



WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To: Westport Board of Education Members
From: Thomas Scarice, Superintendent of Schools
Re: June 13, 2022 Board of Education Meeting
Date: June 10, 2022

Provided below for Board consideration is an overview of the meeting agenda items for June 13, 2022. The meeting will be held in-person.

Discussion

1. Strategic Plan

As we wrap up the school year, a team of faculty and administration have worked to continue advancing the priorities of our strategic plan. Although it has been a challenge to gather and spend sustained time on this effort over the past few months, the team looks forward to time over the summer to finalize a strategy map for the district. That said, the team did take two days at the end of May to go deeper into the two areas of focus:

- social-emotional well-being, and
- collaborative problem solving.

The overarching goal of the plan can be simplified to the following: to foster the development of well-adjusted students who can work together to solve complex problems.

Social-Emotional Well-Being

The team approached social-emotional well-being with a two-pronged approach addressing: immediate needs, future needs.

In response to addressing the more immediate needs in social and emotional well-being, the team began to set priorities for the start of the 22-23 school year. As you may recall from the presentations earlier this year, one focus on social-emotional well-being is intended to address the urgent conditions we experienced prior to the pandemic, as well as the effects of the pandemic. The Board will be presented with approaches for the start of next year, with additional ideas built in over the summer, that are intended to meet these more immediate well-being needs.

Additionally, the team sought to project a vision of the future of our schools that would identify two social-emotional capacities that would serve all students well beyond their years of schooling, capacities that would enable them to thrive as young adults and beyond. I am most enthusiastic about this work.

There are many considerations and possibilities, however, it is recommended that in order to prepare our students for the challenges of the world they enter as young adults, and to truly use the power of strategy to distinguish the work of the Westport Public Schools, the district will place a long-term focus on two areas:

- leadership development and
- “growth mindset”.

Leadership Development

In my boldest moments I envision a sustained strategic campaign towards the development of the “*Westport Public Schools Center for Leadership Development*”, a place for training students on leadership, hosting guest speakers and experts on leadership, perhaps a library of resources and training materials, true leadership training for all students.

One of my driving beliefs is that I see leadership as a verb, not a title or position. We lead all types of actions and activities, from organizational and executive leadership, to community-based efforts and teams, to the leading of our own families and personal lives. All students would be well served by learning the skills and capacities of effective leadership. The skills and capacities of ethical leadership will serve our students well beyond their school years.

This type of work is ordinarily done at the collegiate level, or in independent and private schools. Yet, we have opportunities for student leaders in our schools (i.e. captains, clubs, student government, etc.), and waiting until higher education to train all students in effective leadership misses a critical window of opportunity to develop these skills. I look forward to continued brainstorming and possibly collaboration with the community on this long-term effort.

Growth Mindset

A “growth mindset” is marked by individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and feedback from performance and from others). The deep research of Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, Dr. Carol Dweck illustrates that individuals with a “growth mindset” tend to achieve more than those with a more “fixed mindset” (those who believe their talents are solely innate gifts).

An individual’s mindset develops over time and is influenced by many factors, including the school environment. Over the past 15 years since Dweck’s landmark book, “Mindset”, a great deal of instructional resources have emerged. In addition, tools have been developed to inform school and district policies that either encourage, or discourage, a “growth mindset”. Although this work is familiar to our schools, bringing the research of the “growth mindset” to the level of policies and practices is another long-term effort that would serve all students well, while distinguishing our school district.

Collaborative Problem Solving

As stated in the most recent WPS strategic plan iteration, the district mission is achieved by “fostering critical and creative thinking, and *collaborative problem solving* through a robust curriculum delivered by engaging and dedicated educators”.

During our two day workshop last month, the team identified early objectives through a variety of activities to build off of previous district work. The team prioritized the following:

- clearly identifying current learner-centered tasks throughout the PreK-12 curriculum,
- renewing classroom spaces to foster student autonomy, de-center the teacher, increase knowledge mobility, and reduce social stress,
- iterative processes, such as “design thinking” loops, embedded in curriculum units.

Given the nature of this teaching and learning work, the team will require sustained time, this summer and beyond, to continue to develop learning tasks and activities, and to identify the skills of collaborative problem solving so that direct instruction and opportunities for application can be naturally included in our curriculum.

