

January 21, 2021

A special meeting of the Westfield School Committee was held on Thursday, January 21, 2021, at 6:00 pm remotely (due to COVID-19 crisis). Members present by roll call were: Ramon Diaz, Diane Mayhew, Bo Sullivan, Cindy Sullivan, Tim O'Connor, and Chairman Humason. At 5:04 pm Heather Sullivan entered the meeting.

At 5:00 pm Chairman Humason called the meeting to order.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Public participation, excluding personnel:

Vice Chair Tim O'Connor stated that last week, due to time constraints, the public participation emails were not read but were included in the minutes. Tonight's meeting time has been extended and all public participation emails will be read.

Diane Mayhew read the following emails:

Erin Fahey Carrier, Glenwood Drive, Westfield

Over the course of the year you have been tasked with making many decisions regarding our children that I am sure you never thought you would have to make. Tonight will be no exception as you consider the winter athletic season.

As the parent of a downhill ski racer, I ask that you take a few things into consideration as you begin your deliberations.

First, tonight you may decide to return to phase one of the school reopening plan with only certain groups attending in person learning. Remember that in the fall, during phase one, **sports continued**. Winter sports deserve the same consideration and should be allowed if we are in fact at phase one.

Second, the MIAA worked with Medical experts, DESE representatives, sporting officials, and school representatives to create the guidelines to ensure that winter sports are safe. While we have expertise here in Westfield, the MIAA guidelines were created by a Task Force whose sole charge was to determine if winter sports could be modified to follow all health and safety guidelines. They did not spend a few minutes on this topic, they spent weeks of diligent work creating a program that would be safe for our athletes to participate in. And if they did not feel it was safe, they voted to cancel or move that season. Their expertise has guided the vast majority of school committees across our region who have overwhelmingly voted to participate. You need to respect the opinion of this 24-person panel, not just the opinion of our one local expert.

Third, at last night's Board of Health meeting Mr. Rouse hypothesized that the current situation in Westfield with high numbers was the result of Christmas gatherings. Covid was spread when groups gathered in private homes without following known mitigation strategies. He did not say our numbers are the result of basketball games with players in masks, or hockey events with supervised social distancing and certainly not from downhill skiing. He said our numbers are high because people aren't doing what we all know needs to happen – namely wear masks when you are around people from other households and practice social distancing whenever possible. If you want to ensure kids are safe, then allow sports. They will be supervised, socially distant, and wearing masks. That will keep them safe!

Jessica Merriam, Russellville Rd, Westfield, MA

Has the topic of having only the younger grade levels return to school been discussed? I know other towns take this into consideration, and was wondering if Westfield has also. Remote learning is difficult for each and every student, but I can't help but think the youngest kids are suffering in ways that older kids may not be. I am worried about the delay in essential skills such as reading and writing in these younger kids. The fact that they do not have these skills already, also compounds how difficult remote learning is for them (and us).

Obviously the decisions you make are not easy, and you've been making good ones so far. I just want to make sure this option has been brought up and discussed.

Connor Carrier, Glenwood Drive, Westfield, MA

My name is Connor Carrier and I live at 113 Glenwood drive. Two years ago I stood before you to propose giving students at Westfield Tech an opportunity to ski. Last year you allowed Westfield High and Westfield Tech to ski together. Now I'm asking you to look at skiing and its ability to be socially distant. MIAA has released its guidelines and they change very little for us racers. Things like masks and staying far apart are already normal to us. Now with the lack of spectators and lack of the lodge we won't be around others and we won't even be inside. When you do come to a final decision I hope to look at every aspect of our sport. Thank you.

Jackie Rudzik, Pine Street, Westfield, MA

I am a stay at home mom who feels that school is so important and think of all the experiences all the kids are missing by not being in school. I do want my daughter, who's in the 7th grade at the middle school, to go back to school as soon as possible. A lot of other moms I talk to and myself all think it's still too soon to send them back and would be putting them all at risk with how high the city/state numbers are and that continue to grow. I really hope you will consider keeping them home until at least after February vacation and see during that time how things are. I think it would be a really big mistake to take all these kids who mostly carry the virus and will then infect all their families and put them all back together at school even with the precautions being taken they just aren't enough. I feel that people's family's lives are more important than rushing the kids back to school to make things more convenient for parents who work during the day. This is a hard time for everyone and I just hope and pray the committee says the pros and cons of it and will see it's just not worth it and it's too early to send these kids back to school. There is a mutated strain that in the US that infects at a 70% faster rate which makes this decision even more important.

Jenn McCaffrey, High Street, Westfield, MA

Can there be talk about separating out the IEP pull out kids for a sooner return as well? b/c my IEP child is basically failing this year without in-person learning, especially for math and reading. I can't imagine there aren't other kids in the same situation. IEP students should be their own cohort of and should be included in the early return.

