



The Research Bureau

# Governing for Excellence:

Worcester Public Schools' Evolution in Governance

Report 22-10

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Research in the Public Interest

In Collaboration With



Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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## Introduction

The Worcester Public Schools (WPS) is undergoing an evolution in governance, most notably with the shift to district-based representation on the School Committee. While those six new School Committee districts and the two at-large seats will be utilized in the 2023 municipal election for the first time, there are other governance reforms underway made that impact schools, students, and other stakeholders in Worcester's public education system.

This report highlights four areas of recent and ongoing change in the Worcester Public Schools' governance structure and operations, through providing:

1. An overview of the current WPS Governance structure
2. The new district-based representation on the Worcester School Committee
3. Changes to the rules of the Worcester School Committee
4. Organizational changes to the WPS structure under the leadership of Superintendent Rachel Monárrez, Ph.D

While these changes in governance are ongoing, this report is intended to provide some context and background on the implications for the Worcester Public Schools, the students, and the community at-large. For further resources and insights on the new districts of the Worcester School Committee, check out our accompanying dashboard at <https://www.wrrb.org/reports/2022/12/governing-for-excellence-worcester-public-schools-evolution-in-governance> .

### Part One: An Overview of WPS Governance

The Worcester Public Schools, a department of the municipal government of the City of Worcester, is governed by a School Committee, which is comprised of the Mayor as chairperson and six members elected directly by the public.

The School Committee selects the Superintendent of Schools to be responsible for managing the daily operations of the district, as well as implementing the policies adopted by the School Committee. On April 28, the School Committee unanimously selected Dr. Rachel Monárrez as the Superintendent, and she has been serving in that role since July.

On a municipal level, Article 4 (provided in appendix) of the City of Worcester [Home Rule Charter](#) establishes the composition, term of office, and powers of the School Committee. The high schools select a non-voting student representative to attend meetings and serve as an ex-officio member of the School Committee.

The School Committee is the legislative and policy-making body charged with supervision of the Worcester Public Schools. Under Chapter 71, Section 37 of the Massachusetts General Laws:

*The school committee in each city and town and each regional school district shall have the power*

*to select and to terminate the superintendent, shall review and approve budgets for public education in the district, and shall establish educational goals and policies for the schools in the district consistent with the requirements of law and statewide goals and standards established by the board of education.*

By approving the District budget, the School Committee has authority to transfer within line item accounts, so long as the overall amount remains within the City's appropriation. Additionally, the School Committee conducts collective bargaining with all employee organizations and may establish and appoint the position of Assistant or Associate Superintendents. The Committee approves or disapproves those hirings, and upon the request of the Superintendent, provides an explanation of any disapproval.

School Committee members are elected at the same time for two-year terms and, as of the most recent election, are all selected on an at-large basis. The 2022-2023 term School Committee members are Mayor Joseph Petty, Vice-Chair Jermaine Johnson, Laura Clancey, Jermoh Kamara, Sue Mailman, Molly McCullough, and Tracy O'Connell Novick.

The School Committee has four standing sub-



committees which meet to discuss the details of various issues and report back to the full committee for official action. The four Standing Committees are:

1. Finance and Operations

*Chair Tracy Novick, Vice Chair Jermoh Kamara, and Susan Mailman*

The Standing Committee on Finance and Operations provides the full year oversight of the budget of the Worcester Public Schools as required by Massachusetts General Laws Ch. 71, sec. 37 through the review of quarterly budget reports, the reception of reports of the auditors, and issues of payroll, procurement, and financial management and planning that may fall under the purview of the Committee. The Standing Committee provides for facilities management, repair, and capital planning so far as it is under district purview. The Standing Committee also oversees the operational aspects of the district under the departments of School Nutrition, Student Transportation, Information Technology, and School Safety.

