



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES October 6, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	October 6, 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, Patricia Puglisi, HS Principal
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

A. Call to Order – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) Public Comment –

Bernie Romanowski – asked the Committee to consider a vote for K-5 to move from remote to hybrid. He has two children who are struggling to be engaged.

Jake Foster – stated remote learning is a challenge and what he has heard about implementation in the elementary school is frustrating. Mr. Foster understands the chat program in disabled limiting the possibility for social interaction among students. He believes this is an attempt to control not engage children. He would like to see the remote experience extended to include more small group work. Additionally, Mr. Foster asked that meeting materials be posted prior to meetings.

Lukas Shan – Student Representative stated remote learning is interesting and for the most part challenging. Now that students are in week three, they are into the flow. He noted that during classes there is less than the usual amount of participation in class discussions, but he believes everyone is paying attention. Lukas stated some teachers are going over time and cutting into the 10-minute break between classes. this leaves some students in waiting rooms for their next class and it takes up to 10 minutes to be admitted to class. Lukas plays tennis, is a member of the pre-med club, math and science teams.

Ms. Erdmann asked Lukas about academics. He stated classes were challenging and teachers are responsive to requests. He stated some teachers are not allowing the full block for tests and that is an issue for some students. He thought overall student-teacher communication was solid.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf welcomed everyone online to the meeting indicating this is the beginning of week three in the remote learning model with plans to move into Phase I of the Hybrid model. Ms. Wolf believes everyone is getting into the groove. Multiple students will be coming into the elementary schools while remote learning will remain in place for older students. She asked that everyone in the meeting remain respectful and considerate both in the meeting and when they meet outside of the meeting.

3) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 9.1.2020
- Acceptance of Warrants

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the Consent Agenda, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ann Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report

Ms. Cameron reported that Ms. Erdmann and Mr. Harrington had a tour of the new Memorial School building and both agreed it was a little strange without students in the building. Mr. Harrington stated he was impressed with the lighting and flooring in the building and all the unique and thoughtful choices around the finishes in the building.

- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report

The Finance Committee has a Collaborative Group meeting scheduled for October 9, 2020.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – Report

Originally it was believed the Student Transportation Policy would require editing. The policy reads: “Students living within a 1.5-mile radius of the school he/she is attending may have access to transportation for an annual fee subject to route practicality and cost.” The law requires Districts to provide transportation for students living 2-miles from the school. At this time, the District will not offer transportation to families living less than 2-miles from schools. The “may have access” does not require a change to the current policy.

Ms. Wolf wants parents to know the School Committee understands and empathizes with the necessary change. Parents will be notified of the change.

- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – Report

Mr. Warnock stated META has agreed to deliver on the Elementary Hybrid model and to the District’s reopening plan. Mr. Warnock believes the change to the hybrid model is in part possible to the problem solving and collaborative effort between the District and META.

5) Superintendent’s Report

- Reopening Planning & Implementation Report

Superintendent Beaudoin’s update will cover feedback on school opening and remote learning including athletics and technology updates.

Beginning of the Year Remote Learning Feedback

Elementary

- Good Structure & Rigor
- Teachers are doing a great job (communication, lessons and availability)
- Concerns
 - Length of Day – morning is stronger than afternoon “hitting the wall”
 - Schedule alignment between grade levels and universal lunch
 - Amount of screen time – particularly for younger children
 - Technology glitches with Zoom & Chromebooks

Middle School

- Good Structure & Rigor
- Teachers are doing a great job (communication, lessons and availability)
- Concerns
 - Technology glitches (Zoom management/blue tooth connectivity with Chromebooks)
 - Move into curriculum faster

High School

- Good Structure & Rigor
- Teachers are doing a great job (communication, lessons and availability)
- Concerns
 - Screen Time – working to create opportunities for more traditional tasks
 - Student Engagement
 - Upper Classman College Process
 - Mental Health

Recommendation

Mid-October Transition to Hybrid for Elementary

- Target transition hybrid implementation for K-2 week of October 19th
- Target transition hybrid implementation for 3-5 week of October 26th
- Elementary hybrid models – draft schedule provided

Hybrid Model

- The hybrid model meets local and state health and safety guidelines.
- The academic program can be delivered in the hybrid model with some modifications to the delivery of instruction.
- Hybrid model requires lessons to be designed for remote learning and accommodate in person cohorts. Teachers will plan and deliver remote instruction for students to access from home or from school simultaneously.

Options for Families

- Hybrid – 2 days in-person, 3 days at home remote learning
- Hybrid – Remote Only, Remote Participation Only – temporary or full-time, students assigned a cohort, in-person attendance may depend on medical need permanent/temporary, student must meet all attendance and assignment requirements of both in-person and home days, reentry to in-person at quarter/trimester change over
- Independent Remote, DESE Remote Learning Academy – year long commitment, receives MERSD Credit but operates independently of Hybrid/Remote Learning sponsored program, student will receive a faculty advisor.
- Home School – Independent from MERSD – Withdraw from MERSD and file an independent homeschooling plan. Contact Director of C&T for assistance. Link will be available on Reentry page.