Marcia Scanlon, Jessie Lane, Westfield, MA

Good morning Westfield School Committee,

I am the mother of two girls who play for the Longmeadow High School (LHS) co-op ice hockey team. I believe it is unfair and unhealthy to restrict the Westfield

girls from playing in this week's games, including tonight's game. I implore you to change your decision. Fifteen other school committees on our schedule have made the right decision to allow players to compete with safety guards in place. Why sideline our players?

The rationale for not allowing Westfield girls to play in this week's games is unclear to the parents. If it is to treat the boys and girl's teams equally, you are falling far short. They are in different leagues and therefore do not have the same start and end dates. Only considering the boy's ice hockey schedule and by ignoring the girls schedule, you are significantly reducing the number of games for our children. On the other hand, the boy's ice hockey team will benefit by playing a full schedule in their league. How is this treating the girl's team fairly? This is a clear example of subpar treatment of girls' sports. The girls team only has 11 scheduled games. Waiting for your next decision on Thursday cuts this number down significantly. A better and more fair approach would be to allow all teams to start competitive play when their league starts.

School has been in session for over 4 months. Do you know how many days my girls have physically been in the high school to learn? The answer is eleven. Eleven days to interact with classmates and teachers directly. This means that for 6 hours/day, five days a week, for 4 consecutive months they have been isolated alone in their bedrooms. I don't need to tell you the impact of how that affects their physical and mental health. Their only safe outlet is competitive team sports. You are harming the girls you serve, their team, and the competitiveness of the league by not allowing them to play. There is no scientific evidence to sideline them from today's game. As parents we are fully aware and ultimately responsible for the risks to our children. I understand that this may seem trivial to you with the larger world issues going on, but it is not to them. Please read their emails and you will gain a better understanding of the importance. Please reverse your decision and allow them to play in tonight's game. They should not have to cheer on their team from the parking lot.

Ralph Figy, Brookline Avenue, Westfield, MA

Good evening, I would like to weigh in on allowing sports to begin in earnest. I do not see an issue with allowing Winter Sports to begin tomorrow. As a Fall Coach, I found my athletes were very cognizant of the ramifications of someone on the Team getting sick. We were able to complete a successful season with no athletes or their siblings becoming infected I Know that Cross Country was outdoors but the protocols for all teams are the same. The protocols are in place, and they are extensive, for the safety of the athletes and coaches. They are well thought out and if implemented correctly will protect the athletes and the coaches.

In light of the testing positive rate of less than 6% I do not feel that starting sports would make athletes and coaches to be at a greater risk of infection. If an athlete does test positive, the protocols in place would automatically isolate the athlete and his teammates in their cohort. I trust our Administrators to monitor this and to do what is in the best interest of our Student Athletes and their Coaches.

I respect the decision that you will make tonight and appreciate the magnitude of your deliberations. Your concern for the safety of both athletes and coaches. In light of everything, I would like to say that I am on record for allowing Winter Sports to proceed.

Thomas Curran, Highland View Street, Westfield, MA

Two-part question:

1. Doctor Fauci says kids should be back in school and that Covid-19 doesn't transmit from kids as easily as we thought back in March, if we are following what he and the CDC are recommending, like we did closing the schools down in March, then why aren't we opening them now?
2. If we have schools across Massachusetts that have been back in school since August and they haven't had any serious outbreaks or in some cases none at all, like St. Mary's here in Westfield, how can you honestly say that it isn't safe enough for our kids to return to school full time instead of hybrid?

James A. Rae, Sunrise Terrace, Westfield, MA

Mr. Mayor and Distinguished Leaders,

I am writing you all in regards to the vote this evening on the feasibility of allowing athletic competition for our WHS student athletes. As a proud parent of Senior Mackenzie Rae (Assistant Captain-LHS Girls Hockey Co-Op), I want to first thank you all for your efforts over the last several months in dealing with Covid. You have been tasked with managing and leading our City and School system through a major pandemic and cuts to our budgets. A task that is well appreciated by myself and my family, thank you all for your time, energy and sound leadership. With that said, I would like to present you with information in regards to ice hockey, that I feel is pertinent to assisting you in your decision making process. There are currently several guidelines that the boys/girls hockey players, coaches and staffs have to adhere to (Mass Governor's Office/State Health Department/USA Hockey/NIHOA/Local Rink Policies and others). To be quite honest, we are fortunate leadership. I haven't seen this level of guidance and partnership with several other sports over the last several months.