2. Teaching, Learning, and Student Supports

*Chair Molly McCullough, Vice Chair Susan Mailman, and Jermoh Kamara*

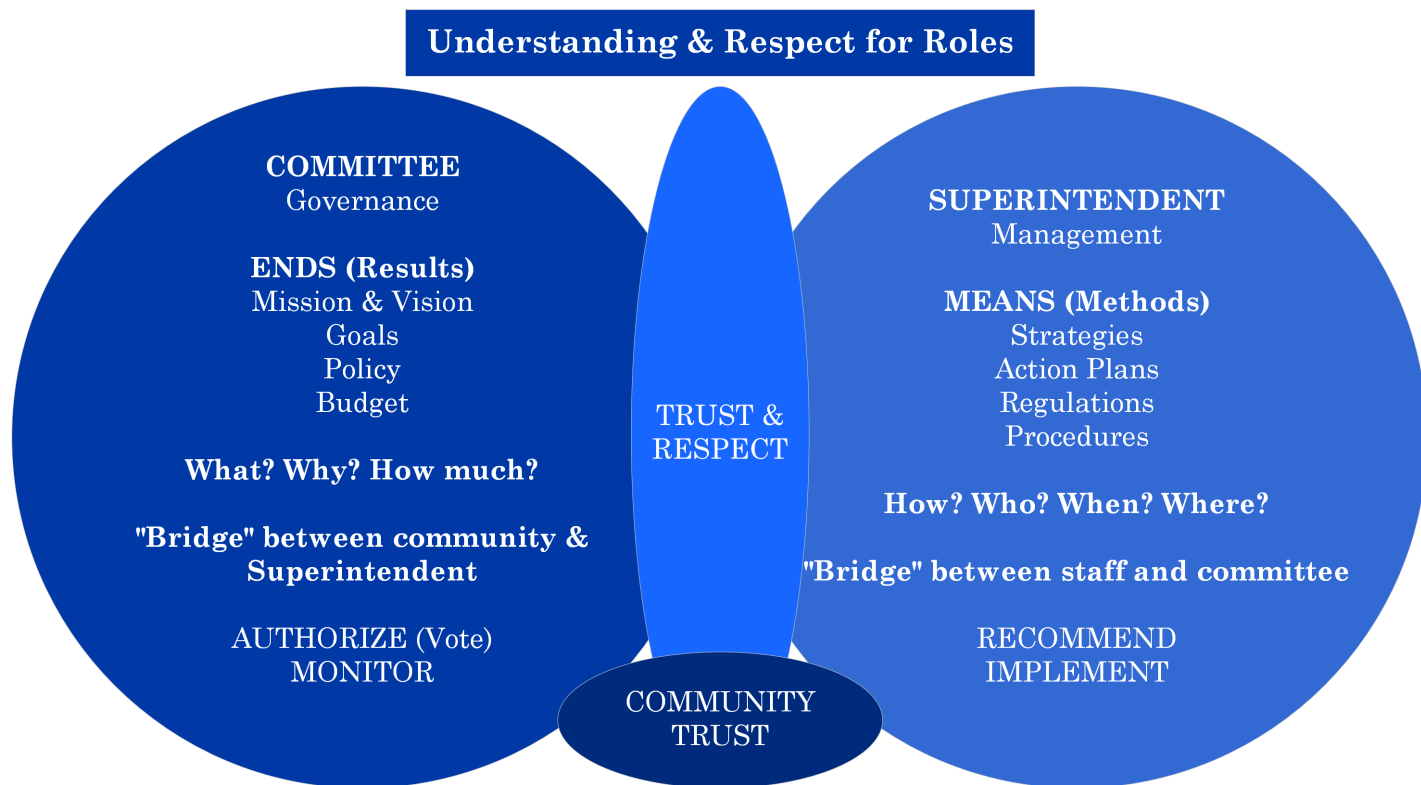
The Standing Committee on Teaching, Learning and Student Supports addresses topics, policies and practices related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, instructional materials, and student support services. In doing so, the Committee monitors and reviews the structures and processes integral to the delivery of the core curriculum. It focuses as well on supplemental and intervention instruction, designed to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of students as each school strives to reach the intended outcomes of college and career readiness for every student. The content and annual edits to the Student Handbook and the Policies Handbook will be referred to the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues prior to approval by the Full School Committee.

3. Governance and Employee Issues

*Chair Laura Clancey, Vice Chair Molly McCullough, and Jermaine Johnson*

The Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues' purpose is to review, update and/or institute all policies governing the Worcester Public Schools. This committee is also responsible for issues related to employees/staff including human resource recruitment, hiring,

**Table 1: School Committee and Superintendent Functions**



Source: Massachusetts Association of School Committees



retention, and evaluations, so far as it is under Committee purview.

**4. School and Student Performance**

*Chair Jermaine Johnson, Vice Chair Laura Clancey, and Tracy Novick*

The Standing Committee on School and Student Performance's purpose is to inquire into and report on matters pertaining to:

- measures of district and school-level performance and improvement
- research and program evaluation
- student assessment
- accountability planning

**Part Two: District-based representation on the Worcester School Committee**

On September 1, 2022, [Chapter 208 of the Acts of 2022](#) was signed into law that changed the Worcester City Charter so that starting with the 2023 election, the School Committee will have six district seats and two at-large seats.

