



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES August 18, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	August 18, 2020
Location:	Via Webex
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Sarah Wolf, Chairperson Shannon Erdmann, Vice Chairperson Ken Warnock Ann Cameron Eric Bourke Theresa Whitman Matt Harrington
Absent:	
Guests:	Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology, Allison Collins, Director of Special Education, Jennifer Roberts, Principal EES, Joanne Maino, Principal MERMS
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) Public Comment** –

Nina Williams a 2018 graduate of MERHS and current Georgetown University student working with Abby Fitzgibbon established a campaign entitled Student Coalition Against Racism. They developed an online survey which was forwarded to students, alumni and the community. Ms. Williams stated final data is representative of the communities at large. Ms. Williams and Ms. Fitzgibbon received 239 responses to their survey which focused on five areas: curriculum, school culture, discipline, school resource officer and diversity of faculty and staff. The full survey, supporting documentation and conclusions will be forwarded to the School Committee and Administration. Ms. Wolf thanked Nina for her worked and assured her the School Committee will address the issues raised by SCAR.

Tamar Lipof stated a petition had circulated over the weekend and this evening she was speaking as a local physician and concerned Manchester parent. Dr. Lipof asked the School Committee to consider a revote on their decision to go fully remote at the beginning of school year 2020-2021. She reminded School Committee members that as elected officials it was only fitting, they hear feedback from parents. The survey recommended students grades K-3 return to school on September 16, 2020 with all safety guidelines in place and offered help from local parents to make that possible. Dr. Lipof stated she believes remote learning turns parents into corrections or patrol officers. She encouraged the School Committee to start with the K-3 classes with outdoor options, windows open and utilizing support of parents. The petition advocates for children and the parents desire to be part of the solution.

Fares Mouchantaf, Essex Board of Health – In a letter to the School Committee the Essex BOH expressed concern for children grades K-5 and online learning at the elementary level. The Board indicated the rate of the virus is low in Essex, Manchester and surrounding communities. The BOH believes the long-term impact on children needs to be taken into consideration citing medical opinions in support of children K-5 being in school. In their letter the Essex BOH indicated they did not believe the District was using scientific data or evidenced based planning for returning to school. The Board suggested the District review the models in Denmark and Norway where children had successfully returned to school.

Kate the mother of two children has heard the criticism regarding the School Committee's decision and thought it important to speak to the reopening of schools. Kate a former teacher and curriculum developer with a master's in education feels qualified to speak to the issue. When she took the survey, she supported returning to school in the Hybrid Model, however the reality of the model is far from a reliable educational model. It is impractical to have 6-year-old children sitting for hours at their desks. Additionally, the cost to the District to implement a Hybrid Model is significant. Kate is excited to see how remote learning differs in the coming school year and supports the District's plans to build a more robust remote learning model.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked 1623 Studios for recording and posting the meeting.

Ms. Wolf indicated it had been a busy week with many people raising questions and concerns about the survey results and the Hybrid Model supported by many parents. Ms. Wolf stated

following the August 4, 2020 and August 11, 2020 meetings the School Committee unanimously voted to start the school year fully remote based on health and safety concerns, the diminished quality to the District's program in the Hybrid Model, staffing challenges and financial constraints.

Ms. Wolf asked if there was a motion to revote the decision made at last week's meeting. There was no motion brought forward by the School Committee.

Ms. Wolf stated we all want to get back to school the vote to start in a Remote Model allows teachers to start preparing to return to their classrooms. The District plans to provide for high needs students in school. Additionally, the District is committed to working with our partners at the Y to establish childcare support for families. Ms. Wolf believes if we work together the District will have a successful beginning for the new school year in a robust remote program.

Ms. Wolf stated we heard from the Student Coalition against Racism (SCAR) and asked Superintendent Beaudoin how the School Committee established a working group to address the issues raised by SCAR. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated there were two options: a standing subcommittee or establish something different to coordinate with the internal group currently working on racism. Ms. Wolf stated the Policy Sub Committee would work with the Administration and SCAR. Ms. Wolf acknowledged the hard work and of the former students at SCAR.

3) Student Report –

The Committee's student representative is taking the summer off. We look forward to Lukas rejoining us in September.

4) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 8.4.2020

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the minutes of August 4, 2020 with edits and the Warrants (1078, 1079 and 1006), Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ann Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – No Report

Ms. Cameron informed the Committee the School Building Committee had met last Thursday and the classroom wing of the new Memorial School is complete and ready for the start of the school year. Ms. Cameron stated there is a punch list of less than 100 items which will be completed soon. Ms. Cameron thanked the team of Dorn Wittier, JCJ and WT Rich who in spite of delays related to Covid-19 completed the build on time and on budget. Ms. Erdmann added

special thanks to former School Committee member, Caroline Weld, who worked tirelessly on the School Building Committee.

Ms. Cameron indicated the Finance Committee is working to schedule a meeting with the Collaboration Group which includes Town Administrators, Town Finance Committee members, Board of Selectmen representatives, Superintendent Beaudoin and Finance Director, Mr. Urbas. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the meeting is likely scheduled for Thursday morning.

6) Continued Business

7) Superintendent’s Report –

- Fall 2020 Reopening Update & Planning Report

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the Planning Update will include an overview of remote learning with additional information coming out as preparations are finalized. This evening presenters will focus on:

- Pedagogical Background of Remote Learning
- Remote Plan
- HVAC Update
- Special Education Update

Dr. Riley stated what the District is planning for the fall is different from the spring. The work for this fall started in March 2020 with defining what remote learning was. Dr. Riley indicated remote learning had never been thought of before and it is important in planning for remote learning in September 2020 to face and learn from the challenges of spring. It is also important to synthesize online learning and delve deeply into online models.

The pedagogical practices for hybrid and remote learning have been in colleges for some time. The team took online courses, reviewed webinars, read articles, upgraded Zoom and asked for feedback from experts around what online learning would look like at every developmental level.

What is the Need?

Which Tech Resources Support This?

Create Impactful Lessons

LMS & Instructional Strategy – Trainings to address whole group and small groups supports, student engagement and parental support

Communicate with Students

Zoom Rooms, Google Hangout, MSSAA and Modern Classroom trainings

Build Classroom Community,

Collaboration & Feedback for Students

Flip-grid, Pear Deck, Screencastify Submit, Ed-puzzle Kami

Instructions Pedagogy in Hy-flex Model

- Books and Training Videos
Highlighting-specific technology to support specific instructional needs
- Webinars
- Online Courses
- Updating MERSD Teacher Website with New Training Links
- Planning Professional Days (10 days at start of School Year)
- Teacher Team Training This Summer
Best Instructional Practices to support Remote Instructions
MSSAA: “Designing Distance Learning: Best Virtual Learning Practices to Maximize Student Learning and Engagement”
Team from each building to train teachers in each building
Best Practices to Support Structure and Content Delivery
Seesaw (K-2: Memorial and Essex)
Google Classroom Best Practices (3-12)
- Collaboration Drop-In Sessions for Teachers
- Videos for In-Classroom and Remote Instructional Delivery

Dr. Riley stated in the spring the State had informed Districts not to instruct with new materials. As a result, the District was in a holding pattern for several weeks.

Moving forward the District is using every resource available to build a better model. We will offer support for students and opportunities for students and families to meet teachers. The RULER team from Yale is coming to help the District build best practices between school and home. There are a lot of moving parts going into the fall around the remote learning model and the team is addressing all the parts.

Seven best virtual learning strategies are being defined and developed at each school and at every grade level.

The District is rebuilding the teachers’ website with recorded tutorials, is building a parents’ website with tech support and adding an IT call in line for parents.

Ms. Cameron asked what percentage of teachers are solid with the use of the correct technology and specifically which resource to use when? Dr. Riley answered all teachers went through trainings in spring and are familiar with Flip grid, Pear Deck, Ed-puzzle and Kami. Teachers are building their knowledge around which technology works best for which task. The District has taken additional steps to consider Google Classroom practices and what each practice looks like in every building. Additionally, the District invested in See Saw for grades K-2.

Ms. Erdmann asked how in fall 2020 the social emotional needs of students will be met and is that online. Dr. Riley stated the District has been working with Yale over the summer with

researchers experienced in supporting students and families and including that support in everyday instruction. Also, Elizabeth Englander has developed an online course on what happens when students come back to school and has specific recommendations on supports to offer in the classroom.

Dr. Riley stated updates will be coming for families closer to the start of school.

