

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN □ PAXTON □ PRINCETON □ RUTLAND □ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1351

Monday, September 14, 2020
7:00 PM

MEETING CONDUCTED REMOTELY, VIA GOOGLE MEET

Wachusett Regional School District Committee

Megan Weeks, Chair	Laura Kirshenbaum
Michael Dennis, Vice-chair	Matthew Lavoie
Melissa Ayala (7:22 PM)	Linda Long-Bellil
Nicole Amos (7:07 PM)	Kenneth Mills
Krista Bennett	Karl Ottmar
Scott Brown	Asima Silva (7:08 PM)
Maleah Gustafson	Christina Smith
Sherrie Haber	Kelly Williamson
Jeffrey Haynes	Linda Woodland (7:40 PM)
Robert Imber	Adam Young (7:05 PM)

Committee Members Absent:

Benjamin Mitchel	Deidre Shapiro
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Administration Present:

Darryll McCall, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Berlo, Deputy Superintendent
Jeff Carlson, Director of Human Resources
Brendan Keenan, Director of Social Emotional Learning
Christine Smith, Administrator of Special Education
Barry Sclar, Supervisor of Information Technology
Rebecca Petersen, Executive Secretary to the Superintendent

Student Representatives Present:

Kenichi Gomi	Kathryn Mangus
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Chair Weeks called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM. Chair Weeks announced the meeting was being conducted remotely, via Google Meet, and will be broadcast on Channel 194 but not streamed live, due to a conflict with the Holden Selectboard meeting the same date and time. Members of the public could access the meeting via YouTube. Chair Weeks also spoke about members of the public submitting comments to questions@wrsd.net, and she also mentioned there will be a second Public Hearing towards the end of the meeting.

I. Public Hearing

Chair Weeks read aloud public comments submitted electronically.

Julie Reno (attachment 1)

Tammy Tod, resident of Rutland (attachment 2)

7:05 PM Member Young joined the meeting

Isabella LeBlanc, WRSD junior and resident of Holden (attachment 3)

7:07 PM Member Amos joined the meeting.

7:08 PM Member Silva joined the meeting.

Student Rep intro and remarks shared by students (attachment 4)

7:22 PM Member Ayala joined the meeting.

II. Chair's Opening Remarks

Chair Weeks opened the floor to the Student Representatives.

III. Student Representatives (K. Gomi, K. Mangus)

Student Representative Mangus explained that the comments read by Chair Weeks were collected in a Google Form by the Student Representatives. She explained that the 50 comments were shared with the Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism Subcommittee. Student Representative Mangus reported on Chromebook distribution, textbook distribution, that college admission representatives have been available, freshmen orientation was conducted virtually, Student Council has started to plan events. There are Instagram and Facebook Group options where the Student Representatives are posting information and tips for parents and students. Chair Weeks presented a website developed by the Student Representatives, which Student Representative Gomi had shared and spoke to.

IV. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

Superintendent McCall addressed the comments shared under Public Hearing and under the Student Representatives' reports.

7:40 PM Member Woodland joined the meeting.

Superintendent McCall spoke about meetings with the District's two transportation providers, AA Transportation and Van Pool Transportation,

explaining that District administration is recommending support of the two motions on the agenda to approve the settlement agreements with the two vendors.

At Superintendent McCall's request, Director of SEL Keenan spoke about the September 10th webinar, *Caring for Your Child During COVID*, hosted by the District and coordinated by Director Keenan.

Superintendent McCall reported on the Facilities and Security Subcommittee that took place immediately before this meeting, noting that work on HVAC/air circulation in the buildings is being addressed and work is progressing.

Chair Weeks opened the floor to questions and comments, asking that members limit their comments to two minutes.

Member Imber asked the Superintendent about the October 1st deadline (SIMs), which Superintendent McCall reported is not going to change per DESE. The District, the state, state legislators, are keeping on top of Chapter 70 funding, which could be impacted due to the number of students who have unenrolled for the 2020-2021 school year.

Member Kirshenbaum expressed her appreciation for what District administration is doing in planning for remote learning and transitioning to hybrid.

Member Lavoie voiced his concern that Superintendent McCall did not respond to emails from parents who reached out about educating the highest needs special education students. Member Lavoie also asked what the holdup is for getting students back in school/what metrics are being followed. Superintendent McCall spoke about his meeting with representatives from the Member Town Boards of Health this date, and a question that was asked was what will happen if one town of the five have increased cases of COVID, which Superintendent McCall will address with DESE.

Member Long-Bellil had a similar concern as Member Lavoie about emails received from parents of special education parents who have questions about the plans for their children returning to school. Administrator of Special Education Smith spoke about the plans for the October 5th return of highest needs students and what District staff have done to reach out to and connect with these families.

Member Mills stressed the importance of knowing which metrics will be followed, information that has been requested previously. He also stressed the importance that when polling parents about transitioning to hybrid, it is important that parents know what hybrid will look like so informed decisions can be made. He also had questions about the use of substitutes when teachers are sick and unable to provide remote teaching. Superintendent McCall explained that paraprofessionals may be called upon to fill in for the teacher when out sick.

Member Ottmar thanked the students for their comments during Public Hearing and he also expressed thanks to the Student Representatives for their efforts. For the next meeting, Member Ottmar would appreciate a report on what some districts are experiencing when operating under a hybrid model.

Member Silva reiterated previous comments about a metric to be used and what will be looked at and used when transitioning to hybrid, and the importance of keeping all student safe and healthy. She also repeated the need to know, as a parent, what hybrid will look like before being asked in a survey to make a decision about the rest of the school year. She noted that COVID numbers that are published are dated, usually two weeks old, which Superintendent McCall acknowledged.

Member Smith expressed her gratitude to the five Member Towns for all supporting the FY21 budget. She also commented on the webinar that was hosted by WRSD on September 10, 2020.

Member Williamson wished staff, teachers, and administration the best with the opening of schools. Member Williamson asked if it would be possible to have Dr. Forkey provide teachers with some strategies to address this year's teaching and learning models.

Member Woodland reported she has not received parent emails that were mentioned earlier in this meeting. Member Woodland asked about the one and a half custodial positions that were cut and not filled. She asked about communication with the hardest to reach students (special education, elementary, etc.). Superintendent McCall spoke about the vacant custodial positions, which principals are comfortable with these positions being unfilled and feeling confident the cleaning and sanitizing work can be addressed by current custodial staff.

Member Young reported the listing of HVAC issues included in the Superintendent's Report is appreciated, and he will report more on this during his report on the Facilities and Security Subcommittee meeting. Member Young expressed the importance of getting students who have difficulty/cannot access education remotely back into the classrooms, and he is hoping the effort is made to have this happen on October 5th.

Member Amos passed.

Member Ayala repeated the importance of communication and contacting parents.

Member Bennett was personally called and received emails about her child returning to school.

Member Brown thanked the administration for the information included in the Superintendent's Report and he too thanked the five towns for supporting the FY21 budget. He voiced his opinion that he feels the Committee should support

the settlement agreement with AA Transportation. He spoke about his son who will be returning to school on October 5th, and reported that he has received calls and communication from the Special Education Department.

Vice-chair Dennis mentioned that many members asked about metrics to be used to transition to hybrid, and he is looking for the criteria that will be used for returning “no sooner than” October 5th. Vice-chair Dennis asked if the District is on track for opening Phase 1 on October 5th, which Superintendent McCall spoke to and confirmed. Vice-chair Dennis spoke about the 300 students who have left the District and he encouraged administration to collect information on why students are being unenrolled and that Superintendent McCall keep the Committee updated on this information.

Member Gustafson appreciated the details shared in the Superintendent’s Report. Member Gustafson asked about the hiring of paraprofessionals and if these new hires are new positions or if they are to fill vacancies. Administrator Smith explained that posted positions are replacing paraprofessionals who have left the employ of the District. Member Gustafson asked if there are spaces ready in some of the schools for students, then why are the highest needs students not being brought back to school in-person now rather than waiting until October or November. Administrator Smith addressed Member Gustafson’s question about students returning to in-person education sooner than October, explaining the many layers of planning and coordinating that is taking place on a daily basis.