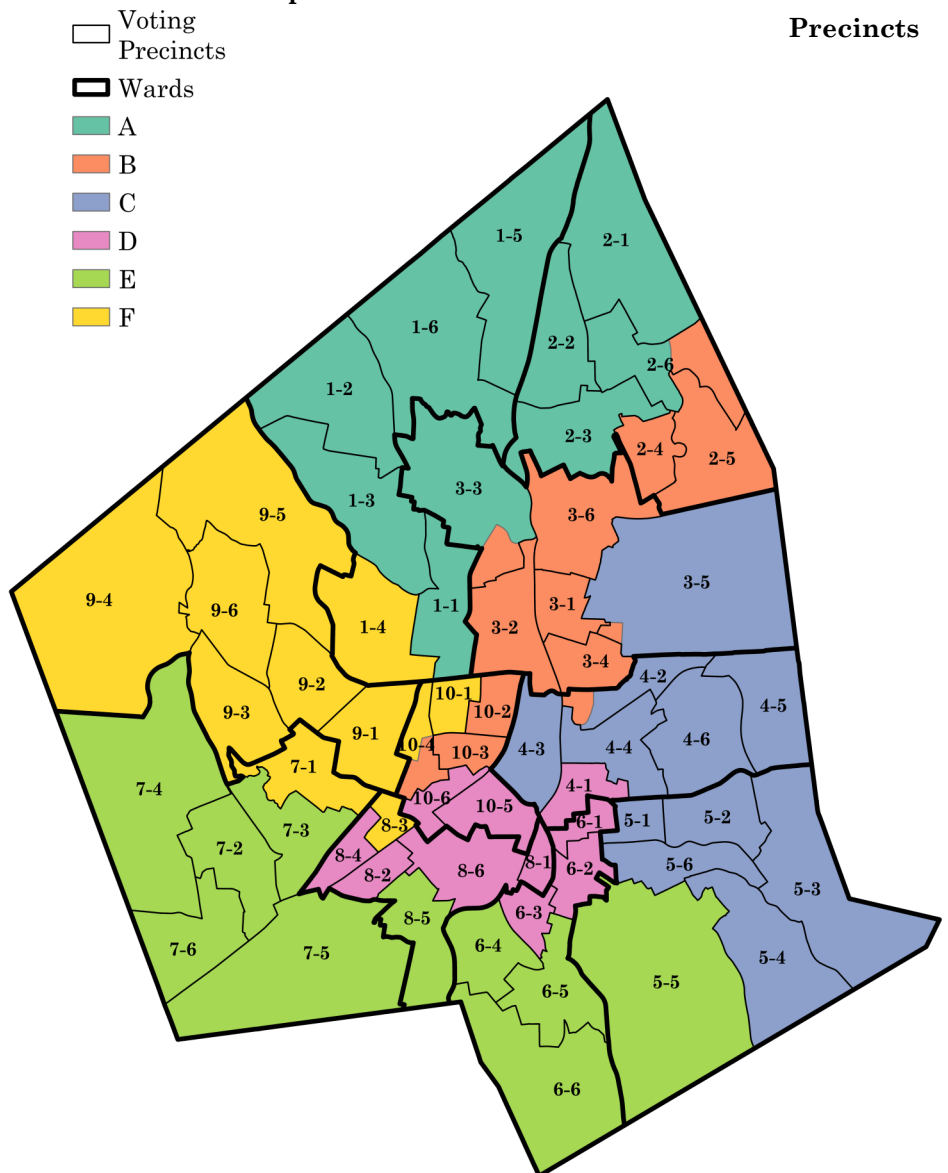
This shift of the School Committee to district representation came about due to a consent decree that required the City select one of three district-based structures for their election. This system of six district seats was selected after public meetings held by the City Council's Committee on Municipal and Legislative Operations. The situation that led to this change was further detailed in the WRRB's Brief, [Changing the Worcester School Committee to District Representation](#).

On Dec. 21, 2021, the City Council approved the Home Rule Petition to change the City Charter accordingly, and was ultimately signed into law by Governor Baker. While the legislative process was moving

forward, the City worked to develop districts that would comply with the terms of the consent decree.

Those requirements included that the new district boundaries contain approximately the same number of residents, and that two of the districts be majority-minority, where Hispanic/Latino/a and Black residents together comprise a majority of the citizen voting age population. Following the terms of the consent decree, a mutually determined independent expert had the final decision on the boundaries - Professor Nathaniel Persily, the James B. McClatchy Professor of Law at Stanford University. In a 2021 public meeting on the process, he explained that "what schools are located in what districts has no bearing on the consent decree... It's about

**Map 1: School Committee Districts with Wards & Precincts**



the representation of voters, not buildings and schools.”

