



Public Comment Responses Received During the WPS BOE Meeting on 1/25/2021

Below is the public record of public comment responses received during the 1/25/2021 BOE meeting.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding non-agenda items
Lindsey Blavais	36 Hyde Lane	<p>Long Lots Elementary has had 7 principals over the last 10 years. That has consequences. Schools - the building, the staff, the students, and the families - are better served when there is consistency and continuity of leadership.</p> <p>And now we are in the midst of a pandemic. A time when having a strong and consistent leader is especially crucial. It is necessary to have a leader who has the trust and respect of the teachers and staff when we are on the cusp of reopening full time. Having a principal who has extensive experience to lead and advocate is pivotal as we are sailing in uncharted waters.</p> <p>Dr. Debra Dunn embodies all of those important qualities and has been the steady leadership that LLS has needed over the past 4 years. She is a very present and thoughtful principal who knows her teachers, staff, students, and families. She has worked tirelessly for the benefit of Long Lots and her absence at our school is palpable.</p> <p>We, the undersigned, are supportive of Dr. Dunn and ask that she be reinstated as Principal of Long Lots Elementary. 311 Long Lots Elementary parents have signed their names to this statement. This letter along with the names will be sent via to email to Superintendent Scarice and members of the BOE.</p>

<p>Carolyn Caney</p>	<p>14 Dorchester drive</p>	<p>The four of us are a group of former and current Long Lots School (“LLS”) parents who also served as LLS PTA Presidents at various points during the last several years. Specifically, all of our children attended Long Lots during the five-year time period where there were no fewer than seven (7) different principals leading the school at various points. In the Spring of 2017, two of us served on the search committee for the new principal of LLS. The Committee unanimously voted Dr. Debra Dunn as its top candidate with her specific charge being to restore stability and bring leadership expertise to the school.</p> <p>From Day One, Dr. Dunn positively engaged the various stakeholders in our school community. She is both warm and pragmatic, drawing on both experiences from her professional career as well as her own personal life to make connections and serve as a valuable resource to parents and staff alike. Dr. Dunn’s respect for and support of the PTA is like none other.</p> <p>From the start of her tenure, it was apparent to us that Dr. Dunn has high standards for herself and her staff. On her watch, many teachers have risen to meet her expectations to the benefit of the students and the environment as a whole. In our view, she was effective at prompting many teachers who had previously resisted change to get on board with new initiatives that on the balance were positives for the school. This was no easy task, as other principals tried and failed to do the same. Dr. Dunn patiently worked at it, earning the trust of the staff and ultimately, their support.</p> <p>We concede that we are not privy to many of the specifics that prompted the District to put Dr. Dunn on leave. We will tell you, however, that the two previous superintendents as well as various interim principals have shared with us that LLS, at times, can be a management challenge. As veteran parents and PTA leaders, we have seen this movie many times before (i.e., principals put on leave pending the District’s investigations) both at LLS and in other schools in the District. We have experienced first-hand how the ensuing upheaval distracts staff and upsets parents. Most importantly, we know on a day-to-day basis who loses when a school has leadership turmoil...the students. With Dr. Dunn’s steady leadership, we had hoped that those days were behind us.</p> <p>Mr. Scarice, you hit the mark in your email from 12/23 when you said, “Look to your right, look to your left and you’ll find someone on the team that you can count on.” For the PTA and the parents at Long Lots, that person is and should continue to be Dr. Debra Dunn.</p> <p>Sincerely, Sandra Krenzer (LLS PTA Co-President, 2017-2019) Lisa Hill (LLS PTA Co-President, 2016-2018)</p>
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		<p>Carolyn Caney (LLS PTA Co-President, 2015-2017; PTA Council President, 2017-2019) Candace Banks (LLS PTA Co-President 2014-2016; PTA Council President 2016-2018)</p>
<p>Sandy Srihari</p>	<p>61 Bulkley Ave N</p>	<p>I am writing tonight in regards to the absence of Long Lots' beloved principal, Dr. Debra Dunn.</p> <p>I had the pleasure of being PTA president under Dr. Dunn from 2018-2020. As members of the BOE will remember, those were very memorable years to be leading our parent community because we were dealing with both CMS going offline and the ongoing redistricting conversations.</p> <p>I cannot imagine going through any of that without Dr. Dunn's partnership and leadership. She was the voice of reason and brought equanimity and insight as we dealt with crisis after crisis. Her wisdom and expertise were invaluable and I watched her ease the worries of countless parents and staff time and time again. She offered counsel to concerned parents, faculty and staff on how to navigate the ambiguity. No matter what was thrown at us she was able to assure everyone that we would make it through, despite their worries. She did this by being honest and fair to the situation, explaining the reality to people without sugarcoating what was happening. It might be easy to say that any principal would react the same during these situations, but that is not accurate. I know personally from living somewhere else before moving to Westport and from having a child in a private school that every administrator runs their school a little differently. Dr. Dunn's approach to these situations was incredible and the parents and students at LLS have benefitted from her wisdom and judgment.</p> <p>She understood that change is harder on parents and staff because elementary schools are often the center of a family's community. It is the place where you begin to form strong connections as you watch your child grow from an anxious kindergartner to an independent 5th grader. Once your child moves on to middle and high school, the connection isn't quite the same. While forming this bond is important to parents, ultimately it is the students who benefit from all these interactions. When a principal is removed from a school, the turmoil hurts so many constituents, but especially the students.</p> <p>I know we aren't privy to the details regarding Dr. Dunn's absence, but I also know these are unprecedented times and that everyone deserves some extra grace right now since the difficulty of every situation has been exacerbated due to the pandemic.</p> <p>As our elementary students return to school full time, it is imperative that they have the stability and wisdom that comes from having experienced administrators at the helm. I know</p>