Member Haber reported she spoke with Jennifer Lynch about sub-varsity level play, which will take place. Member Haber asked if the number of kindergarteners being homeschooled can be shared. Parents and teachers are looking for information about the hybrid model, times and the daily schedules, how will the cohorts be arranged, and information about hybrid is essential in order for parents to be able to answer a poll accurately.

Member Imber asked Superintendent McCall about the needs of the District in terms of hiring, even short term in the areas of nursing and custodial. Superintendent McCall agreed that nursing hires would be beneficial, but without a state budget finalized the District is being very careful about spending. And the same holds true with custodial hires.

Member Ayala clarified her comment about communication and special education, stating she understands the most vulnerable students will be in-person for October 5th, but for students who will be beginning the school year on September 16th the communication not been as helpful or as consistent as it could be.

Member Gustafson asked that additional information about the budget, what was cut and why, what revenues were lost, and what is currently available be provided to the Committee.

Member Long-Bellil asked for an explanation about the afternoon schedules for the three levels (elementary, middle, high). Deputy Superintendent Berlo reported on the plans for the afternoons to be used for pull-out services, a second opportunity for students to check in with teachers about ELA and/or math, which is reflected in all schedules that were shared.

Student Representative Mangus asked what assessment will be used to know if the remote model is working and if students are learning. Superintendent McCall reported assessments will be used to go along with the power standards to determine what students are learning.

B. Recommendations Requiring Action by the School Committee

1. Motion: To accept the settlement agreement between AA Transportation for Home to School Transportation, Special Education In-District, and Special Education Out-of-District and the Wachusett Regional School District whereby invoices for the total closure days of 62 days are pro-rated with a payment to the vendor of 75% of total invoice, with the District realizing a savings of 25%.

(S. Brown)
(J. Haynes)

At Superintendent McCall's request, Director Deedy spoke to the motion, giving an update and also providing some history about the District's relationship with AA Transportation.

Chair Weeks opened the floor to questions and comments.

Vice-chair Dennis spoke about this matter, providing the background of this motion. Member Gustafson, a member of the Business/Finance Subcommittee, commented that the 75%/25% split has not changed since the start of discussions about a settlement agreement. She commented that the President of AA Transportation fell short of sharing information requested by the District, to justify the 75%/25% option. Member Young asked a question of Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Dennis about the 75%/25% offer, which Subcommittee Chair Dennis explained it is what came out of negotiations Director Deedy and a colleague had with AA Transportation. Member Long-Bellil asked Director Deedy how the relationship between the District and AA Transportation would be impacted if this motion is not supported. Director Deedy cannot speak for Mr. Ernenwein, but he feels Mr. Ernenwein wants to work with the District to come to a settlement. Mr. Ernenwein is willing to freeze rates for the 2020-2021 school year, as well as some of the special education transportation costs. Member Haynes asked if there were any other vendors or service providers who did not receive payment for services not rendered during the spring, to which Director Deedy answered yes. Member Haber stated she could support making a payment to AA Transportation to cover expenses, but she does not believe the District should be responsible for making a payment to make the company whole.

Member Brown spoke in support of AA Transportation, providing some history of the relationship between the District and AA Transportation. Vice-chair Dennis responded to Member Haynes comment about not paying other vendors, noting that AA Transportation has held firm on the 75%/25% split. Member Lavoie noted that if the Business/Finance Subcommittee cannot support the 75%/25% option, he can support that subcommittee's recommendation. Member Ayala asked if the District will know if AA Transportation's PPP is forgiven and if other options, beside the 75%/25% option, were considered. Director Deedy does not know if the PPP loan has been forgiven, and he reported that other options other than 75%/25% were not accepted by AA Transportation. Member Imber cannot support the motion as presented. Member Ottmar noted that as the motion stands, there are still many questions. Member Amos asked if the motion is not supported, based on the information provided, what will the next steps be. Director Deedy would need to discuss with the Superintendent to find out if the matter will be dropped or if they will dig down deeper. Member Brown too appreciates the Business/Finance Subcommittee's work on this matter.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

None

Opposed:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

The motion failed unanimously.

2. Motion: To accept the settlement agreement between Van Pool Transportation for Special Education Out-of-District Transportation and the

Wachusett Regional School District whereby invoices for the total closure days of 62 days are pro-rated with a payment to the vendor of 75% of total invoice, with the District realizing a savings of 25%.

Per Director Deedy, administration withdraws the motion.

3. Motion: To extend the contract with Melanson CPAs to continue to serve as the District's auditing firm for the 2020-2021 (FY21) school year and in doing so, exercise the first of two (2) option years of said contract.

(A. Young)

(K. Mills)

Vice-chair Dennis asked if either the Chair or Vice-chair of the AAB could speak to this motion or to the quality of the work of this auditing firm. Vice-chair Dennis asked if this motion is time sensitive, which Director Deedy responded no.

Motion: To table the motion on the floor to a time certain, September 29, 2020

(M. Dennis)

(K. Mills)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion passed unanimously.

V. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business brought before the subcommittee.

VI. Secretary's Report

A. Approval of #1350 Regular Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on August 24, 2020

(K. Mills)
(A. Young)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The minutes were unanimously approved.

B. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on August 24, 2020

Deferred

C. Approval of #324 Special Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on August 31, 2020

(S. Haber)
(S. Brown)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Christina Smith
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

Abstained:

Linda Long-Bellil
Asima Silva
Kelly Williamson

The minutes were approved 17-0-3.

VII. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

Chair Weeks reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Director of Business and Finance's report that Members should contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer's Report, Members should contact the Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair.

VIII. Committee Reports

A. Management Subcommittee (M. Weeks, Chair, M. Dennis, Vice-chair, S. Brown, K. Mills, C. Smith, A. Young)

Chair Weeks reported this subcommittee will meet on September 21, 2020.

B. Education Subcommittee (C. Smith, Chair, L. Long-Bellil, Vice-chair, N. Amos, K. Bennett, S. Haber, R. Imber, L. Kirshenbaum, D. Shapiro)

Subcommittee Chair Smith reported this subcommittee met immediately before this meeting.

Motion: To approve the second reading of Amended Policy 3813 *Policy Relating to Education Audio, Video and/or Stenographic Recordings of Parent Teacher Conference and Team Meetings Audio, Video and/or Stenographic Recording of Meetings*, waiving the reading.

(C. Smith)
(L. Kirshenbaum)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion was unanimously approved.

- C. Business/Finance Subcommittee (M. Dennis, Chair, K. Mills, Vice-chair, M. Gustafson, B. Mitchel, K. Ottmar)

Subcommittee Chair Dennis reported on the September 8, 2020 meeting of this subcommittee. He reported the FY20 fiscal year was closed out. He also reported that the District is currently operating under FY20 budget levels, and the administration has been asked to provide an updated report on the budget at the next regular School Committee meeting.

- D. Legal Affairs Subcommittee (S. Brown, Chair, K. Ottmar, Vice-chair, R. Imber, K. Mills)

Subcommittee Chair Brown reported this subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting and that the full Committee will be updated on the MOA with the WREA during executive session, at the conclusion of the regular School Committee meeting.

- E. Superintendent Goals and Evaluation Subcommittee (K. Mills, Chair, L. Kirshenbaum, K. Williamson, L. Woodland)

Subcommittee Chair Mills reported this subcommittee will meet on September 21, 2020.

- F. Facilities and Security Subcommittee (A. Young, Chair, J. Haynes, Vice-chair, L. Woodland)

Subcommittee Chair Young reported this subcommittee met immediately before this School Committee meeting, as well as on September 1, 2020.

Motion: To approve the second reading of Draft Policy 6612.3 **Policy Relating to Pupil Services Face Covering**, waiving the reading.

(A. Young)
(S. Haber)

Member Gustafson asked if this draft policy had been reviewed by the Boards of Health, which Subcommittee Chair Young does not believe had been done. Discussion ensued about process, if the second reading is deferred, or if the draft policy is amended it would need to go before the subcommittee first before two readings of the amended draft motion. Member Young will keep the motion on the floor.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson

Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

The motion was unanimously approved.

G. Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism Subcommittee (A. Silva, Chair, L. Woodland, Vice-chair, N. Amos, M. Ayala, K. Bennett, S. Brown, M. Gustafson, J. Haynes, L. Kirshenbaum, L. Long-Bellil)

Subcommittee Chair Silva reported on the September 8, 2020 meeting of this subcommittee.