After public hearings held by the Worcester Board of Election Commissioners, as shown in Map 1 below, the six districts were finalized and labelled as A, B, C, D, E, and F, which differentiates them from the numbered City Council districts. Complying with the terms of the consent decree, each district is within 4% of the “ideal population”, or one-sixth of the city’s population - 34,419, and districts A and B are “majority-minority.” Under these boundaries, there are five precincts that are “split precincts” between different School Committee districts - Ward 2 Precinct 6, Ward 3 Precinct 3, Ward 3 Precinct 5, Ward 4 Precinct 2, and Ward 10 Precinct 4.

Based on the addresses of the current School Committee members, they are residing in three of the six districts:

A: Laura B. Clancey, Susan Mailman, Molly O. McCullough

B:

C: Jermoh Kamara

D:

E:

F: Tracy O’Connell Novick, Jermaine Johnson

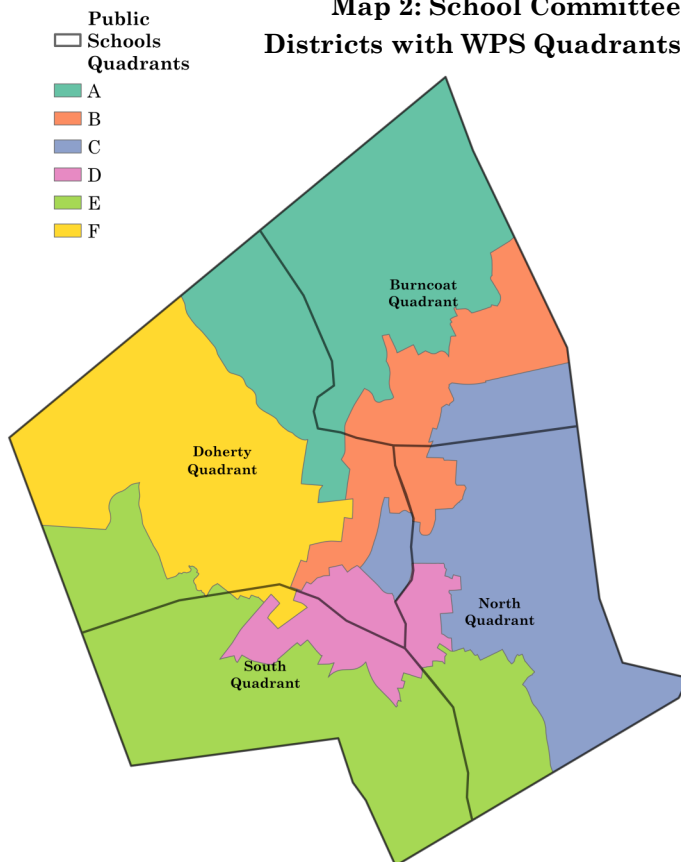
Maps 1, 2, and 3 and Table 2 on the next page illustrate the complexities of these new districts, by showing them relative to the WPS Quadrants, public schools facilities, and City Council districts. For interactive versions of these maps and other resources, including the identification of polling places, please go to <https://www.wrrb.org/reports/2022/12/governing-for-excellence-worcester-public-schools-evolution-in-governance>.

Since the School Committee and City Council district elections occur during municipal election years, both races are the same ballot. With the boundaries of those districts being independent of one another, this will result in a complicated electoral and balloting process. There will be a need for at least sixteen different ballots in that election cycle, and complexities will face candidates, voters, and those administering the electoral process.

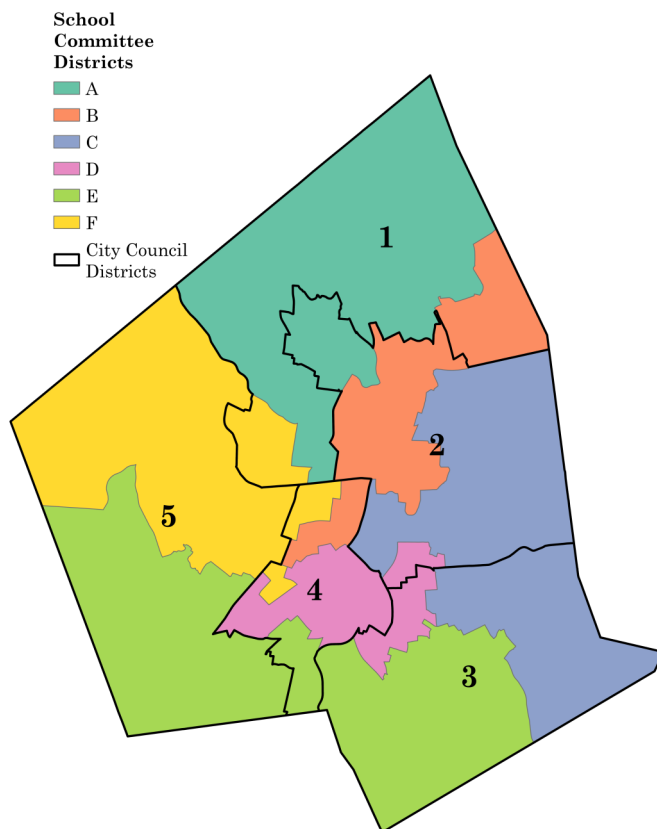
### Part Three: Changes to the School Committee Rules

