Westford School Committee/Superintendent Operating Protocols for 2023-2024 School Year

For the purpose of promoting effective governance and enhancing teamwork, we, the Superintendent and the members of the Westford School Committee, adopt the following operating protocols:

How We Serve Our Schools
- We represent the needs and interests of all our students in the District, and those needs and interests are primary in the decisions we make. We are committed to creating opportunities to listen to members of the community so that we may better understand the needs of our students and our families.
- We will foster an environment of trust, respect, and inclusivity; and we will model this in our interactions with one another, administration, staff, students, town officials, and members of the public.
- The Superintendent is responsible for the day-to-day management of the District and for overseeing personnel issues. The School Committee is responsible for setting policy for the District, approving the budget, and evaluating the Superintendent. We collaborate in setting the vision and goals for the District.

How Our Meetings Work
- We acknowledge that a School Committee meeting is a business meeting held in public—not a public meeting. We will make every effort to ensure that meetings are effective and efficient.
- We will conduct business through a descriptive agenda that appropriately notifies the public in a timely manner of what will be discussed at the meeting. Each meeting's packet will be made available online prior to the meeting and will contain supporting documents for the business before the Committee.
- The School Committee welcomes community members to attend our meetings and to speak on matters within its purview. To promote equitable opportunities to be heard, speakers will be limited to two minutes in their comments. The overall duration of the public comment period will be predetermined on the meeting agenda, but may be extended at the discretion of the Chair.

How We Communicate
- We recognize the importance of proactive communication, with the intent of avoiding surprises for either the School Committee or the Superintendent. If School Committee members have significant questions or concerns, they agree to contact the Superintendent and School Committee Chair well in advance of a meeting.
- School Committee members will channel requests for information through the Superintendent and School Committee Chair, rather than directly to staff. The Superintendent will ensure that each member has equal access to any response to Committee inquiries.
- Committee members will refer any important questions or concerns received from members of the community to the Superintendent. It is not the role of the School Committee or any of its members to resolve individual issues.
- Members of the public may contact all of the members of the School Committee by sending an email to school-committee@westfordma.gov. Please note that emails to and from the Committee are part of the public record. Whenever possible, the Chair will respond on behalf of the Committee.

By signing below, we recognize the importance of honoring these agreed upon protocols; and we commit to engage in self-reflection and continued improvement, not only in how we operate, but how we collaborate and communicate with one another.
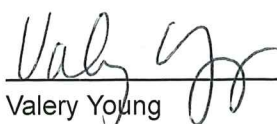
Dr. Christopher Chew	Kathryn Clear	Marisol Garcia
Sean Kelly	Bill McDonald	Chris Sanders
Valery Young	Mingquan Zheng	

Things NOT Included in the Operating Protocols, but That We Still Intend to Pursue

- We want to have agenda-setting meetings on Mondays...a full week before SC meetings
    - We will distribute a draft of the agenda to the committee soon thereafter
    - Draft agendas can include "upcoming topics" section at the bottom
- Agendas will be more descriptive, including a short blurb about agenda items that may require some context or explanation.
    - We will continue to indicate if a vote is expected; and we will also indicate if a vote is not expected at the current meeting, but will be expected at the following meeting (e.g. "Discussion only. Vote expected on XX/XX")
    - The top of the agenda can include the limit for each individual speaker in public comment (this year's chair is leaning toward 2 minutes, as to maximize the number of people who get to speak)
    - Do we want to put the above protocols on the back of each agenda? Or include in each packet as the second document.
- We need to create a new "contact us" page for the school committee, which includes the ability to email the entire committee at a new, group email address that gets forwarded to all members
    - This "contact us" page should mention that all emails to or from the committee are in the public record
- The chair should remind attendees at the beginning of public comment of the overall ground rules of public comment:
    - The purpose (not a dialogue, but a chance to *be heard*)
    - 2 minutes per speaker
    - Overall time limit
- When introducing the above protocols at the first meeting, we need to give space and time to explain the why, reinforce how this makes the way we operate better and more transparent, and also recognize that we can re-evaluate these in the future and continue to refine them.
- Since this is a departure from how we've been operating for a while, it may actually feel less transparent and communicative to some in the public. The hope is that by improving our agendas, making sure our packets are solid, that the net effect is that the public feels *more* informed and less "blindsided" by meeting content.
    - That said, we can continue to look at alternative avenues to communicating with the soliciting input from the public. Non-business-meeting public forums are one example of how we can do so. School committee coffee hours?
- We can also revisit these protocols and revise if needed during the year. We recognize this is new and we should allow ourselves the chance to see how these protocols work in practice and adjust if needed.
    -