Motion: To extend the meeting to 10:30 PM.

(K. Ottmar)
(S. Haber)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie

The motion was approved 18-2.

H. Audit Advisory Board (B. Mitchel, Chair, A. Young, Vice-chair)

AAB Vice-chair Young reported the AAB has not met since the last School Committee meeting and is waiting for feedback from administration before scheduling the next meeting

I. Ad Hoc Subcommittees

J. Building Committees

K. School Council Reports:

Central Tree Middle School (M. Lavoie), Chocksett Middle School (K. Williamson), Davis Hill Elementary School (K. Williamson), Dawson Elementary School (L. Kirshenbaum), Glenwood Elementary School (N. Amos), Houghton Elementary School (D. Shapiro), Mayo Elementary School (A. Young), Mountview Middle School (S. Brown), Naquag Elementary School (S. Haber), Paxton Center School (K. Ottmar), Thomas Prince School (A. Silva), Wachusett Regional High School (K. Mills), Early Childhood Center (L. Woodland), Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC) (M. Gustafson)

Member Gustafson – Reported on the SEPAC meeting of September 9, 2020 and reported the next meeting will be October 5, 2020

IX. Public Hearing

Emily Miller (attachment 5)

X. New Business

Chair Weeks asked members who have requests for information to send it to her and she will share it with District administration.

Member Lavoie would like a discussion about student population for the 2020-2021 school year and how it will impact the FY22 budget.

XI. Executive Session to discuss strategy for contract negotiations with the Wachusett Regional Education Association, Inc. (WREA) on 2020-2021 school reopening, as the Chair deems a discussion in public session would have an adverse effect on the District's bargaining position, not to return to public session.

Motion: To enter executive session to discuss strategy for contract negotiations with the Wachusett Regional Education Association, Inc. (WREA) on 2020-2021 school reopening, as the Chair deems a discussion in public session would have an adverse effect on the District's bargaining position, not to return to public session.

(S. Brown)
(L. Long-Bellil)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Megan Weeks
Michael Dennis
Nicole Amos
Melissa Ayala
Krista Bennett
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Jeffrey Haynes
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Matthew Lavoie
Linda Long-Bellil
Kenneth Mills
Karl Ottmar
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Kelly Williamson
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion passed unanimously.

XII. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned to executive session at 10:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Darryll McCall, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

DM:rlp

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Julie Reno Public Comment
- Attachment 2 – Tammy Tod Public Comment
- Attachment 3 – Isabella LeBlanc Public Comment
- Attachment 4 – Student Public Comments
- Attachment 5 – Ellen Miller Public Comment



Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Fwd: Bullying - no action and curriculum updates

1 message

Megan Weeks <megan_weeks@wrsd.net>

Mon, Sep 14, 2020 at 10:08 PM

To: Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Megan K Weeks, M.Ed
Chair WRSD School Committee
Assistant Principal, Murdock High School

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Julie R** <juliebdulie@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Sep 10, 2020 at 6:41 PM
Subject: Bullying - no action and curriculum updates
To: <questions@wrsd.net>

Hi,
Twice in my daughter's time in this district from K-8 we have either met with the team (first grade Davis Hill meeting with VP, teacher, school psych) about bullying or submitted a formal bully complaint (MTV last year). The end of the DH meeting was Jay (VP at the time) saying well it is good she will be at a new school next year. We had just moved to Mayo region. This should NEVER be the resolution. These kids would be reunited in Middle School.

In 5th grade, my daughter was called a slut several times by a 5th grade boy. Nothing happened with this. In 6th grade on the 3rd day of school same boy said the same thing and Mrs. Hughes addressed it and it never happened again.

However, several days on the bus she heard the same boy call a classmate a nigger. She knew this was bad and stood up for this classmate. It continued.

Then, in 8th grade last year she was so bullied by a troubled kid that she became suicidal and she was hospitalized. I made a report and requested an investigation, again, nothing came out of it. Nothing. And now my daughter is, thankfully, out of this district and at Monty Tech. And again, the comment was made to me by one of the administrators "well, it will be a good thing for her to be in a different school next year." Why is this the go to response in this district?

While I am thrilled my daughter is out of WRSD, I have a child still in 2nd grade who has special needs and I am ready to do whatever it takes to protect him.

Regarding curriculum ideas...

Perhaps it might be a good time to revisit celebrations in the classroom. By not having Birthday parties and not recognizing religious holidays instead of making kids feel welcome it is backfiring and creating very limited exposure to anything outside of what each students' family celebrates.

Why not do the opposite? Poll the families at the beginning of each school year and ask what they would like to share about their family celebrations. And maybe you will have family volunteers who would be willing to come in and share what their cultures and religions do to celebrate a birth, a death, a holiday, etc. It's a great opportunity to include everyone and to open the conversation for kids who maybe feel they don't have anything in common with their opposite sex, different race, different religion, etc peers.

This would build so many learning opportunities.

The time is now to review how education is happening. Clearly our district is failing at many levels.

Let's try something different. Maybe be proactive instead of reactive.

Thanks for your time,
Julie Reno

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Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Fwd: Public Session Letter

Megan Weeks <megan_weeks@wrsd.net>

Mon, Sep 14, 2020 at 10:08 PM

To: Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Megan K Weeks, M.Ed
Chair WRSD School Committee
Assistant Principal, Murdock High School

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Thomas Tod** <thomasetod@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Sep 14, 2020 at 6:58 PM
Subject: Public Session Letter
To: <questions@wrsd.net>

September 14, 2020

After watching the last four meetings I felt compelled to write this letter to you all. As a lifelong resident of this school district, a former school committee member I am saddened to see the behavior of this present school committee and your treatment of one another.

Member Lavoie, after consulting with Chair Weeks and not getting a satisfactory response from her, filed a grievance regarding what he perceived as a violation of the Open Meeting Law. This was not an attack against anyone's character, but his perception of an act which he perceived as a violation of Open Meeting Law.

Proper protocol was followed and a determination was made by the district's attorney. The school committee then had to vote whether they agreed with the determination of the attorney or if they wanted to pursue this complaint any further. The person who the grievance was filed against spoke, then Member Lavoie explained why he filed.

What happened next was inexcusable by Chair Weeks and Member Haynes. The motion on the table was to discuss whether to take the attorney's determination or to investigate further. Member Haynes launched a verbal attack against Member Lavoie. This is in direct violation of the district's Bullying Policy which you are all obligated to follow. Member Haynes was not speaking to the motion and the Chair of this committee should have asked Member Haynes to stop and speak to the motion, but she did not. It took another school committee member to stop the verbal attack. I feel both Chair Weeks and Member Haynes owe Member Lavoie a public apology.

Also, Chair Weeks please try to be fair in giving school committee members the same amount of time when it is their turn to speak. If two minutes is the limited amount of time to speak, then try to make that a rule

for all members not some members. Several times you cut off Member Gustafson and Member Lavoie, and yet you allow other committee members to ramble on.

Please keep in mind any resident of the WRSD can place a grievance with the Attorney General regarding a breach of the Open Meeting Law. Also, any resident of the WRSD can place a complaint with the State Ethics Commission if they feel there has been an ethics violation.

This committee keeps preaching to the public, imploring us to have patience and show kindness. I think you should look within your own group and practice what you are asking of your constituents.

Thank you for your time,

Tammy Tod
3 Orchard Hill Dr.
Rutland, MA 01543

The contents of this e-mail, and any attachments, are the property of the Wachusett Regional School District, and subject to the Public Records Law, M.G.L. c.66, § 10.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding the urgent need to retire the current image of the Wachusett Regional High School mascot and the need to increase education on differences through an actively anti-racist curriculum. My name is Isabella LeBlanc and I live in Holden. I have attended schools in the Wachusett Regional School district since kindergarten. I began my educational career at Dr. Leroy E. Mayo Elementary School, went to Mountview Middle School, and am a current junior at Wachusett Regional High School. I have had very positive experiences in each of my schools, unlike some of my peers of various minority groups. I have never been silenced or faced prejudice by teachers or peers.

The absence of understanding racial and cultural divides is an immense problem. Education is paramount to truly expose the systematic hatred within our nation and own community. Our current mascot does not represent the current student body or the ideas we share with the changing world around us.