In 2017, the Center for District and School Accountability at the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education conducted a

**Map 2: School Committee Districts with WPS Quadrants**



**Map 3: School Committee Districts with City Council Districts**



**Table 2: Worcester School Committee Districts and Worcester Public Schools**

School District	Name	Type	Grades
<b>A</b>	Burncoat Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Francis J McGrath Elementary School	Elementary	K - 6
	Nelson Place School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Norrback Avenue School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Thorndyke Road School	Elementary	K - 6
	Worcester Arts Magnet School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Burncoat Middle School	Middle	07,08
	Forest Grove Middle School	Middle	07,08
	Burncoat Senior High School	Secondary	09 - 12
<b>B</b>	Belmont Street Community School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Chandler Elementary Community School	Elementary	K - 6
	City View School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Clark Street Community School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Lincoln Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Wawecus Road School	Elementary	K - 6
<b>C</b>	La Familia Dual Language School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Lake View School	Elementary	K - 6
	Rice Square School	Elementary	K - 6
	Roosevelt School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Worcester East Middle School	Middle	07,08
	North High School	Secondary	09 - 12
	Worcester Technical High School	Secondary	09 - 12
<b>D</b>	Goddard School of Science & Technology	Elementary	PK - 6
	Grafton Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Head Start School	Elementary	PK
	Jacob Hiatt Magnet School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Union Hill School	Elementary	K - 6
	Woodland Academy	Elementary	K - 6
	Claremont Academy	Secondary	07 - 12
	University Park Campus School	Secondary	07 - 12
	YOU, Inc. Joy & Robert Wetzel Center	Special Education	
<b>E</b>	Canterbury School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Columbus Park School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Gates Lane School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Heard Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Quinsigamond School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Vernon Hill School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Sullivan Middle School	Middle	06 - 08
	South High Community School	Secondary	09 - 12
	Center for Applied Behavioral Instruction	Special Education	K - 12
	Seven Hills Foundation	Special Education	K - 12
	YOU, Inc. Carol Schmidt Village	Special Education	
<b>F</b>	Chandler Magnet School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Elm Park Community School	Elementary	K - 6
	Flagg Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	May Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Midland Street School	Elementary	K - 6
	Tatnuck School	Elementary	PK - 6
	West Tatnuck School	Elementary	PK - 6
	Doherty Memorial High School	Secondary	09 - 12
	Summit Academy School for Alternative Learners	Special Education	K - 12



comprehensive district review of WPS.

The review resulted in a formal [report](#) that specifically cited activities of the 2017 School Committee as presenting challenges to the Worcester Public Schools:

*School committee members make many motions that require action by administrators and administrators devote much time responding to these motions. Few motions that require action by administrators are aligned with district priorities for continuous improvement or with administrators' main responsibilities.*

To address this situation, the report recommended the consideration of a "consent agenda" approach, to bundle routine action items for consideration, with the ability to shift any items of concern for larger deliberation. The report also noted that:

*School committee members should exercise a great deal more restraint in making motions that are not related to the critical task of improving the quality of teaching and learning.*

Since the 2017 report, there have been changes to the School Committee membership, and the current members have made updating and improving their Rules a priority. This was reflected in a collective motion on Jan. 8, 2020, and led to detailed examination of the Rules by the Standing Committee on Governance and Employee Issues.

Through these efforts, the [School Committee Rules](#) were updated in February and May 2022 to reflect a number of changes, most notably:

Use of Consent Agendas: The agendas now include such a section for approval of minutes, donations, personnel records, filing of recognitions, and notices of interest to the public, with a majority vote threshold to shift an item for full consideration

Clarity on Agenda Items: Those agenda items filed by School Committee members are required to be "under the purview of the Committee, focus on the business of the Committee, and should be concise and specific."

Public Petitions: There is a standing public comment period to accompany the ability for members of the public to file a petition on any matter under the School Committee's purview.

