



**CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS**  
Department of Health & Human Services  
Division of Public Health



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD  
Health & Human Services  
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark  
Public Health  
Director

**DATE:** November 16, 2021  
**TO:** Board of Health  
**FROM:** Karyn E. Clark, Director of Public Health  
**RE:** **Board of Health Meeting/ WebEx Meeting Minuets November 8, 2021**

*Welcome & Introductions*

Meeting was called to order at 6:33 PM

Members present: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chairman, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen, David Fort, and Van Tran, MD

Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of Public Health, Matilde "Mattie" Castiel, MD, Commissioner of Health & Human Services, Cassandra Anderson, Chief of Community Health, Natalie O'Brien, Administrative Assistant

Guests: Maureen Binienda, Superintendent, Worcester Public Schools, Megara Bell, Consultant for Sex Ed Curriculum, Casey Burns, Director, Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester

Dr. Gurwitz expressed sympathies on behalf of the Board to Dr. Hirsh on the loss of his mother.

Dr. Gurwitz and the Board welcomed new Board of Health member Van Tran, MD.

*Approval of minuets from October 18, 2021*

Frances Anthes made motion to approve the minutes with an edit and clarification.

Motion seconded by Chareese Allen. Dr Tran abstained from voting. Motion approved.

*COVID-19 Updates*

Dr. Castiel presented PowerPoint slideshow (attached) with COVID-19 updates.

- In Worcester 63% have received their first dose of COVID vaccine, 55% are fully vaccinated as of 11/5/21.
- Many COVID-19 positive areas on map align with areas with high populations of Hispanic and Black communities.
- 45% of Worcester's Black community is vaccinated and 44% of the Hispanic community.
- Need to spend time in communities of color to educate and build trust to get younger population vaccinated.



- High number of Latinx youth testing positive for COVID-19.
- Post-Vax Life has 9 youth ambassadors involved from communities of color. Dr. Castiel provided a link to a video that is now on social media to demonstrate life getting back to normal if we all do our part.

*Discussion:*

Frances Anthes thanked Dr. Castiel and Maureen Binenda, Worcester Public Schools Superintendent, for their work on vaccinating our young people.

Bell Hill and Union Hill areas have low vaccination rates.

Dr. Tran inquired where students can receive vaccines aside from pharmacies.

David Fort asked what is being done in Asian communities that can be replicated in other communities to prevent COVID-19 infections in children.

Dr. Castiel stated that there is less hesitancy and more trust of healthcare in the Asian community versus the Black and Brown communities.

David Fort stated data shows that the Asian community wears masks.

Dr. Tran stated that the Asian culture does not have the same mistrust in healthcare that Black and Brown communities do.

Chareese Allen asked what else can be done to address the hesitancy in the Black and Brown community.

Dr. Castiel stated that before school was out, vaccines were offered after school so that parents could be with kids during vaccination. Many vaccination events have been held at the Girls and Boys Club, Girls Inc., Worcester Youth Center, and the YMCA to encourage families to come together to get vaccinated. Also go out into the communities to get the vaccine to different areas. Dr. Castiel does a radio show on La Mega every few weeks to also reach more people in the Latinx community and answer their questions. There are give aways, such as bikes, to get more youth involved.

*WPS Sex-Education Curriculum*

- Maureen Binienda introduced Megara Bell. Magara has gone through the Worcester Public Schools sexual health curriculum this summer, which is posted on the WPS website, [www.worcesterschools.org](http://www.worcesterschools.org) . Curriculum posted by grade; worksheets and videos available to make everything transparent.
- Sex-Ed is part of a comprehensive health curriculum. Parent can choose to opt-out child from Sex-Ed curriculum, but student still required to take health curriculum.
- As of today there are 23,486 students in the WPS. 3,154 have opted out of Sex-Ed. A small number of students in grades 9-12 have opted out. Of those that opted out, 58.9% in K-4 and 35.7% in 5-8.
- Megara Bell stated that the curriculum was carefully selected and she was surprised about the opt-outs in younger grades because the topics in younger grades are less controversial; respecting other's space, boundaries, bullying.
- Most parents of middle school and high school students expect health education from schools.
- New health teachers were hired and all schools have access to certified health teachers.
- Belmont City View has a high Latinx population, Gates Lane with a high Autism population, and Tatnuck Magnet all have high opt-out rates. Opt-outs do not seem to be linked to race and ethnicity.