Superintendent Beaudoin updated the Remote Learning Model

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is well positioned to move into remote learning. The School Committee voted to start the school year remote with the potential to bring back younger students as the year progresses. Special needs students will start the school year in their classrooms.

The remote learning model will replicate the school day and is set up with strong pedagogy. The general plan for secondary students is to accommodate the high school program exactly like it would look if the students were in the building. The online classes will include introduction to material, instruction and working with peers in small groups. The expectation is students will be active and involved all day. Attendance will be taken in each class, typical assessments will be provided with feedback and grading including report cards. Superintendent Beaudoin reiterated all of the in-class expectations will exist online.

Readiness to attend school means students are dressed for school, work quietly and have a desktop like surface to work from. Students should be engaged, on time and ready to learn. The advisory outlook for middle school is the same as high school with teachers teaching from their classrooms.

This approach filters down to the elementary level with developmentally appropriate interactions with the teacher. Younger students will not be on screen for 6-hours at a time. Remote learning does not negate in person activities. Opportunities will be provided for children and parents to meet their teachers before transitioning to online learning. At the elementary level, the typical schedule will be followed with an eye to bringing the children into the building.

All students will be provided with an iPad or chrome book the District understands each student needs their own device. Supplies will be prepared for pick up. The online day will simulate the school day. Students will attend all classes with breaks built in for non-computer-based work.

Ms. Erdmann asked about the asynchronous learning model. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the asynchronous model is offered by the Department of Education under contract with the District. It is an alternative for families where remote learning does not work to enroll in the program and receive credit from MERSD. The curriculum covers the same material. Ms. Erdmann asked if a family chose the asynchronous model and if the student wanted to participate in athletics (if athletics were offered) would that be possible. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she hoped that would be the case.

Ms. Whitman asked as we triage high needs special education students, she was concerned about older students who need science labs. Superintendent Beaudoin answered we are not there yet, but Principal Puglisi is aware of the need and will address that as time allows. Ms. Whitman also asked if there would be an adjustment in school start times. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the school day will begin at 8:00 a.m. to keep aligned with student's schedules if we move back to in school classes and in consideration of META contracts.

Ms. Whitman stated there had been concerns expressed last spring around the District "coming at us" in our homes. Ms. Whitman would like to see the remote learning model as more of a partnership. Dr. Riley responded that is a conversation for us to have as we transition to a full day model. Hopefully, families will be comfortable with the structure this fall when class schedules are made clear and materials provided. Dr. Riley indicated this has been a learning curve for everyone. Ms. Whitman reiterated when we are educating in our homes it needs to feel like a partnership.

Ms. Whitman asked for the timeline regarding materials needed to start the school year. Dr. Riley stated principals will forward information and the information will be on the parent's website. Principal Roberts stated she hopes to have information to the parents next week.

Ms. Cameron asked how hard it was to move into "sub" Zoom rooms. Principal Maino stated all teachers know how to move into break out rooms. Ms. Cameron stated study groups and collaborative learning are an important part of the learning model. Dr. Riley stated teachers are in study groups now.

Ms. Cameron asked about moving from remote to hybrid and would the District be able to maintain the full educational program when that move was made. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that would be possible at the elementary level.

Superintendent Beaudoin elaborated that the challenge at the Middle and High School levels was the number of students in a cohort group with students and teachers interacting with 60 to 120 individuals. Superintendent Beaudoin pointed out there were inconsistencies with the State and Department recommendations for which she has requested clarification from the Department of Education and concluded either the State needs to amend their guidance or DPH needs to say the number of individuals is safe.

Ms. Whitman asked where social emotion learning was being incorporated. Superintendent Beaudoin stated RULER is in the classrooms, full counseling direct support is available, tele help is available, all schools have identified students who were not engaged in spring and there are built in levels of tiered response to help student on plans.

Ms. Whitman asked how parents received help for their children. Superintendent Beaudoin stated parents should go to their classroom teacher or the principal.

Special Education Planning Update – Dr. Collins stated the School Committee voted and supports in school learning for high needs students. The District is working with META to determine teacher availability to deliver the program. The Department of Education definition of

high needs students is below. The District will prioritize SWING and pre-school programs. The District will also maintain information and implement student's IEP's working with parents form spring and continue to monitor student progress moving forward.