Calendar of Superintendent Reports: In addition to a report by the Superintendent at each meeting, a formal calendar is established with set topics:

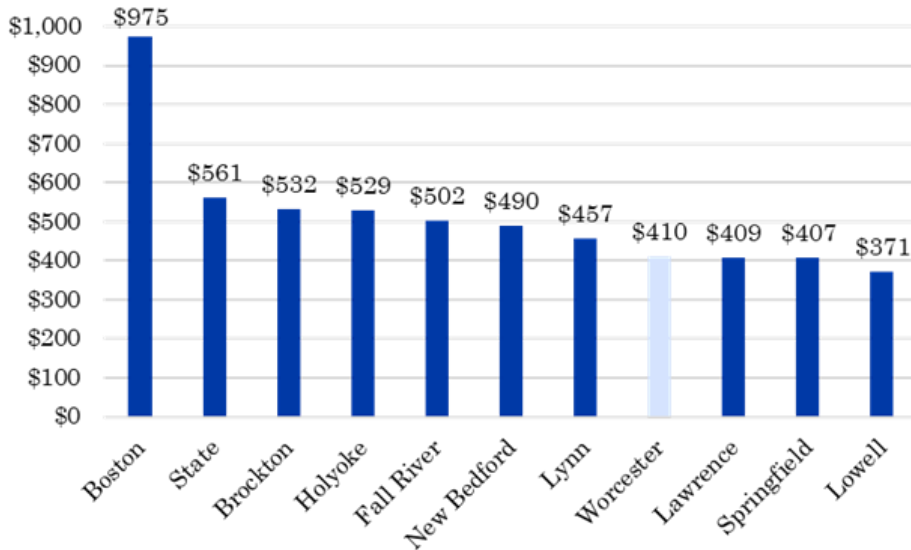
- First February meeting: Report on the Governor's budget
- July meeting: Evaluation of the superintendent
- August meeting: Back to school report
- Second October meeting: MCAS report
- First December meeting: Superintendent's midcycle review

School Committee Student Advisory Committee: Authorized under [Chapter 71, Section 38M](#) of the Massachusetts General Laws, members of this committee are elected by each city secondary school, with their Chair serving as a non-voting member of the School Committee. The Committee meets monthly and every other month with the full School Committee, and members have the right to be recognized by the School Committee Chair and speak on any business under consideration. Its formal purpose is to:

- To provide for a meaningful link and to promote a mutual sense of respect and understanding between the student body and the School Committee.
- To represent before the School Committee, the attitudes, interests and concerns, both positive and negative, of the student body.
- To advise the School Committee and add insight to their deliberations.
- To carry to the School Committee and to support proposals and items of concern to the student body, and to initiate, on behalf of the student body and in conjunction with the student government, projects and proposals for presentation to the School Committee.
- To inform the student body of the functions and workings of the School Committee.
- To represent to the School Committee a cross-section of the entire student body.

Since its inception, the Advisory Committee has provided input to the School Committee on issues such as the Rules, budgetary priorities, transportation, career technical education, and mental health support for students.

**Table 3: Comparison of per-pupil expenditures on District Administration between WPS and urban peer districts, 2019-20**



Source: Worcester Public Schools

**Part Four :  
Organizational Changes to WPS Structure**

As noted in the WPS Fiscal Year 2023 budget, when compared to peer Gateway Cities, Worcester is among the lowest spending on administration.

That specific figure for WPS is \$410 per pupil, as compared to the statewide average spending on administration at \$561 per pupil. As shown in Table 3 above, of the largest urban districts in Massachusetts, WPS spends less than six peer communities, with only Lawrence, Springfield, and Lowell at lower levels.

Prior to Dr. Monárrez’s appointment, there were six leadership positions reporting directly to the Superintendent—the Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; the Chief Financial and Operations Officer; the Chief Human Resources Officer; the Chief Diversity Officer; the School Safety Director; and the Assistant to the Superintendent / Clerk of the School Committee.

As noted in Table 4 on the next page which details the WPS organizational chart, there are now seven leadership positions reporting directly to Dr. Monárrez. With the School Safety position now reporting to the Deputy Superintendent, there are two new direct reports—the Chief Academic Support Officer and the Chief Community Relations Officer, which was since retitled as the Chief Communications Officer.

Chief Academic Support Officer’s job description:

*Under the direction of the Superintendent, plan, organize, control and direct the functions of the Academic Supports Division; formulate and develop academic support systems, policies, standards and procedures in compliance with a variety of federal, State and local laws, rules and regulations; serve as a member of the Superintendent’s Cabinet; actively collaborate with the Teaching and Learning Division as a seamless team; supervise and evaluate the performance of assigned personnel.*

On the December 1, 2022, it was announced at the School Committee meeting that Anna Azarloza would be serving in this role.

Chief Communications Officer’s job description:

*The Chief Communications Officer acts as the principal advisor to the Superintendent and District on matters of public and press relations, internal communications, external communications, and community relations. This position provides leadership and performs professional-level work to advance communication and public information strategies to enhance awareness and understanding of the District’s mission, goals, programs, services, and activities among internal and/or external audiences.*

As of December 2, 2022, this position was posted but not yet filled.