*Discussion:*

David Fort asks if socioeconomics could be a factor.

Maureen Binienda noted that the schools are from both affluent and less affluent areas. It may have to do with the parents personal beliefs. They could want to talk to their kids. Some want to see how the first year goes and then make the decision if they want their children to be involved.

Chareese Allen asked if there could be a misunderstanding about what the Sex Education curriculum is.

Megara Bell explains that Sex Education is a broad term that incorporates younger social emotional topics. Maureen has been vigilant about the transparency. She initiated having 5 family forums on the website that go through the curriculum in detail from K-12. Principals and school teachers have been doing school based meetings so parents can meet with Health teachers to review the curriculum items. There have been incidents at various schools where adults have been flyering schools with misinformation, creating doubt.

Dr. Tran asked if a survey can be done to ask why the parents chose to opt-out children from Sex Education curriculum to try to stem this opt-out.

Frances Anthes stated that we should just let it play out and let people experience the program. Number of opt-outs may dwindle. We don't want to intimidate people. Doing good work when everything is so controversial.

Dr. Gurwitz asked how we compare to other communities in Massachusetts.

Megara Bell sees that Worcester is getting a large number of opt-outs but is doing a better job with the training, having age appropriate range, and enough health teachers.

Dr. Gurwitz states he would like to have the BOH make a formal statement to endorse the Sexual Education curriculum at WPS.

Frances Anthes makes motion to endorse the curriculum. Motion is seconded by Chareese Allen.

Frances Anthes commended the school committee, the Superintendent, and her staff for their efforts in designing, implementing and putting forward the comprehensive health education curriculum which includes sexual education.

### *CHIP*

- Cassandra Andersen, WDPH Chief of Community Health introduces Casey Burns, Director of the Coalition for Healthy Greater Worcester.
- Casey Burns presented a PowerPoint slideshow (attached) on the 2021 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) release.
- This CHIP is much more upstream, equity and data driven. Focusing on structural conditions—social inequities lead to institutional inequities which drive living conditions.
- Cassandra Anderson suggests that the BOH can get involved by adopting Municipal Racial Equity policies by working with the Coalition's Racism and Discrimination Sub-Committee. Tools can be piloted and reviewed to see how they can be used and see what's missing. They can be used long-term in BOH work. Big part of the plan are the Community Wide Policy Change Campaigns with 12 campaigns—11 with one that includes 'other' things that have not been added yet that may develop along the way such as the Post-Vax Life Campaign.
- Public Health campaigns are key to prevention. How can the BOH be a part of this work? An interested BOH member could be appointed to a campaign. Collaborating with the BOH and other institutions in the city on the advancement of the different campaigns. BOH could be at the table for these different campaigns.

- The BOH could lead the Prioritized Strategy and Action Agenda on the CHIP. This would be to pass new policies regarding the reporting of health equity data to track public health indicators (see slide deck). Important to have the data to see if we are making progress. A Coalition data sub-committee already meets monthly.
- Policies and agreements need to be put in place and the BOH could help be a part of making that happen. The data group could come to the BOH and present on the kinds of data that they are examining.
- The 2021 CHIP release will be held on November 9<sup>th</sup> and is also a celebration of the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health award being presented to Worcester.

*Discussion:*

Frances Anthes and Chareese Allen agree on the need for diversity and inclusion.

Looking forward to the initiative.

Dr. Tran asks if there could be a plan to regroup and provide the BOH with more details on the health information and increasing transparency and to let the BOH know what they can do as a group to help.

David Fort states that there have been blocks from politicians to get things done. The BOH has tried to step in and do things the city and politicians were not able to do. BOH runs into stumble blocks from the city administration and the city council. Politics are getting in the way and standing in the way of progress when it comes to equity, racism and public health issues.

Dr. Gurwitz states that the BOH needs a roadmap to assist and support the work of the new CHIP.

Cassandra Anderson offers to come back with others that can provide more details of how to implement one of the campaigns.

*Next Meeting/Topics*

Civilian Review Board discussion and next steps.

COVID-19 updates, health disparities and children

Homelessness and cold weather

Future Topics: Human trafficking

Next meeting will be Monday, December 6, 2021 at 6:30 PM via WebEx.

*Adjourn*