The partnership between USA Hockey and State/Federal agencies is important for this conversation because most of our student athletes play club hockey simultaneously with High School hockey (prior and during the winter season). Each weekend and a couple times a week, they join players from other towns and even states, as teammates and opponents. While they understand the risks associated, they do it because they follow the guidelines without fail. I will admit that I am not a health expert or professional, but I have read several articles and followed the metrics to be able to make decisions when it comes to my children's safety. My feeling is that if the student athletes and staffs follow the recommended protocols, the risk of infection is dramatically mitigated and they can enjoy both school and extracurricular activities. Some of our girls have offered to voluntarily go Full Remote learning during the season in order to keep themselves sequestered from the student body and prevent an outbreak.

All I ask is that you take the given the examples above and the fact that most of our Westfield students (not just athletes) engage in activities outside of the Westfield bubble, into your decision making process. There are always going to be risks associated in everything we do until the pandemic subsides, but the personal tolls/challenges that we and our students have faced are causing learning gaps, development challenges and mental health issues. Our administrators and teachers have had to change their style and methodology (very successfully), but I am certain that they will attest that our children have suffered a great amount since last March. Lastly, I am making a plea that we look at opening up all school and

extracurricular activities under the strictest of guidelines and cancel where we see spikes or non-compliance. We owe it to our children and need to look for ways forward.

Mayor Humason thanked everyone for their emails. He reminded everyone that comments can be submitted to the School Committee by sending an email to: schoolcomm@schoolsofwestfield.org.

3. 1st reading waived and 2nd/final reading, by title only, of policy File: JLCB-R Administrative Regulations Regarding Immunizations of Students: Diane Mayhew moved, Ramon Diaz seconded to waive the first reading and have a 2nd/final reading, by title only, of policy File: JCBR-R Administrative Regulations Regarding Immunizations of Students.

The following roll call vote was taken:

	<u>Y</u>	<u>N</u>
Ramon Diaz	X	
Diane Mayhew	X	
Bo Sullivan	X	
Cindy Sullivan	X	
Heather Sullivan	X	
Tim O'Connor	X	
Chairman Humason	<u>X</u>	
	7	0 motion passes

2. Westfield Public Schools Back to School Plan
a. January 19 return to the Hybrid Model
Stefan Czapowski updated the committee on the WPS Back to School Plan and the number of cases in the schools.

Joe Rouse reported on the COVID-19 numbers. He stated that the numbers were down this week, compared to the last two weeks. Also, that we still needed the two weeks to see how things go. The proposed meeting on January 28, 2021 is needed to review the cases and see if we can return to the hybrid model on February 1, 2021.

A discussion took place on the A & B week calendar and equity in A & B week assignments. After discussion, it was decided to have the Superintendent research the situation to see if a change in the calendar was necessary.

Diane Mayhew moved, Heather Sullivan seconded to the following:

- To return to the hybrid model on February 1, 2021
- All students to return to school, in person, every other week A & B week
- To start with a Cohort A week

The following roll call vote was taken:

	<u>Y</u>	<u>N</u>
Diane Mayhew	X	
Bo Sullivan	X	
Cindy Sullivan	X	

Heather Sullivan	X	
Ramon Diaz	X	
Tim O'Connor	X	
Chairman Humason	<u>X</u>	
	7	<u>0</u> motion passes

Bo Sullivan expressed his displeasure with the schedule for the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. He stated that teachers will not receive the vaccination until Level 2 and this is very unreasonable because we are trying to get students back to school.

b. Athletics

Athletic Director Ryan Dunphy was in attendance and addressed the committee regarding winter sports. Winter Sports include: Skiing, Swimming, Hockey, and Basketball.

Ryan proposed two (2) different options to the committee for consideration:

1. Continue with Winter Athletics. Follow the EEA guidelines along with the MIAA modifications.
2. Continue with Winter Athletics. Follow the EEA guidelines and MIAA modifications but consider limiting or eliminating spectators.

Cindy Sullivan moved, Ramon Diaz seconded to allow Westfield Public Schools Athletics to move forward with competition for Winter Sports, based on the MIAA and the PVIAC guidelines and restricting spectators to two (2) family members per athlete effective January 22, 2021.

The following roll call vote was taken:

	<u>Y</u>	<u>N</u>
Bo Sullivan	X	
Cindy Sullivan	X	
Heather Sullivan	X	
Ramon Diaz	X	
Diane Mayhew	X	
Tim O'Connor	X	
Chairman Humason	<u>X</u>	
	7	<u>0</u> motion passes

At 6:31 pm Ramon Diaz moved, Cindy Sullivan seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Stefan Czaporowski, Superintendent of Schools
Clerk – Westfield School Committee

A true copy, Attest:

Diane Mayhew, secretary
Westfield School Committee