	<p>that I personally would feel comforted knowing that Dr. Dunn was there to navigate this next phase of our journey. Please reinstate Dr. Dunn - we need her back, and our students need her back.</p> <p>Thank you so much for listening, Sandy Srihari LLS PTA President, 2018-2020</p>
<p>Maria Mulvehill</p>	<p>20 Hyde Lane</p> <p>We stand with our fellow LLS PTA Presidents to express our support for Dr. Dunn and underscore how integral she is to our school. Dr. Dunn has been our keystone at Long Lots for the past 4 years and now she has been gone from the school for 6 weeks. The school, the staff, and the students want and need her to come back.</p> <p>It's hard to put into words Dr. Dunn's importance to the school. She is kind, she is thoughtful, and she cares about each and every person who is enrolled or employed within Long Lots. She knows each kid. She knows their parents and their siblings. Kids and parents have noticed and feel her absence. They are used to seeing her at every drop-off and pick-up, greeting everyone with a welcoming (albeit masked) smile. It is clear that she approaches her job on a human level - meeting each individual where they are and making sure they have what they need to succeed.</p> <p>Dr. Dunn has been a leader to her staff and a huge supporter of the PTA. Meeting with us every week even when she has no more time to give. Listening to our concerns and actively keeping us in the loop when we cannot be in the school physically. As representatives of the PTA, we are incredibly grateful to have had such a supportive and experienced partner in Dr. Dunn.</p> <p>To paraphrase Mr. Scarice, "we are educating in a pandemic" and we believe that one of the most important things that we can do for our students and staff is to create a safe and supportive learning environment. Consistency and continuity are paramount during trying times like these. Removing our principal, who has been a steady hand, strong and supportive leader, and fierce advocate for LLS, halfway through a pandemic school year, is harmful to our school's morale.</p> <p>We know you all know about Long Lot's recent Principal history. It hasn't been a good situation. It's not healthy for student and staff morale. It's not good for consistency around facility management. We - our whole community - lucked out when Dr. Dunn walked through our doors. We would like to make sure that she can walk back in. Long Lots needs her.</p>