The current image of the mountaineer, is of a man who wears the clothing of a farmer with a rifle in his hand. The weapon is extended in a position as if ready to be fired and the man is in a defensive stance. At Wachusett, visitors are welcome as students learn about a myriad of different subjects and cultures. It seems ironic that Wachusett has the word welcome written in several languages on a wall near the auditorium entrance, yet by the entrance to the driveway we have the image of a threatening man with a weapon as if ready to intimidate any incoming visitors. There are countless talented students who can participate and collaborate to design a new improved image for the mascot.

To acknowledge a counter-argument, the Second Amendment Rights in the United States Constitution describes the individual right to keep and bear arms, which is irrelevant to the alteration of the Wachusett mascot. By removing the man's weapon the school in no way is changing its support and alignment with the Constitution and American ideals. Rather, realigning the mascot to the morale of the school and its students is crucial at this time.

A symbol should unify a body of people. A symbol unites one group of people and divides that group from outsiders. For example, the United States flag unites citizens from the fifty states, yet does not include citizens from other nations. The Wachusett mascot should unite all of the students, teachers, staff, and residents within the five towns. Through the past months, we learned that school is more than just what occurs between walls of a building, it transfers to homes and is found within students as they continue to enrich themselves from a distance. Change is never an easy task, yet tradition or heritage is never a strong enough excuse to remain in the habits or practices of our ancestors.

Wachusett's mountaineer mascot first appeared in 1955, the same year Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to change seats on a bus due to the color of her skin. The mountaineer appeared before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation and it was printed before the famous "I Have a Dream" speech was delivered. The mountaineer, imposed in 1955, was not created by or voted on by students at that time. The current mascot image represents only one type of person.

Injustices happen far too often in our country and recent attention has been called to these issues. Changing the mascot will not end racism and bigotry in the country, but every small adjustment contributes to a greater change for the better.

Section two of article twenty-six in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial

or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” Teachers and students at Wachusett strive to develop understanding and compassion for all individuals.

If just one student feels uncomfortable in or excluded from the Wachusett community, that is one student too many.

If we do nothing and do not make conscious changes, we support those who are opposed to inclusion and acceptance in the world. It is essential that immediate and productive action is taken to address racism.

We must ponder the following questions:

- Does the current image represent the diversity of Wachusett and does the image represent the cultural diversity in which our school wishes to embrace and celebrate?
- Will Wachusett address xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, and racism?
- To create change we must call upon experts to share insight and understanding with our community. How will we uphold professional suggestions for reform and have ongoing recognition of injustices in our school and community?
- Is white privilege recognized by the Wachusett community and are the discriminatory events that unfold every day understood?

Just because something always was or always has been does not make it right. An understanding of an abstract concept like anti-racism, tolerance, and the appreciation for diversity, without visible change is ultimately meaningless. When the mountaineer is rightfully changed, our work for the fight to equality is not done.

The paradox of administrators speaking about core values of Wachusett such as acceptance, kindness, and tolerance from a podium with the image of a man holding a weapon must be addressed. One cannot believe that all students will internalize rhetoric when it is not backed with action.

The majority of American public school systems, including ours, have fostered racist thought and have inadvertently raised racist young adults. These students unintentionally share racist messages and do not recognize the malice behind their words. For example, one Wachusett student said, “All I have to say about our mascot is there is nothing wrong with it... There is nothing to fight for at Wachusett.” This student does not understand the hate-filled dialogue that occurs every day at Wachusett Regional High School and the unequal challenges students of minority backgrounds face each time they attempt to be heard, enter a classroom discussion, or in social discourse. Education is paramount. It is the only way to break from the cycle of learning history from one side. From an early age, students must be taught how to question events and view situations from a variety of perspectives.

The current educational system and our mascot assist white-male students and alumni. Asking beneficiaries to speak for the oppressed will rarely work. We cannot expect the majority to stand up for the minority. Surveys are excellent tools to collect data, however, it is only logical that students in the racial majority will be indifferent to change. We are currently in a global pandemic, the nation is divided, and every endeavor is placed politically on either the left or right. Continuous education and the mascot change must occur simultaneously.

Through researching psychological and sociological patterns, studies demonstrate that teenagers are psychologically proven to be apathetic. Studies have shown that adults are able to have a deeper understanding of how others may feel in a situation, while teenagers’ responses are often self-focused. It is

unrealistic to propose that students will be able to unite to fight for a minority group of students without a solid anti-racist educational background. We cannot expect the students to rise above their biological instincts and patterns of behavior. Images one views on a daily basis subconsciously register in the mind and the subconscious brain is where decisions are made. An executive decision to retire the mascot is necessary. A consensus will not be reached by apathetic students with white privilege who are conditioned to the current image.

There are individuals who state that taking down an image erases history and we may be ignoring our past. In taking down images we are in no form erasing or rewriting history, instead, we are recognizing it, facing it head-on, and making an informed change for the present. In fact, by taking down monuments and old images each person who sees the change will be able to truly rethink history and his/her perspective. By removing the image that promotes only one group, we are honoring the work of the groups that have gone for years unrecognized and undervalued.

At Wachusett, if we truly wish to remember our history, we must first remember the land our school is built upon is the land of the Nipmuck tribe. The name of the school is "Wachusett," an Algonquian word, meaning "near the mountain" or "mountain place". To recognize our history we need to acknowledge that our ancestors have actually devastated the land of Native Americans and we rarely speak of this horrific invasion. Only two native tribes are recognized by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs in the state of Massachusetts today.

Our current mascot holds a pointed gun and although it will physically not damage a student, it mentally is degrading to our school's mission and individual mental clarity. The mascot promotes a patriarchal society which clearly does not represent the way the Wachusett Regional School District wishes to empower young women and minority groups. Those attached to an image cannot be ruled by nostalgia. Sentimental thought is entrenching and the reminiscent thoughts lack intention.

We make immediate change when it is necessary. We did not go to school for the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year to keep others safe. Although it was a challenge for each student in a unique way, administrators did not question the idea as health consequences were known. We can retire the mascot image and reform the curriculum if it is prioritized in the same way as mitigating COVID-19 and keeping students healthy physically and mentally.

We admirably remember historical figures who did the unexpected, who made drastic change, and were persistent in the pursuit of equal rights for humanity. Avoiding confrontation, staying apathetic, and not diligently looking for ways to assist others significantly degrade one's reputation, particularly when future generations look back upon the past and are dismayed by the lack of action. Strong leaders take responsibility for inequalities and issues that were not recognized. Individuals in leadership roles must make difficult, yet politically, ethically and morally correct decisions to which not everyone will agree.

In a conversation I had with Dr. McCall, he posed the question "Who owns the mascot?"

I now request that the school committee express its dissatisfaction with the current racist, sexist, and violent mascot image and call for a change.

I asked current Wachusett Regional High School students and alumni three questions:

1. How do you see Wachusett students reflected in the mountaineer?
2. What does being a mountaineer mean to you?

3. What qualities of a mountaineer are important for students to gain in their time at Wachusett?

I have anonymously included responses from individuals who agree and disagree with the notion of changing a mascot. I intended to ask unbiased and non-leading questions as to allow for the honest thoughts of each individual. In responses, I noted patterns of students and alumni recognizing how the current mountaineer does not encompass all members of the Wachusett Regional High School community, the need for reform in the educational system, and the need to address racism and other forms of discrimination.

Below are some articulate and pertinent responses to three questions pertaining to important qualities of Wachusett Regional High School students and the mascot's representation of the qualities and students:

1. How do you see Wachusett students reflected in the mountaineer?

- "As the diversity in Wachusett's student body grows I continue to see many students of color and minority students isolated by the image of the mountaineer. As a member of the LGBT community I feel that many students who are minorities due to their sexuality or race have seen their communities experience gun violence throughout history up until modern day. The image of the white mountaineer with a gun simply serves to recall this violent history to mind and ultimately isolated students."
- "Wachusett students reflect the mountaineer through their determination and endurance. It takes a lot to climb mountains and in each of our lives we have our own mountains. Wachusett students climb each of their mountains to the best of their ability and don't stop til they reach the top."

