friends of METCO helped absorb

some of the costs but could not absorb all of it to keep late buses going. We have 158 students who participate in METCO.

The cost of doing business – level services – continues to increase. Most of the proposed budget for 2015-2016 is simply to maintain what we currently have in place.

- Enrollment -- We actually did a good job forecasting enrollment. We have about 5000 kids attending WPS. Enrollment is difficult because you have to forecast both at the school level and then at each individual grade level. This year, our forecast for the Middle School was off by 11 students which was not too bad (1178 students at WMS). We expect number to decrease by 20 students next year. We expect a big dip in WMS in FY 18 -- 40 less students. FY16 and FY 17 forecast – enrollment will remain the same at WMS. FY18 decrease is as a result of the bubble moving from WMS to WHS.

Enrollment is expected to be somewhat flat in the next few years and then we will see a slight decline. WMS still one of the biggest middle schools in the state. Mark Ito does a great job making a big school feel smaller and more intimate. We want all of our kids to be known to each other and to their teachers.

- Middle School Budget Requests –

(1) Two Staff Position -- Mark requested two staff positions to maintain class sizes. By having those two positions, the School will be able to maintain the integrity of the middle school model. We are unapologetic with respect to this request as it is so important for our kids. This may not look that important as a line item on the budget but it is very important.

(2) Additional Staffing for Modern Language – This request is still in the budget.

(3) Support for Special Education.

The rest of the requests in the budget for the Middle School are to maintain status quo.

- Other items in the Proposed Budget for FY 2015-2016:

- Funding for World Language Pilot – The district is launching elementary world language program. There will be a pilot in two of the elementary school next fall (Hardy and Sprague). Pilot will be in K-2 classes. Goal is to bring world language to all of the elementary schools in the districts – 90 minutes of world language – in Fiscal Year 16-17. It is difficult to find 90 minutes in an already full curriculum day. This will eventually impact WMS because 6th graders will eventually come into the middle school with language experience.

Q: Have you picked the language?

A: No and we know that the actual language taught does not really matter. Kids who have a second language have an easier time picking up another language.

The decision as to which language is selected will be impacted by the quality of the teaching pool. We do not believe we will be able to offer more than one language because of economies of scale, but when kids come to WMS, they will be able to select another language. (Kids do not have to continue with the language taught at the elementary school).

- WHS – Evolutions Program – No easy way to describe Evolutions other than it is a different paradigm – one curriculum in which all areas of learning come together into one class. It is a holistic approach which captures kids for whom traditional learning does not engage them. We believe this program will capture those kids. This program will only be available to juniors and seniors. This program will change how we teach. It is a return to what we have in elementary school – more holistic approach.
- More on Budget – School Committee approved a 5.6 % increase – most of which was level services with just a few additions. We still have to make cuts so we tried to do so by through efficiencies. Unfortunately, with budgets, you have cuts but at the same time make new investments. We have to make tough choices but we need to keep our eyes open to the greater good and the strategic plan. We were asked to make some additional cuts by the Town; we were asked to find \$600,000 in cuts. The good news is that request came because the discussions around health insurance had not been completed. Town is currently engaged in a conversation with all of the unions to control costs around health care. Hopefully, if those health care costs saving go through, it will have less of an impact on the school budget. Means with health care savings, we will not have to have additional reductions.

Q: How does the Middle School PTO budget impact the overall School Budget?

A: We do not assume that the PTO budget will offset the town school budget. [Catherine – big part of the PTO budget is in supplementing and supporting school, i.e., creative arts programs. We also fund teacher grants and professional development. We fund end of year activities. Those are our biggest budget buckets.]

- “Park Assessment” – Park came out of a consortium of a dozen states all committed to similar standards and efficiencies to be gained if we all use the same test to conduct assessments. Idea behind Park was not just efficiencies but also to have assessment to make sure kids are college ready. Implementation is difficult. We all had to do a field test last year. This year, school districts were given the option of whether they wanted to participate in the Park Assessment. We decided not to particular in the field test this year. We have so much going on and we are happy to have other districts work out the challenges of a new testing system. There has been lots of debate around testing. Wellesley is trying to be smart and thoughtful with respect to this issue. MCAS is not the “be all and end all” but we can learn from the results, i.e., achieve gaps, science

curriculum issues. We believe there is value to testing and we want to get the right amount of testing -- not too much or too little. The state will have to decide if Park Assessment will be accepted. Political issue – new governor, unlike former Governor Patrick, is not necessarily on board with Park Assessment.

Q: There has been a backlash against the common core and some states are trying to opt-out. What are your thoughts on the common core?

A: We think the common core standards are good. I think the standards are worthy and represent aspirational goals and then we have to build in the teaching to achieve those aspirations.

Q: Is there any update on Performing Arts Director opening?

A: We are still looking. We are looking for someone who will take the program to the next level – two candidates have come in – one from LA and one from Texas – but still looking to fill position.

Q: With implementation of world language pilot, will there still be the option to enroll your child in language program either before school or after school?

A: Yes.

Final thoughts from Dr. Lussier: Just signed a new contract and is happy to be coming back. He cannot believe that three years is already coming to an end. He is delighted to be staying longer.

Next Speaker: Katey Goehringer, Beth Willet and Marybeth Martello – spoke about the upcoming STEM Expo to be held at the High School on March 28th from 10am to 2pm.

(Video shown)

- 3500 people attended last year
- There is something for everyone at the EXPO – lots of great events for WMS students, i.e., build your own app, walking through humpback wall, tour high school, Robert Cohen from WHS is going to teach a class.
- 96 exhibits and 18 workshops
- Expo will have a sports area –how golf balls made? How skis made? Math to improve scoring in basketball.
- Entire gym will have robots
- Speaker specifically geared toward elementary and WMS students – how electronics can bring stories to life.
- Former Wellesley student has asked specifically to talk to elementary and WMS students about how he got interested in engineering.
- Dr. Sheila Nirenberg – professor at Cornell Medical College in NYC – is the keynote speaker. She has basically cracked the code that allows the image that your brain sees and translates into a

code that the neurons in the brain understand. She has developed an eye glass that will help people with macular degeneration. This is a wonderful opportunity to interact with her. Great to have a woman speaking and for young girls to see her and understand that they too can get involve in this type of work.

- Meeting the science professionals was very important last year in helping kids connect what they can do with a STEM career. Kids do not understand what they can do with these degree and this is a place where we are trying to meet that need. The committee is still looking for more professionals in the area so if you know of anyone please let STEM Expo committee know.
- Ways to get involved?
 - Attend the expo; extend the invitation to friends and family
 - Consider volunteering to help
 - Suggest STEM Professionals for the reception with H.S. kids.

Go to the WEF website and plan your day at the EXPO.

Minutes submitted by Connie Burton