		<p>With kind regards,</p> <p>Maria Mulvehill and Elsa Morgan LLS PTA Current Co-Presidents</p>
<p>Cecilie Schachte</p>	<p>Westport CT</p>	<p>Dear Westport Board of Education,</p> <p>So often we take the time to express negative thoughts and opinions, but rarely the positive ones. I'm writing this letter on behalf of Debra Dunn, who was my principal when I taught at Long Lots. Debra had the very difficult task of arriving at Long Lots after the unfair dismissal of the previous principal and half of a year of an interim principal. The staff was anxious, divided, and negative. I'm not exaggerating when I say that Debra literally saved Long Lots.</p> <p>With a quiet, yet encouraging tone, she gained our trust and our respect. It was apparent to us immediately that she loved the children, was a knowledgeable educator, and a well-seasoned leader. At the same time, by valuing our opinions and standing firmly beside us, she took us from a very broken staff to a strong productive community.</p> <p>I was a teacher at Long Lots for fifteen years. In those fifteen years the administration changed over a dozen times. That's not a good record. The Long Lots community needs stability and a strong leader. That's Debra Dunn.</p> <p>Thank you, Cecilie Schachte</p>

Brandi Briggs	37 High Point Road	<p>We are writing to express our concern regarding Dr. Dunn's absence from Long Lots and to encourage her quick return. As you know, Long Lots has been through 7 principals in the past approximately 8 years. We have finally found a principal who is able to make tough decisions, and at times even unpopular decisions, while putting the best interest of her staff and students first. She is running an elementary school larger than one of our Middle Schools, and yet has been able to connect with staff, students and parents in such a meaningful way. She is in an unenviable position trying to establish leadership with a staff that has not had a consistent principal in years. Yet, she has been able to improve a troubled school in a short time period while so positively impacting her students' lives.</p> <p>As RTM members representing District 7, which encompasses Long Lots, we have heard from countless parents who are devastated by Dr. Dunn's absence. Moreover, we have heard from numerous teachers (who have asked to remain anonymous) that they feel more supported by Dr. Dunn than they have at any other point in their careers. We unequivocally support the letter signed by over 300 Long Lots parents pleading for Dr. Dunn's return to the school. Please let Dr. Dunn continue the difficult work she has begun in improving our school. Our children and staff need Dr. Dunn now more than ever.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Lauren Karpf and Brandi Briggs</p>
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Tulika Sethi	14 Windy Hill	<p>I am writing to express my dismay at the continued absence of Dr. Dunn as the leader of the LLS community. Her guiding presence is deeply missed not only by my family but by the other families in the LLS DL community.</p> <p>My children and I moved to Westport from Singapore in August 2016. In the following 12 months there were multiple changes in leadership. Needless to say this was very disconcerting for my family because not only were we new to Westport but this was our first interaction with the public school system. The arrival of Dr Dunn dramatically changed the environment in the school. The change was palatable not only amongst the parent community but also with the teacher and administrative staff. LLS truly became a nurturing environment where the staff, parents and especially the children thrived.</p> <p>My son was always filled with joy if our car was lucky enough to stop by Dr. Dunn at morning drop off. She always greeted us with a warm smile and seemed genuinely pleased to have my son at school. She would always make a comment about their shared love for sports teams, music and theater. Dr. Dunn is always so gracious in not only recognizing the efforts of my volunteering activities but always making me feel like I am making a significant contribution to the well being of our school community.</p> <p>Our family has chosen the DL option because my son has several health concerns and during the pandemic, Dr Dunn often checked on his welfare and worked with me to assimilate the DL families into the larger LLS community. With the decision to go back to full time, our community is deeply divided and needs the leadership of Dr. Dunn more than ever.</p> <p>Dr. Dunn being placed on leave is adversely affecting the welfare of over 500 students and 100 staff members at a very challenging time. I implore you to reinstate her as principal and give her the opportunity to lead our school at a very important juncture of the pandemic school year.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration,</p> <p>Tulika Sethi</p>
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<p>Michelle Benner</p>	<p>61 Hillspoint Road</p>	<p>During last week's BOE meeting, over 40 teachers from every school in the WPS and at least 15 parents posted comments voicing great concern over plans to transition to full-time, in-person school in February before teachers have the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.</p> <p>In my opinion, the majority of the BOE member's response was callous and disrespectful. John's reading of the comments were cut off halfway because some BOE members complained it was getting late and that the comments were too long. Instead of limiting each comment to 3 minutes, a majority of the BOE members voted to stop reading in order to move on to other agenda items. I recall many meetings a few years ago during the CES crisis which lasted well near and into midnight. And this was when we were all gathered together in public. That certain BOE members complained of having to stay up late while reading these comments from the comfort of their own homes speaks volumes. Our teachers go into school every day to teach our children in person. They have worked their hardest, their very best, and more hours than they ever have to create an amazing distance learning and hybrid program to ensure an incredible education for our children despite a global pandemic which has sadly killed over 400,000 Americans.</p> <p>In response to plans to return to full time in person school, teachers voiced grave concerns over safety and expressed feeling acutely stressed and undervalued. They wrote thoughtful descriptions of their experiences to date, shared educated opinions, and offered a clear picture of daily life and logistics inside our public school buildings. Instead of acknowledging their concerns, the BOE and members of the Admin team blatantly disregarded these comments in full public view. It was heartbreaking to witness. Our teachers deserve so much better than this.</p> <p>On Friday, I received a letter from BMS announcing the original plan to proceed full steam ahead. The letter states The middle school administrators and central office administrators worked collaboratively with the school staff to develop plans to transition students back more in person learning at school. But reading through the comments posted from Monday's BOE meeting, I find that many teachers do not feel they have been collaborated with. How do we as a community reconcile these two conflicting perspectives? Are teachers being collaborated with or not? And what is being done to address their concerns?</p>
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Vanessa Weinbach	6 Riverfield Dr	How many students have switched from hybrid to DL? Will all the changing students be assigned their new classes by Thursday with the survey deadlines extended?
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DISCUSSION