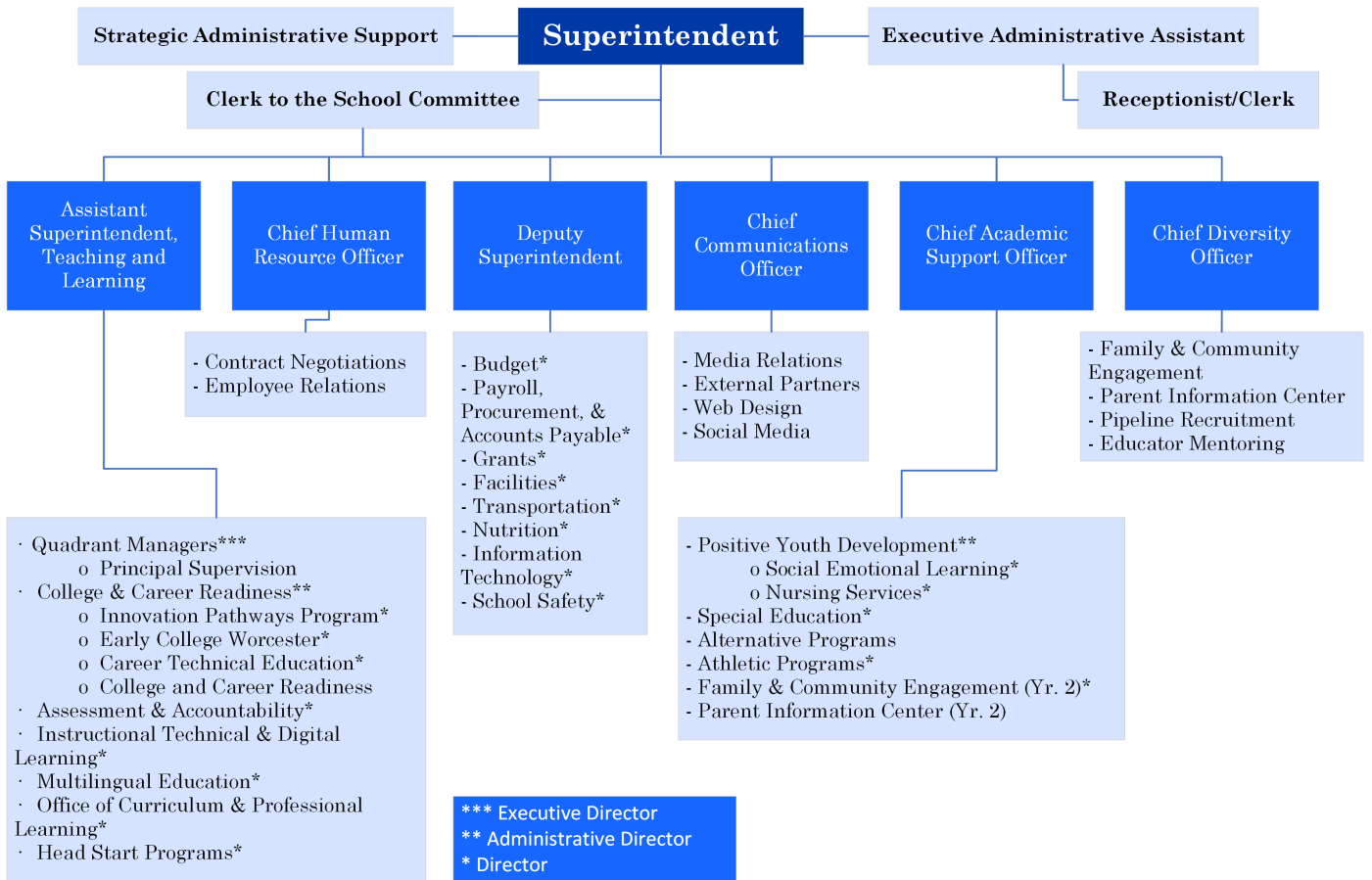
These ongoing changes in the Worcester Public Schools’ governance are profound and structural, with long-term implications for the students and other stakeholders of our education system. As the community prepares for the 2023 municipal election, the complexities of the new district-based School Committee structure will require attention and consideration from all facets of our community.

*Governing in Excellence is supported by a grant awarded by the Worcester Education Collaborative with funding from the Barr Foundation.*





**Table 4: Worcester Public Schools Organizational Chart**



*Source: Worcester Public Schools*

Appendix

**WORCESTER CITY CHARTER  
ARTICLE FOUR—SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

*As of September 2022*

**Section 4-1 Composition, Term of Office and Powers.**

Composition - The school committee shall consist of the mayor, who shall chair the committee, 6 district members and 2 members elected at-large.

