

JANUARY 13, 2025
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

The Waterloo Region District School Board held a Committee of the Whole Meeting this evening at 7:00 p.m. in the Education Centre Boardroom, with the following members in attendance: M. Radlein (Chairperson), B. Cody, S. Estoesta*, C. Johnson, J. Meissner*, S. Piatkowski, M. Ramsay, M. Waseem*, C. Watson, J. Weston and K. Woodcock.

*Virtual Attendance

Student Trustees D. Lakhanpal and F. Luo were in attendance.

The following senior administration members were in attendance: S. Miller (Interim Director of Education and Secretary), L. Agar, M. Armellini, E. Dougan-McKenzie, A. Gaymes-San Vicente, N. Landry, B. Lemon and C. Sagar.

Other staff in attendance: M. Mayer and S. Reidel.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson M. Radlein called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

1. Moved by K. Woodcock, seconded by C. Johnson:

That the agenda of the January 13, 2025, Committee of the Whole Meeting be approved.

-Carried-

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairperson M. Radlein visited Preston High School.

DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

DELEGATIONS

There were no delegations scheduled for this meeting.

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY G201 - TRUSTEE CODE OF CONDUCT

Trustee J. Weston shared that the Policy Working Group reviewed the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) recommendations and for ease of reading, inserted the new sections from OPSBA template rather than edit each line of the existing policy.

Trustee M. Waseem joined the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Trustees asked questions regarding the use of an Integrity Commissioner and the benefits of membership in OPSBA.

2. Moved by J. Weston, seconded by S. Piatkowski:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board approve Board Policy G201 - Trustee Code of Conduct as presented at the January 13, 2025, Committee of the Whole Meeting.

-Carried-

REPORTS

INTERIM FINANCIAL REPORT AND FORECAST

This report was provided for information.

The information in this report was based on financial results up to November 30, 2024 (Q1). Consistent with the approved budget for 2024-2025, we expect the WRDSB to finish the year in a balanced position; this was confirmed through the submission of our revised estimates to the Ministry of Education on December 13, 2024. The following is a list of risks and challenges that staff will closely monitor:

- Staff replacement costs (short-term sick leave)
- Enrolment fluctuations
- Variances in energy consumption (utilities) and associated costs
- Ministry announcements

Trustees asked questions regarding PCard monitoring, Special Equipment Amount and Other Grant Revenue and Other Non-Operating Expenses. With a current reduction of 347 students from last year, trustees asked questions regarding funding for declining enrolment and the impact on school utilization which is minimal at approximately 2-3 students less per school. It was noted that budgets are closely monitored and as the WRDSB remains on track for a balanced budget, it would not be necessary to hire a third party to find savings.

MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS QUARTERLY UPDATE

This report was provided for information.

Current capital priority projects with budgets greater than \$2.5M were outlined to indicate the project status relative to the schedule, budget, and scope. Significant milestones, along with basic project statistics, were also presented.

Trustees asked questions regarding the timing of the projects' completion.

GRAND RIVER TRANSIT BUS PASS VERBAL UPDATE

This update was provided for information.

Senior Manager L. Agar shared that as a result of the January 2023 motion requesting the exploration of feasibility of providing free bus passes for secondary students and students between the ages of 4 and 14, staff have participated in a number of discussions with the Region of Waterloo and in the Grand River Transit (GRT) Business Plan consultation process. Regional Council had requested GRT discuss a plan for free bus passes for children 12 years of age and younger. On December 20, 2024, the Region of Waterloo passed a budget that included a number of service increases including, effective July 2025, that children of the age of 6 and under will ride for free with some limitations. WRDSB staff will continue to engage with the Region of Waterloo and GRT when possible but regional support and direction is required to drive changes to public transit.

BOARD REPORTS

MOTION: ENROLMENT

This Notice of Motion was served at the October 21, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting by Trustee C. Watson with support from Trustee M. Ramsay. Trustee C. Watson introduced the motion by providing her concerns related to declining enrolment, the need to attract more students and increased enrolment at the coterminous school board. She referenced a knowledge of parents choosing other education institutions and an importance of focussing on student achievement and well-being. The motion was split into two parts.

Trustees discussed the motions. A friendly amendment was added to the first motion to have the report include a summary of the modeling of available regional data to determine the extent to which local circumstances align with the provincial trend as mentioned on folio 62 of the January 13, 2025, Committee of the Whole agenda package. Discussion continued on the motion, some trustees expressing concern with the recitals in the report appearing to state assumptions regarding the reasons for the decline. When asked, staff noted that enrolment data is already being collected and monitored. Discussion continued regarding statistical data, provincial trends, schools being safe for all students and other factors that may impact enrolment.