2. What does being a mountaineer mean to you?

- "Being one in a school of thousands... integrity, honesty, being a well-rounded student, and putting one's best effort forth."
- "Being determined and strong willed but it also means teamwork. Mountaineers don't climb mountains alone very often since it can be dangerous...to be part of something greater than yourself."
- "Being independent in my beliefs and having strength in will to stand by them, but also being open minded to discuss other viewpoints. It means being educated, unbiased, and understanding"

3. What qualities of a mountaineer are important for students to gain in their time at Wachusett?

- "The ability to work through conflicts peacefully, accept and care for others, and take responsibility of their own learning. Wachusett must do its best to prepare adults for the future, as citizens and voters. This should include teaching against bias and hatred."
- "I hope that Wachusett teaches students to expand their world views. Coming from the small town of Rutland, Wachusett was one of the first places I got the chance to experience different viewpoints and cultures. I think learning to respect and include all people is the most important thing to learn"
- "Respect for other people and to accept other people. To have confidence in themselves and to believe that they can do anything and that we should learn to be open minded."

General responses which did not directly answer one of the three questions, valuable thoughts to be considered:

- "I think that the logo and mascot don't represent the values that our school claims to support. The mountaineer is a gun toting hick, there's no other way to say it. He is shoeless, has a long beard and unkempt hair, and a shotgun. Our school claims to be modern and accepting, but when strangers drive into our parking lot, they're greeted by the mountaineer, and is that the face that our community wants to put forward?"
- "Being educated means not only having an extensive amount of knowledge about the world, its people, its past, and its numerous cultures, but also being aware and understanding of every individual."
- "[The mascot] is vaguely shaped like a swastika"

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding the urgent need to retire the current image of the Wachusett Regional High School mascot and the need to increase education on differences through an actively anti-racist curriculum.

I will begin by introducing myself to you. My name is Isabella LeBlanc and I live in Holden. I have attended schools in the Wachusett Regional School district since kindergarten. I began my educational career at Dr. Leroy E. Mayo Elementary School, went to Mountview Middle School, and am a current junior at Wachusett Regional High School. I have had very positive experiences in each of my schools, unlike some of my peers who are in various minority groups. I have never been silenced or faced prejudice by teachers or peers. Recently, I have begun to see and understand the disparities between racial groups in the criminal justice and educational systems across the United States. Through reading, I have learned of the horrific experiences, and nearly impossible challenges individuals face growing up without the privileges I have.

I am writing today to express my extreme concern about the current issues echoing around the United States and the lack of action on the behalf of students and administration at Wachusett Regional High School. The absence of understanding racial and cultural divides is an immense problem. Education is paramount to truly expose the systematic hatred within our nation and own community. One aspect I would like to concentrate on is the Wachusett mountaineer mascot. Our current mascot does not represent the current student body or the ideas we share with the changing world around us.

The current image of the mountaineer, which is mounted on a rock by the entrance to the high school and on many pieces of school spirit wear is of a man who wears the clothing of a farmer with a rifle in his hand. The weapon is extended in a position as if ready to be fired and the man is in a defensive stance. In my experience, Wachusett has a welcoming atmosphere, and visitors are welcome as students learn about a myriad of different subjects and cultures. It seems ironic that Wachusett has the word welcome written in several languages on a wall near the auditorium entrance, yet by the entrance to the driveway we have the image of a threatening man with a weapon as if ready to intimidate any incoming visitors.

To acknowledge a counter-argument, the Second Amendment Rights in the United States Constitution describes the individual right to keep and bear arms, which is irrelevant to the alteration of the Wachusett mascot. By removing the man's weapon the school in no way is changing its support and alignment with the Constitution and American ideals. Rather, realigning the mascot to the morale of the school and its students is crucial at this time.

A symbol should unify a body of people. A symbol unites one group of people and divides that group from outsiders. For example, the United States flag unites citizens from the fifty states, yet does not include citizens from other nations. The Wachusett mascot should unite all of the students, teachers, staff, and residents within the five towns. Through the past months, we learned that school is more than just what occurs between walls of a building, it transfers to homes and is found within students as they continue to enrich themselves from a distance. Change is never an easy task, yet tradition or heritage is never a strong enough excuse to remain in the habits or practices of our ancestors.

Wachusett's mountaineer mascot first appeared in 1955, the same year Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to change seats on a bus due to the color of her skin. The mountaineer appeared before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation and it was printed before the famous "I Have a Dream" speech was delivered.

The mountaineer, imposed in 1955, was not created by or voted on by students at that time. Through contacting local historians and the Gale Free and Worcester Public Libraries I have found only anecdotal evidence of the mountaineer's origins. The current mascot image represents only one type of person. A mascot should bring together all of the diverse aspects of the student body. Women are extremely underrepresented around the world. For instance, in the United States, on average, a woman is paid only 79% of a man's salary in an equivalent role (Li). Likewise, black men are about 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men. When arrested on average, black men receive sentences that are 19.1% longer than those of white men convicted for the same crimes. In the 2015-2016 school year, nationally, African-American students represented only 15% of total high-school students, yet made up 44% of students suspended more than one time, and were 36% of the students expelled (Niederberger). Our mascot appears to be a male caucasian which does not represent all students and staff of minority groups who attend and contribute to Wachusett Regional High School. We must be sensitive to include and value every individual.

Injustices happen far too often in our country and recent attention has been called to these issues as they have been recorded on video. Changing the mascot will not end racism and bigotry in the country, but every small adjustment contributes to a greater change for the better. Mother Teresa once said, "Small things done with great love will change the world." Every action that we do has a ripple effect and it is critical that the image that represents over two thousand students represents each and every student.

Section two of article twenty-six in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace." Teachers and students at Wachusett strive to develop understanding and compassion for all individuals. Students are ready to make adjustments and changes if it is morally necessary.

If just one student feels uncomfortable in or excluded from the Wachusett community, that is one student too many.

We must remember a symbol is a representation of a place, not the place itself. Wachusett's mascot should be welcoming and inclusionary not intimidating. There are countless talented students who can participate and collaborate to design a new improved image for the mascot. Symbols are powerful tools which evoke strong opinions and emotions. For example, if a confederate or nazi flag were to be hung, a strong response may erupt. Statues of Christopher Columbus and Robert E. Lee have been removed in many cities as they no longer represent citizens' ideals in their respective regions. Images one views on a daily basis subconsciously register in the mind and the subconscious brain is where decisions are made.

Mahatma Gandhi stated, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." If we do nothing and do not make conscious changes, we support those who are opposed to inclusion and acceptance in the world. It is essential that immediate and productive action is taken to address racism.

I understand the issue of anti-racism is controversial and surveys were administered last year for a mascot change, however, due to the circumstances in our nation, it is imperative that a change is made with urgency. We must ponder the following questions:

- Does the current image represent the diversity of Wachusett and does the image represent the cultural diversity in which our school wishes to embrace and celebrate?
- Will Wachusett address xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, and racism?

- To create change we must call upon experts to share insight and understanding with our community. How will we uphold professional suggestions for reform and have ongoing recognition of injustices in our school and community?
- Is white privilege recognized by the Wachusett community and are the discriminatory events that unfold every day understood?

When the mountaineer is rightfully changed, our work for the fight to equality is not done.

The image of the current mountaineer does not reflect Wachusett students in the twenty-first century. Just because something always was or always has been does not make it right. An understanding of an abstract concept like anti-racism, tolerance, and the appreciation for diversity, without visible change is ultimately meaningless.

I asked current Wachusett Regional High School students and alumni three questions:

1. How do you see Wachusett students reflected in the mountaineer?
2. What does being a mountaineer mean to you?
3. What qualities of a mountaineer are important for students to gain in their time at Wachusett?

The responses I have included at the bottom of this letter are recorded anonymously. I have included responses from individuals who agree and disagree with the notion of changing a mascot. In writing to my peers and recent alumni I intended to ask unbiased and non-leading questions as to allow for the honest thoughts of each individual.

Students feel passionately about the mountaineer mascot and have countless words, both of approval and disapproval for the image. Students wish to be heard and in hearing all students we must acknowledge the silent message from the mountaineer he subconsciously shouts to every passerby, "this school was founded by and made for people who reflect in my image." He is the negative stereotype of a Wachusett student from the 1950s, which no longer represents the 2020 students, alumni, or community members accurately.