Fall Guidance from DESE

- Students must receive all services in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction or a combination of both
- Instruction and services delivery model (versus resources and supports)
- While abiding by the current necessary health and safety requirements
- Strong emphases on providing in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible
DESE guidance prioritizes: Preschool and High Needs students
- **High Needs**
Services provided outside of the general education classroom
By special education teachers and related service providers
Special education services constitute more than 75% of the student's school day
Students who primarily use aided and augmentative communication

Plan for MERSD

- Deliver all IEP services
- Remote learning plans will be developed, and parent input sought, most likely after liaisons return to school
- Planning will consider data from spring on student progress with remote learning
- Envisions a continuum from high needs students in specialized programs, to students who need extra problem solving to access remote, to students who are in full inclusion programs and can access remote given school day structure and their typical IEP supports
- Any discussion of in person services will include consideration of public health guidance to avoid mixing cohorts of teachers and students and to minimize the number of contacts for each student and staff member.

Ms. Wolf asked if remote learning plans were available for all students in special education, she indicated there was a parent this evening who commented her child struggled to access and succeed in the spring. Dr. Collins indicated that was the plan.

Ms. Cameron asked if there would be a phased in plan for kids who struggled this spring. Dr. Collins plans to follow-up with an email to all parents with children on IEP's. Ms. Cameron also asked about at risk kids and those kids who were not at risk in the spring but are now she wanted to know how we get eyes on them. Hopefully, that will take place during in-person meetings prior to school.

Ms. Wolf asked about screening for kids who are struggling. Dr. Collins stated screening teams are in place and will meet remotely. Teachers and parents can refer to the team and there are additional supports to general education.

Ms. Whitman asked if meal pick up will continue in the fall and how that will happen. Superintendent Beaudoin stated we are working on that and will let parents know. Ms. Whitman also asked if critical hires had been made for EES. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she was signing letters regarding the hires.

HVAC Update – Mr. Urbas

Mr. Urbas stated information in DESE guidance regarding maximum fresh air flow has been achieved in all buildings. Systems at MEMSHS and Memorial School were new and EES has an updated system in place. HEPA filters that assure best air exchange have been procured.

The District is working with an engineering consultant on HVAC systems to provide additional information on how to best optimize current systems. The report submitted from the consultant was strong. The engineer provided a checklist for preventative maintenance. The District is in a good position to provide healthy air flow. Additionally, an Air Balancing Consultant has been hired to review the systems and confirm all systems are performing.

META requested information from the District on plans regarding air quality. Mr. Urbas assured the School Committee it is clear the District is following all DESE guidance and all OSCA regulations.

Ms. Whitman asked if it was necessary for dampers at EES to be manually adjusted and if teachers needed to make those adjustments. Mr. Urbas responded most of the building was automatically adjusted and where that did not take place the Facilities Department would make the adjustments not the teachers.

Ms. Cameron asked about the District budget and where the District currently stood regarding reserves. Mr. Urbas stated the reserves are strong in part due to earned interest income from money deposited for funding the new Memorial School. Grants, FEMA money and State aid have to date kept the District from dipping into reserves. Additionally, The CARES Act provided \$225.00 per student to the district. A full review of the budget will be developed for the next meeting.

Ms. Whitman asked about sports and club activities. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is waiting to hear about DESE recommendations regarding sports and where we can club activities will be offered online.

Childcare Options

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is working with the Y for a local option around childcare. The Y is an approved licensed emergency childcare provider and certified early childhood day care provider. The District has worked with the Y as an independent contractor in the past.

The plan is to offer full day and extended day options for local parents. The costs of the program are low with financial assistance and a sliding scale for services.

The Y is developing a brochure for the communities. The plan is for 2 counselors to 10 children with staff supervising online remote learning where applicable. There will be built in breaks and movement activities during the school day. Lunch will be provided. To date there have been about 100 inquires about the program. The program will be limited to District students.

8) School Committee Comment –

Ms. Wolf ended the meeting stating she wants everyone to know we all want children in school and do not want children on screens the full day. The School Committee is working for a safe productive school year and we appreciate your support and feedback.

Ms. Erdmann stated the solution is not perfect for everyone and asked for patience as the year moves forward.

9) Adjourn

Mr. Warnock moved the School Committee Business Meeting to Executive Session, Ms. Cameron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.