1. Health Update - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding Health Update.
Carole Chinn	2 Farmer Road	Given mutations of COVID on the horizon, is Westport considering strengthening its mitigating measures through upgraded masks, better marking for social distancing outside, air purifiers, voluntary asymptomatic testing, etc.? Which ones? If not, why not?

2. FY 2022 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

- **High School Class Size**

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding FY 2022 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools.
John	Test	Test
Jen Ackerman	Long Lots School	Good evening. We've been so lucky to have access to many types of technology here in Westport. However, we have some nearly unusable Smart boards that don't properly align, or are too old and damaged. Some are over 11 years old now. There are a few of these older models in some of the rooms at LLS and we've been told they will be replaced at some point but a couple years have come and gone and still no replacement. If they cannot be replaced then we need a different solution in those rooms. Please consider keeping the replacement cycle for Smart Boards. We are also open to other types of technology that is suggested, grade level dependent, but we need something to use that is interactive and that WORKS. Many thanks for your consideration during this challenging budget season.
Amy Herrera	3 Sandhopper Trail	It seems very irresponsible to eliminate extra funding for Covid protocols and accommodations. With so many mutations emerging calling into question vaccine efficacy, it seems like it's best to hope for the best while continuing to plan for the worst. At the very least it seems like we will need to extend a distance option.

DISCUSSION/ACTION

1. **Capital Project Funding Request – Greens Farms School Cooling Tower** - No public comments were received on this item.
2. **Capital Projects Soft Costs Request** - No public comments were received on this item. One test comment was posted.
3. **Discussion of Capital Projects in Rank Order of Priority** - No public comments were received on this item.
4. **Acceptance of Gifts** - No public comments were received on this item.