In responses I received, I noted patterns of students and alumni recognizing how the current mountaineer does not encompass all members of the Wachusett Regional High School community. Students mentioned the need for reform in Wachusett's educational system and the need to address racism and other forms of discrimination among students. Students and alumni stated the mountaineer is representative as it demonstrates perseverance, determination, and camaraderie. These are skills students have and will gain throughout their time spent in high school as they prepare for the world beyond the Wachusett region.

The paradox of administrators speaking about core values of Wachusett such as acceptance, kindness, and tolerance from a podium with the image of a man holding a weapon must be addressed. One cannot believe that all students will internalize rhetoric when it is not backed with action.

A mountaineer is defined as a person who takes part in mountaineering (the act of climbing a mountain). Our current mascot does not look ready to climb a mountain as he is without any form of hydration and proper footwear.

The majority of American public school systems, including ours, have fostered racist thought and have inadvertently raised racist young adults. These students unintentionally share racist messages and do not

recognize the malice behind their words. For example, one Wachusett student said, "All I have to say about our mascot is there is nothing wrong with it... There is nothing to fight for at Wachusett." This student does not understand the hate-filled dialogue that occurs every day at Wachusett Regional High School and the unequal challenges students of minority backgrounds face each time they attempt to be heard, enter a classroom discussion, or in social discourse. Education is paramount. It is the only way to break from the cycle of learning history from one side. From an early age, students must be taught how to question events and view situations from a variety of perspectives.

Not all students see the ideological issues within the current mountaineer. When changed, some may initially be dismayed. The current educational system and our mascot assist white-male students and alumni. Asking beneficiaries to speak for the oppressed will rarely work. We can equate asking Wachusett students about the mountaineer to asking men of the twentieth century if women should have the right to vote or slave owners if slaves should be set free. We cannot expect the majority of students to stand up for the 11% of minority students at Wachusett Regional High School. Surveys are excellent tools to collect data, however, it is only logical that 89% of students in the racial majority will be indifferent to change (Wachusett). It is unrealistic to hope for a "groundswell" of students demanding this change. For the same reason that statues have been taken down without authorization, our mascot will not be changed unless minority groups and their allies are able to be clearly heard. We are currently in a global pandemic, the nation is divided, and every endeavor is placed politically on either the left or right. Continuous education and the mascot change must occur simultaneously.

Through researching psychological and sociological patterns, studies demonstrate that teenagers are psychologically proven to be apathetic. The medial prefrontal cortex, a region at the front of the brain, is still developing in teenagers. This region is responsible for higher-level thinking, empathy, and guilt. Studies have shown that adults are able to have a deeper understanding of how others may feel in a situation, while teenagers' responses are often self-focused. Over time, brain activity shifts from the back to the front and connections are made (Goudarzi). It is unrealistic to propose that over two thousand students will be able to unite to fight for a minority group of students without a solid anti-racist educational background. One Wachusett student said, "I'm just there to finish high school. I don't really care that much about that whole thing. We need to be diverse but at the end of the day we're just there to get through high school." Unfortunately, apathy is often one of the first reactions students will have. We cannot expect the students to rise above their biological instincts and patterns of behavior. An executive decision to retire the mascot is necessary. A consensus will not be reached by apathetic students with white privilege.

There are individuals who state that taking down an image erases history and we may be ignoring our past. In taking down these images we are in no form erasing or rewriting history, instead, we are recognizing it, facing it head-on, and making an informed change for the present. In fact, by taking down monuments and old images each person who sees the change will be able to truly rethink history and his/her perspective. By removing the image that promotes only one group, we are honoring the work of the groups that have gone for years unrecognized and undervalued.

At Wachusett, if we truly wish to remember our history, we must first remember the land our school is built upon is the land of the Nipmuck tribe. The name of the school is "Wachusett," an Algonquian word, meaning "near the mountain" or "mountain place". Our school sits upon land where the Nipmuc tribe once lived (Brooks). To recognize our history we need to acknowledge that our ancestors have actually devastated the land of Native Americans and we rarely speak of this horrific invasion. Only two native tribes are recognized by

the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs in the state of Massachusetts today. Those attached to an image cannot be ruled by nostalgia. Sentimental thought is entrenching and the reminiscent thoughts lack intention.

According to Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center based in Maryland, and the nation's leading child research organization, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among teenagers in the United States. It is alarming that the percentage of high school students considering suicide has increased by 25% and suicide rates have increased by 33% since 2009. Additionally, multi-racial students are the most likely to consider suicide as about one-quarter of students reported having considered it one year before being surveyed. Female students consider suicide about twice as often as racial male equivalents (Pane).

Our current mascot holds a pointed gun and although it will physically not damage a student, it mentally is degrading to our school's mission and individual mental clarity. The mascot promotes a patriarchal society which clearly does not represent the way the Wachusett Regional School District wishes to empower girls and young women and minority groups.

We make immediate change when it is necessary. We did not go to school for the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year to keep others safe. Although it was a challenge for each student in a unique way, administrators did not question the idea as it was known that students and their families could potentially need severe hospital care. We can retire the mascot image and reform the curriculum if it is prioritized in the same way as mitigating COVID-19 and keeping students healthy physically and mentally.

We admiringly remember historical figures who did the unexpected, who made drastic change, and were persistent in the pursuit of equal rights for humanity. Avoiding confrontation, staying apathetic, and not diligently looking for ways to assist others significantly degrade one's reputation, particularly when future generations look back upon the past and are dismayed by the lack of action.

Strong leaders take responsibility for inequalities and issues that were not recognized. Individuals in leadership roles must make difficult, yet politically, ethically and morally correct decisions to which not everyone will agree.

To summarize progress regarding the mascot change up to this point in time:

First, I spoke with Mr. Beando on July 1, he stated he would prefer to focus on student perspectives and transferred a decision on the mascot to Superintendent McCall. Mr. Beando invited me as the first member of a new Principal's Advisory Committee. Since this time, I have sent my ideas for the committee to Mr. Beando who continues to look for qualified student members for the committee.

I had a conversation with Dr. McCall on July 9, he agreed the mascot is not representative of all Wachusett students and requested I further develop my argument for changing the mascot. I sent this additional letter to him on July 15. Currently, Dr. McCall is clearly busy with developing plans for school reopening and will respond with steps moving forward once a decision has been made in regard to school this fall. The contents of this letter is a combination of my two letters previously sent to Dr. McCall.

In my conversation, Dr. McCall posed the question of "Who owns the mascot?"

I now request that the school committee express its dissatisfaction with the current racist, sexist, and violent mascot image and call for a change.

Responses to three questions pertaining to important qualities of Wachusett Regional High School students and the mascot's representation of the qualities and students:

1. How do you see Wachusett students reflected in the mountaineer?

- "I think the mountaineer makes us look less intelligent. We have a very smart student body but our mascot is a hillbilly with a gun that honestly looks homeless. I think it makes our school look foolish."
- "I am not really sure that it does. The mascot has been a tradition for many years, a representation of some people's high school spirit and identity. That being said, I do not feel that its portrayal of an armed white male represents me or my peers."
- "As the diversity in Wachusett's student body grows I continue to see many students of color and minority students isolated by the image of the mountaineer. As a member of the LGBT community I feel that many students who are minorities due to their sexuality or race have seen their communities experience gun violence throughout history up until modern day. The image of the white mountaineer with a gun simply serves to recall this violent history to mind and ultimately isolated students."
- "Wachusett students reflect the mountaineer through their determination and endurance. It takes a lot to climb mountains and in each of our lives we have our own mountains. Wachusett students climb each of their mountains to the best of their ability and don't stop til they reach the top."
- "It represents the perseverance of the students."
- "The mountaineer is our mascot, but I do not see students identify with it often, they instead associate with the school's name. At times, I cannot even remember what the mascot is, it isn't very prevalent at all, so it is hard to see anything reflected in the mountaineer."
- "The mountaineer reflects diligence and determination, as well as humble beginnings"
- "I don't see students reflected in the mountaineer"
- "I see Wachusett students as exemplifying the work ethic and individualism of the mountaineer, but also being lost and stuck in their ways without proper guidance."
- "Being a mountaineer to me means following what the school stands for, being responsible and open to all and working hard to achieve what you want. And I think those are the qualities students should learn from Wachusett, because I think being hardworking and able to communicate and open to all ideas is important in life."
- "I don't feel that the Wachusett students are represented by the mascot at all."
- "The mountaineer represents our students perfectly because mountaineers were strong resourceful and smart people which is exactly what we should strive to be."
- "I suppose that I see a common theme of perseverance in both the mountaineer and the Wachusett students. Both are working hard to reach a goal, or multiple goals, and they will be rewarded for their hard work and effort."