3. Moved by K. Woodcock, seconded by J. Weston:

That the Waterloo Region District School Board call the question.

-Carried-

A recorded vote was requested for both motions.

4. Moved by C. Watson, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That staff prepare a report with the historical data and trends for the last ten years concerning WRDSB enrolment data for JK and SK, regional growth and immigration rates; and

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That the report includes a summary of the modeling of available regional data to determine the extent to which local circumstances align with the provincial trend as mentioned on folio 62 of the January 13, 2025, Committee of the Whole agenda package.

That the data collection and analysis be presented to the Board of Trustees at a Committee of the Whole by the end of May 2025.

-Carried-

In Favour:

B. Cody
S. Estoesta
M. Ramsay
J. Meissner
M. Radlein
M. Waseem
C. Watson
J. Weston
K. Woodcock

Opposed:

C. Johnson
S. Piatkowski

Trustees continued discussion on the second part of the motion focussing on a voluntary exit interview or survey. Trustees asked staff about how a survey might be conducted. It was noted that currently Grade 12 students are surveyed on graduation as well as Grade 8 students transition to secondary school. Some trustees expressed concerns regarding confirmation bias and the collection of data. Trustees discussed the related recitals provided as part of the report.

5. Moved by C. Watson, seconded by M. Ramsay:

That Waterloo Region District School board explore implementing a voluntary exit interview and or survey for parents who remove their children from the WRDSB to help determine why parents choose to remove their children from the WRDSB; and

That this information also be presented to trustees as part of budget deliberations.

-Defeated-

In Favour:

B. Cody
M. Ramsay
C. Watson

Opposed:

S. Estoesta
C. Johnson
J. Meissner
S. Piatkowski
M. Radlein
M. Waseem
J. Weston
K. Woodcock

QUESTION PERIOD

No questions were raised.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

This Notice of Motion was served at the January 13, 2025, Board Meeting by Trustee C. Johnson with support from Trustee S. Estoesta:

Whereas we last consulted our broader community about our Strategic Plan in March 2022,

Whereas Board Policy G400 says we should do a review of our Strategic Plan every 3 to 5 years,

Whereas we have received informal feedback about our Strategic Directions from staff and the community,

Whereas we want to ensure the many educational needs of our students are addressed.

Whereas we want to reach out to our broader community in multiple ways to ensure all members in our community have an opportunity to have their voices heard and a chance to have input on whether our strategic directions should be revised.

(a) That the Waterloo Region District School Board consult with the broader community to get input regarding the educational needs of our students.

(b) That we use multiple forms of communication to connect with as many members in our larger community as possible:

(i) That we reach out to all students, families, parents, legal guardians and caregivers using a variety of engagements such as town hall meetings, virtual and asynchronous methods.

(ii) That we reach out to all staff in every school and at the Education Centre.

(iii) That we reach out to the many community organizations who work both directly and indirectly with the WRDSB.

(c) That staff lead the consultation process with Trustee involvement.

(d) That this process begins in the Spring of 2025.

This Notice of Motion was served at the January 13, 2025, Board Meeting by Trustee C. Watson with support from Trustee M. Ramsay:

Whereas many parents/guardians, staff and community members have legitimate serious questions and concerns about the learning agenda at WRDSB schools,

Whereas many parents/guardians, staff and community members seek transparency and accountability from the WRDSB Trustees,

Whereas WRDSB board meeting bylaws restrict two way conversations at the WRDSB public board meetings,

Whereas the WRDSB consultation policy states "The guiding principles for effective consultation are as follows:

1.2.1 The WRDSB recognizes the vital role of consultation and the importance of interactive two-way communication.

1.2.2 The WRDSB is committed to providing the public with meaningful opportunities to offer input and to influence Board decision-making.

Therefore be it resolved that the WRDSB Trustees direct that a Town Hall Meeting be scheduled in a central location to answer questions and concerns of students, parents/guardians, staff and community members,

And that the Town Hall meeting be scheduled no later than the end of February 2025.

Both Notices of Motion will be scheduled for discussion by the Agenda Development Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

6. Moved by K. Woodcock, seconded by J. Weston:

That the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 13, 2025, be adjourned.

-Carried-

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 p.m.