(b) Term of Office - School committee members shall be elected for terms of two years each, beginning on the first secular day of January in the year following their election and shall serve until their successors are qualified.

(c) Eligibility –

(1) Any voter shall be eligible to hold the office of at-large school committee member; provided, however, that the person shall have resided within the city for 1 year immediately prior to the election.

(2) Any voter shall be eligible to hold the office of a district school committee member; provided, however, that the person shall have resided within the district for 1 year immediately prior to the election.

(3) For the 2023 school committee election only, if the school committee district boundaries have not been finalized by September 1, 2022, then the date by which a person shall have been a resident of the district shall be 60 days following finalization of the school committee district boundaries.

(4) In the event that a district school committee member relocates their residence to a different district within the city during their term of office, such school committee member shall be permitted to serve the remainder of their 2-year term but shall not be eligible for reelection in the same district.

(d) Powers and Duties - The school committee shall have all the powers which are conferred on school committees by general law and such additional powers and duties as may be provided by the charter, by ordinance, or otherwise. Its powers and duties shall include, but shall not be limited to the following.

(1) To take general charge of all the public schools in the city, including the evening schools and evening high schools, and all special programs conducted by the school department

(2) To appoint a superintendent of the schools who shall be charged with the day to day administration of the school system, subject to policy directives adopted by the school committee. The school committee may award a contract to the superintendent of schools for a term not to exceed six years, in accordance with section forty-one of chapter seventy-one of the General Laws.

(3) To appoint all other officers and employees connected with the schools, define their duties, fix their compensation, makes rules concerning their tenure of office, and to suspend or remove them at pleasure, subject to any applicable provision of the general law.

(4) To make all reasonable rules and regulations consistent with general law, for the management of the school department.

(5) To take control of all school buildings and grounds connected therewith.

No site for a school building shall be acquired by the city unless the approval of the site by the school committee is first obtained. No plans for the construction of or alterations, with the exception of ordinary repairs, in a school building shall be accepted, and no such work shall be commenced on the construction or alteration of a school building unless the

approval of the school committee and the city manager shall have first been obtained.

(6) To provide, when necessary, for temporary accommodation for school purposes. The school committee shall furnish all school buildings with proper fixtures, furniture and equipment and shall provide ordinary maintenance of all school buildings and grounds.

**Section 4-2 Organization - Mayor, Vice-Chair.**

(a) Organization - The school committee shall organize on the first secular day of January, in accordance with the procedures set forth for the organization of the city council in section 2-2.

(b) Chair - The mayor shall serve as chair of the school committee and shall have the same power to vote on every matter coming before the school committee, as any other member.

(c) Vice Chair - Once the school committee shall have organized and at that meeting, the committee shall elect one of its members, by majority vote of all the members elected, to serve as vice-chair. The vice-chair shall preside at all meetings of the committee at which the mayor is not present.

**Section 4-3 Conflict of Interest.**

Except as otherwise authorized by law, no member of the school committee shall, while a member thereof, hold any other office or position in the school department, the salary or compensation for which is payable out of the city treasury.

**Section 4-4 Salaries.**

The members of the school committee, other than the mayor, shall receive as compensation for their services a salary equal to fifty percent of the salary established for members of the city council in accordance with section 2-4 of this charter.

**Section 4-5 Meetings of the School Committee.**

(a) Rules of Procedure - The school committee shall from time to time establish rules for its proceedings which shall include and be subject to the following.

(i) All meetings of the school committee shall be open to the press and to the public, except as otherwise provided by section twenty-three B of chapter thirty-nine of the General Laws.

(ii) The vote on any particular measure shall be by roll call when requested by any member and the yeas and nays shall be so recorded.

**Section 4-6 Vacancies.**

(a) At-large school committee member -

If a vacancy shall occur amongst the 2 at-large members of the school committee, said vacancy shall be filled in the same manner as provided in section 2-10(a) for the filling of vacancies in the office of councilor-at-large, from among the candidates for election to the office of at-large school committee members at the preceding regular municipal election.

(b) District school committee member -

If a vacancy shall occur in the office of district school committee member it shall be filled in the same manner as provided in section 4-6(a) for the office of at-large school committee member, except that the list shall be of the candidates for the office of district school committee member in the district in which the vacancy occurs; provided, however, if there be no candidate on such list who remains eligible and willing to serve, the vacancy shall be filled at a special election called by the city council to be held within 90 days after the city council is notified by the board of election commissioners that the vacancy cannot be filled as aforesaid.



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