2. What does being a mountaineer mean to you?

- "I've never really associated myself with that label. I'm a student that went to that school but I'm not really a mountaineer."
- "Being a mountaineer means being one in a school of thousands. Ideally, it symbolizes integrity, honesty, being a well-rounded student, and putting one's best effort forth."
- "Being a mountaineer means pioneering inclusivity, progress and change. The entirety of Wachusett emphasizes empathy and diversity and sadly I do not see this reflected in the current mascot."
- "It means being determined and strong willed but it also means teamwork. Mountaineers don't climb mountains alone very often since it can be dangerous. To be a mountaineer means to be part of something greater than yourself."

- "Being a mountaineer to me means that I am able to get over obstacles that I am faced with. I also think being a mountaineer is important because it means I am part of this great community."
- "Being a mountaineer means that you work hard no matter the circumstance"
- "In the symbolic sense, I'd like to think it represents working through adversity."
- "Being a mountaineer means that I'm a part of the Wachusett community and have a responsibility to do good."
- "Being a mountaineer means that I am part of the Wachusett community and I must work hard to uphold the values of said community."
- "It doesn't really mean anything to me, it's just a mascot"
- "Being a mountaineer to me means being independent in my beliefs and having strength in will to stand by them, but also being open minded to discuss other viewpoints. It means being educated, unbiased, and understanding"
- "Being a mountaineer means being a part of a community that is full of people from different backgrounds."

3. What qualities of a mountaineer are important for students to gain in their time at Wachusett?

- "A good education, compassion, empathy, and a greater understanding of the world at large"
- "It is important for students to gain the ability to work through conflicts peacefully, accept and care for others, and take responsibility of their own learning. Wachusett must do its best to prepare adults for the future, as citizens and voters. This should include teaching against bias and hatred."
- "I hope that Wachusett teaches students to expand their world views. Coming from the small town of Rutland, Wachusett was one of the first places I got the chance to experience different viewpoints and cultures. I think learning to respect and include all people is the most important thing to learn at Wachusett"
- "I would say determination to face everything life throws at us is important for students to take with them after they leave Wachusett."
- "The important qualities of a mountaineer that the students should gain at their time at Wachusett are respect for other people and to accept other people. To have confidence in themselves and to believe that they can do anything and that we should learn to be open minded."
- "Perseverance and a sense of confidence. I think Wachusett sets up the students very well for life beyond high school. In addition, I think the high school allows students to become comfortable asking for help when they feel that they need to do so."
- "Definitely perseverance through all the hard trials, and individuality because at Wachusett it may seem hard to be an individual when a lot of people act and look the same"
- "Hardworking, friendly"
- "Resilience, determination, and the ability to work hard."
- "Clearly, being educated is the main goal, since it is a learning institution. This means that mountaineers should gain the skills necessary to remain honest and knowledgeable. Which means recognizing the past as a tool to learn from, not something to hide."
- "Independence, responsibility, etc. things necessary for growth into the adult world to be a functional human that contributes to society"
- "It is important for students to learn the work ethic, self-confidence, practicality, and being a part of nature and the community from the mountaineer."
- "Perseverance, courage, accountability, independence, problem solving skills, and critical thinking skills."
- "Kindness and respect for others"

- “We come to be educated. To formulate our own opinions about the world based on clear analytical thinking. It is where we come to learn the history of the cultures in the world, and to accept and learn from their failures and to celebrate their successes.”
- “The mountaineer is a symbol of tenacity. It is important for students to learn to be tenacious, especially in times like these”

More general responses which did not directly answer one of the three questions, but are valuable thoughts and need to be considered:

- “[One issue is] the racist students that walk the halls without consequences. We need to worry about the uneducated white teenagers yelling the n-word.”
- “I think that the logo and mascot don’t represent the values that our school claims to support. The mountaineer is a gun toting hick, there’s no other way to say it. He is shoeless, has a long beard and unkempt hair, and a shotgun. Our school claims to be modern and accepting, but when strangers drive into our parking lot, they’re greeted by the mountaineer, and is that the face that our community wants to put forward?”
- “It’s literally just an ugly mascot that our school probably paid some terrible designer 70 years ago”
- “It paints us white people as country hicks”
- “[The mascot] is vaguely shaped like a swastika”
- “My mascot may not be ‘as up to date’ with current beliefs and ethical beliefs, but he represents not only my current peers and the administrators of this school, but past generations as well. Being a mountaineer means being able to think about things with a clear head .”
- “It should be viewed as a reminder of past mistakes and successes, and a symbol of how far the student body has come and how it accepts and understands how things have become the way they are”
- “The stereotype of a poorer, southern person is offensive and the gun opposes the welcoming message”
- “Being educated means not only having an extensive amount of knowledge about the world, its people, its past, and its numerous cultures, but also being aware and understanding of every individual... Instead use rational thinking and logical reasoning to discuss things in a democratic and equal way using peaceful communication. It means understanding all aspects and perspectives and being able to empathize with numerous situations.”

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Student Rep intro

Kathryn Mangus Senior

Hello everyone, I want to begin by thanking you all for your time. When the Diversity, equity and anti-racism subcommittee was formed several students asked to share their thoughts with the subcommittee. Due to subcommittee laws and the current remote situation having all the students speak was impossible. However, their voices still deserved to be heard- so as a student rep I created a google form where students could write in their thoughts about racism in the wachusett district. Many students also emailed or direct messaged me to have conversations on racism and how it affects children in our schools. Students in grades from 5th- post grad all wrote in about their experiences. Fifty students wrote in for their thoughts that were read to the subcommittee on the 8th however Chair Weeks asked that I select a few to share with the entire committee. The entire document of all responses should be shared with the committee but, if it is not please email me and I would be happy to send it to you. I thank you all again for working to make our district Anti-racist and hope we can make Wachusett a better community for our students of color. Please email me with comments and concerns at kathrynmandus21@wrsdk12.net.

Anonymous

8th Grade Chocksett

I attend Chocksett Middle School. I am white, however I noticed instances of racism and it hurts me to see that and has motivated me to try to make a difference. At Chocksett there are “core values” and these are constantly talked about in school and pushed on students. I feel as though none of these core values talk about equality. It may help if they did or if equality was a core value in itself so that more awareness about anti-racism is spread. Even if equality isn’t made a core value at Chocksett, I still feel that anti-racism needs to be talked about more. It also should be taught and practiced in classrooms. Equality is a belief that doesn’t just affect school, it affects the rest of students lives and should be taught at a young age.

Anonymous

Senior Wachusett

I think that teachers should be more aware of what they're saying to students. They're teachers who are supposed to teach students how to be good people so it's especially harmful when they say ignorant things. There's one thing especially that sticks out in my mind. I clearly remember because it was so blatantly ignorant even though it happened over a year ago. Last year there was a student in one of my classes who had Hispanic heritage. This teacher was especially problematic, she even slut shamed celebrities in front of the class so honestly i'm not surprised, she would also get extremely irritated and be rude to students over the smallest things. Once in class she gave really confusing instructions so we kept asking her to repeat it. When this student asked her to repeat instructions that were unclear still and she said something along the lines of “How many times do I have to say it for you to understand? Do you need me to say it in Spanish for you??” It was honestly shocking and the whole class was literally silent. The student was

obviously uncomfortable. I'm not sure if it was her intention to be racist but as I said, teachers should hold themselves to a greater level of responsibility. Their position is teaching the future of America. I literally couldn't believe a teacher would say that to a student and humiliate them in front of the whole class. Anyways my point is like after that experience teachers need to understand the consequences of things they say.

I have faced so many microaggressions and witnessed other poc experience them as well. If necessary teachers should be educated on what microaggressions are because it is hard to understand them sometimes if you have never experienced them yourself! Not only teachers but also students. Once in my homeroom I was asking another student in my class questions about the different Chinese empires. Another girl overheard and said, "Shouldn't you know that??? You're chinese." Which again to her maybe it didn't seem offensive but microaggressions are not always obviously racist. Not all Asians are Chinese, and just because I have heritage from another country doesn't mean I know the entire history of that country. I was literally born in America and have gone to that country twice in my whole life. But just because I don't look "white" the student just assumed I knew everything about my "other country" which really threw me off guard and I really didn't know how to respond.