In both areas, I foresee additional work this summer and I look forward to addressing the immediate needs identified, as well as the more bolder, visionary elements of this plan.

Discussion/Action

1. Holistic Recommendation for the Long Lots School Building

As a follow up to my recommendation last week to build a new construction of an elementary school on the Long Lots campus to serve the students of Long Lots and the Stepping Stones Preschool, I am asking the Board to take action Monday evening. My recommendation is based on the information provided at the last Board meeting which covered all of the criteria previously identified. The list of criteria in making this decision is intended to be holistically as taken together, the recommendation is clear.

The action requests that the Board authorize the Superintendent of Schools to prepare the necessary documentation required to submit a grant application by June 30, 2023 for the replacement of the Long Lots Elementary School with a new facility located at the existing site. This authorization would include the preparation of educational specifications, updated enrollment projections, project budgets, environmental site assessments, geotechnical borings, wetland assessments and other documentation or studies required by the state Department of Education and the Department of Administrative Services Office of School Construction Grants and Review (OSCGR).

I have also asked the Board to approve authorization that would enable the administration to solicit proposals to prepare the necessary documentation and studies from qualified professionals in support of the grant application, including the authorization for the administration to engage with OSCGR in advance of the grant application to ensure the grant application is favorably received by the appropriate state authorities.

The proposed motion language would move the project forward with the necessary “pre-grant application” steps, while authorizing the initiation of these projects over the summer so that we continue to move this project forward. The

administration will work with our partners from Colliers Project Leaders to prepare for the next formal action steps in the late fall, or early winter, with the town funding bodies, as we advance the appropriate motions and funding requests to remain on our June, 2023 grant submission timeline.

2. **Gifts**

The Board is asked to take action to approve the following generous gifts from the Saugatuck and Coleytown Elementary PTAs.

- \$3,834.35 by the Saugatuck Elementary School PTA for the purchase of 65 additional audiobooks for the Saugatuck Elementary School Library;
- \$5,000.00 by the Coleytown Elementary School PTA for the purchase of diverse books for the Coleytown Elementary School book room and classrooms, and
- \$24,059.11 by the Coleytown Elementary School PTA for the purchase, delivery, and installation of a new sound system and projector system for Coleytown Elementary School.

3. **2022-23 School Lunch Program**

On May 16, 2022, the Business Office concluded acceptance of proposals for Food Services. The RFP can be found here: <https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1650485809/westport/qgigcbw6g8a3apyiywov/22-012-RFPFoodServiceManagementCompaniesBid~pdf>.

The district received proposals from the following companies:

- Compass Group USA, Inc. (Chartwells Division)
- Whitsons Culinary Group

Both highly respected companies submitted competitive bids with slight nuances on delivery, profitability and innovation.

The following individuals served on the interview committee::

- Suzanne Levasseur (Supervisor of Health Services)
- Stafford Thomas (Principal, Staples High School)
- Kris Szabo (Principal, Coleytown Middle School)
- Elizabeth Messler (Principal, Saugatuck Elementary School)
- Marisa Zer (Parent; PTA Bedford Middle School)
- Stefanie Shackelford (Parent; Districtwide PT A Co President)

The committee reviewed electronic copies of the two proposals for individual review. On June 2, 2022, the committee met to discuss the proposals and to choose a vendor. Please see the attached summary by CFO Elio Longo for a summary.

After careful consideration, the committee unanimously recommends that the Board award 022-012-RFP Food Services Management Companies to Compass Group USA, Inc. (Chartwells Division), in accordance with the full RFP terms and the Chartwells financial/cost proposal.

An action item has been placed on the agenda for the Board's consideration.

4. **Authorization to Sign Contracts**

According to Board policy #3293.1 ("Authorization of Signature"), the Board annually renews the authority of the Superintendent and/or the Director of Financial Services, individually or jointly, to execute agreements, to apply for grants, or to sign other documents as may be necessary in the normal course of the school system's business, including documents that support the adopted budget or that implement the Board's established policies or programs. This authorization does not extend to those agreements or other documents which require specific, formal approval of the Board of Education and/or the signature of the Board Chairman. To comply with regulations of the State Department of Education, the Board annually renews this authority, designating by name the individuals holding the positions of Superintendent and Director of Financial Services who are so authorized. This action item would grant this authorization, effective July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.