Anonymous

Senior, Wachusett

Racism and racist language is far too common at Wachusett. As a white student, I have been told to "put some pants on the n-word" by a group of laughing boys when I quietly walked on the school sidewalk wearing shorts. I've heard my classmates scream the n-word in the cafeteria and receive no discipline, despite the multiple adults within earshot. One of my friends immigrated to America when she was in Elementary school. Within her first week at Wachusett, she heard the boy next to her joking suggest that they should line up all of the immigrants - legal or illegal - and shoot them in the head. Imagine a person you just met, suggesting that you and your family should be murdered. This conversation happened directly in front of the teacher. No one said anything. There needs to be an emphasis on teaching the origin of certain racial slurs and their place in dehumanizing others. Teach why they are wrong. Teach students the hard and horrifying truth of these words - history can not be ignored or else it will be repeated. We need to eliminate the ignorance and disregard for others that's so common in this sheltered school. There needs to be a stated emphasis on reporting these incidents and a verbal outline of what happens if these incidents occur. Have students hold each other accountable. Speak on the importance of coming to administration and normalize it, many students never report things for fear of retaliation. Others don't believe the system works or cares. I'm glad the school has formed an anti-racism committee and hope it brings real change.

Anonymous

Senior, Wachusett

As a white student at Wachusett, I might see racism less than a student who isn't white. The main thing that I have seen at the high school is the use of the N-word by primarily white students. I

think that this is highly inappropriate, especially hearing it being screamed across a room or out loud for "fun" when no administration does anything to stop the use of this language. Other racial slurs aren't uncommon at the school. These mainly come from the same students who like to use the N-word, thinking that it makes them cool or funny. At WRHS and maybe even starting before, we should be taught about the divides that have been caused by race and learn to be sensitive to others and not use language or actions that specifically targets one student or group of students. Many white students are allies who stand with their non-white peers in reprimanding this behavior, but it does scare me the amount of hatred that some other students possess (towards a certain race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc). We should be taught against hate and to work together as one species rather than many different races and other subcategories, along with learning of the oppression that minority races and other groups have faced throughout history (and, of course, why these actions are wrong). Personally, I only know of one black teacher at the high school. I know that the school has to hire whoever they can find to teach the positions needed, but many underclassmen of color that I have talked to wish that they had more teachers like them that they can go to for support in a high school where the majority of students are white. I think that WRHS wanting to form a club or committee of students of color to check in and make sure that they are taking better actions at the school against racism is a wonderful idea. I will stand up to hate and bigotry at the high school whenever I see it and try my best to actively stop these incidents from happening with the knowledge that I currently have (most of it from social media and reading outside of school, which I think says a lot in itself).

Elise

Senior Wachusett

Each year in English class, I have read a book that includes racial slurs (examples include "Of Mice and Men" and Huckleberry Finn). When we read this book aloud, I have seen students say the slurs out loud. I have also seen teachers brush this off and not talk about the history of this word. I think it's important that teachers talk about the history of racial slurs and how saying them is harmful to black students. I think that if students learn this in class, they also understand how it is wrong to use racial slurs in and outside of school. I believe teachers need to also be aware by only including readings by white males the message they are subconsciously sending to students. The message is that females of POC cannot make great works of literature. I also think this limits the perspective students receive and therefor, limits student education

Anonymous

Post Grad

Hello, I am an alumna of Wachusett Regional High School and want to share my experiences and observations with the many different social issues here at the high school. First and foremost: racism. Wachusett is 92% white and therefore, even if people don't realize, caters

to this white majority. As a white woman myself, I had the privilege of not being directly affected by this, but I know plenty of people who have and would like to speak on behalf of them so that their stories can be heard. As I moved up through the high school, I noticed these microaggressions more and more: students would drive in with Confederate flags tied to their trucks and face no consequences, everyone would turn and glance at the one or two black people in the room whenever we talked about slavery and civil rights during history class, posters hung up on the wall that say "Shoot 'em up Wachusett," and black people would get stopped in the hallway way more than white people. Furthermore, there is only one black teacher in the entire school, and people always tell her she looks like Michelle Obama simply because she is black and shares her name, which perpetuates the stereotype that "all black people look the same." During my senior year, one issue in particular took place that I'm sure everyone has heard about because of how bad it was and how bad the administration handled it, but a girl in my graduating class sent some very racist comments to another girl in my class, saying she looked like a "proboscis monkey," with a "nose being the shape of a legit penis and having eyes that don't open," and adding that she'll "drop my cat off later as a peace offering and so you don't starve tonight." She also posted a photo on social media of a cat in a paper bag with the caption "chinese take out?" which she and her friends proceeded to kick. This year, with everything going on with the Black Lives Matter Movement, the racism at this school has become even more clear. A student, in answering a question about how we can solve police brutality, said "Well having a black male dead is a[s] normal as most black people are the ones to commit the crime. They have given themselves that and that is their fault. They can change their ways of being who they are." Administration has proven to be horrible in dealing with these issues as well. In the whole situation my senior year, administration did barely anything to punish the girl who said all the racist comments and they also still punished the girl who received the comments who was trying to stand up for herself since she knew administration wouldn't help at all. A student who is a couple years older than me also remembers that she and her friends, while just sitting at a table in the cafeteria, would often get passed by the police officer on duty, who would stare at them, grab her taser, then let go once she walked by. One of her friends would also get stopped repeatedly in the hallway when he was doing nothing wrong, just because he was black and "looked suspicious." In fact, administration has been so bad about choosing who they stop in the hallway based on looks that I learned throughout my four years that, had I wanted to, I could have easily left the building at any time in broad daylight and nobody would stop or question me simply because of the way that I looked and carried myself. Finally, I myself felt very uncomfortable having police officers at the school in the first place, especially now that they carry guns, and I know I'm not the only one. The Holden Police Station is right across the street, if there is an actual problem that needs police they can get there pretty fast, so students should not have to feel threatened by a man walking around with a gun at all times, judging them based on the color of their skin, how they dress, etc.

Beyond racism, Wachusett has many other social justice issues. For instance, sexism is also a huge problem at the school. I have experienced it by Wachusett students twice this summer alone, and I have graduated and therefore don't spend much time with a lot of Wachusett

students anymore, and I know that many other girls, past and present, at Wachusett faced similar problems and have constantly been objectified by men. In my class, I heard about a “nude collection” that some of the boys had in which they shared girls’ nudes with each other and ranked them from “common” to “rare.” I don’t know if the administration knew about it, but if they did they didn’t do anything. Other than the way students treat each other, however, the way administration deals with it and talks about it isn’t great either. While some points of the dress code do make sense such as wearing pants, shirts, shoes, etc and not hiding your face, some parts are very pointed towards girls such as “tops without straps or that reveal midriffs” and “backless shirts.” These rules imply that it is okay to objectify women based on the way that they dress. I have seen boys show up to school events not wearing a shirt and not facing any consequences for it, so why should girls be prohibited from wearing a crop top, a strapless shirt, or a backless shirt on a hot day if they feel like it? Furthermore, while I certainly agree that the Self Defense for Women class is needed and I appreciate it being offered by the school, the school shouldn’t just be teaching girls how to defend ourselves; they should also be teaching boys how to respect women. It’s not enough to just treat the symptom of the problem, it will only be solved once we get to the root.



Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Fwd: Indigenous Peoples Day

1 message

Megan Weeks <megan_weeks@wrsd.net>

Mon, Sep 14, 2020 at 10:07 PM

To: Rebecca Petersen <rebecca_petersen@wrsd.net>

Megan K Weeks, M.Ed
Chair WRSD School Committee
Assistant Principal, Murdock High School

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Emily Miller** <emilycorday@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Sep 14, 2020 at 7:10 PM

Subject: Indigenous Peoples Day

To: <questions@wrsd.net>

Hello,

As a parent of a second grader in the district, I am writing to express my support for changing the name of Columbus Day. We should not be glorifying a murderer. Students in this district still learn that this man "discovered" America and see him as a hero. We need to stop teaching inaccurate history. Changing the name of this holiday is a move in the right direction.

Thank you,

Emily Miller

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