MERSD Remote Learning Technology Update

Dr. Riley and Mr. Urbas presented the Technology Update stating they are aware of challenges and encouraged families with problems to please call the help desk the more the District is aware of the problems the more we can help.

K-2 Technology – iPads (Zoom and Seesaw), Grades 3-5 Technology – Chromebooks (Zoom and Google Classroom), Grades 6-12 Technology – Chromebooks (6-8), BYOD (9-12) (Zoom and Google Classroom)

Technology Support Infrastructure

Parents/Students: External helpdesk, 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., email: MERSDhelp@axiscomputernetworks.com, Phone 978.463.2112

Teachers/Staff – Internal help desk: 4 FTE, 2 tech team, 1 contracted and 1 tech integrator. Allows for building-based support.

Help Desk Summary

213 external Help Desk tickets through Friday, 10/2. First week: average 30 new tickets/day, Second week: average 8 new tickets/day, Past week: average 6 new tickets/day.

Feedback: Same day communications, FAQ documents, Positive reviews of contract staff, some technology issues persist.

Internal tickets: new hardware and software rollout, Zoom meetings configurations/settings and routine on-site issues (printing, network, etc.)

Most Common Challenges/Solutions

Difficulty logging onto Zoom related to: Traffic at Zoom, use of multiple devices with same Zoom account and Zoom/Google account interaction, Help Desk has protocol for this, can require multiple log in attempts.

Audio/video lag or glitches related to: Home Internet: bandwidth, distance to router, number of devices at home, and non-school internet uses at home (e.g. other video streaming) Device resources (CPU, memory) being overtaxed by Zoom and other uses – Chromebooks and other home devices.

Solutions include: Home networking adjustments, Zoom and Chromebook software updated, Muting microphones when not speaking and Help Desk also showing parents how to clear cache prior to rebooting, closing other browser windows, which can free up resources.

Internet: Small number of families with unreliable Internet – offering prepaid hotspots.

This is a work in progress for MERSD (and all remote districts) – We are continuing to assess and adapt.

Ms. Erdmann asked if families with problems were allowed to swap out computers. Dr. Riley replied yes, we have swapped out devices and checked out and allowed the use of home devices for families. The District continues to follow up to confirm situations are resolved. Ms. Cameron

asked about logging into Zoom with multiple devices. Superintendent Beaudoin stated it has helped for families to have someone to talk to and the team works daily to problem solve.

Ms. Whitman asked about disabling blue tooth and requiring the use of headphones. Dr. Riley stated it was a challenge to support the additional technology and some technologies are not compatible with all devices. Additionally, there are some problems with the audio infrastructures which are being worked on and addressed. Ms. Whitman stated the District is trouble shooting not turning resources off. Dr. Riley stated that is correct and cross over technologies with blue tooth is not as easy as it appears.

Athletic Update

Principal Puglisi is happy to report the Athletic Program is moving forward really well. Coaches and students are following guidelines and mask wearing remains a priority. The District may reconsider spectators at competitions in the next few weeks. Principal Puglisi stated there were varying rules school to school with some schools not enforcing the No Fans Ban.

Principal Puglisi added the District is bringing some students back into school focusing on students who have missed multiple days in a row. The District is continuing to identify high needs and regular education students who may need additional assistance to make sure they are on track.

Over the next three weeks the District will transition to hybrid in the elementary schools. Week of October 14th grades K-2 and the following week grades 3-5.

6) Continued Business

- Hybrid Transition Indicators

Hybrid implementation criteria for K-5

Health and Safety

- Manchester and Essex are shaded green or gray according to MA Covid map
- Safety Guidelines are met, and HVAC systems meet seasonal requirements
- MBTS and Essex BOH agree with decision, have a notification system in place and agree to partner with District to address contact tracing needs

Educational Program

- Instructional supports are flexible and functional
- District can meet time-on-learning goals

Staffing

- All classrooms staffed by a teacher
- Meets Teaching Assistant and Substitute staffing needs in each school
- Nurse and/or nurse assistant in school

- Meets bus monitor staffing requirements

Financial

- Hybrid learning can be accommodated within School Committee budgetary allocation

Hybrid implementation criteria for MS/HS

Health and Safety

- Manchester and Essex are shaded green or gray according to MA Covid map
- Safety Guidelines are met, and HVAC systems meet seasonal requirements
- MBTS and Essex BOH agree with decision, have a notification system in place and agree to partner with District to address contact tracing needs

Educational Program

- Cohort size expands to 60 or greater for Middle High School, (teacher exposure = 120, students and State guidelines for gatherings = 10 people per 1000 ft)
- Full educational program continues

Staffing

- All classrooms staffed by a teacher
- Meets Teaching Assistant and Substitute staffing needs in each school
- Nurse and/or nurse assistant in school
- Meets bus monitor staffing requirements

Financial

- Hybrid learning can be accommodated within School Committee budgetary allocation

Further District Considerations

- Surveillance Testing – a tool for increasing # of students on campus
- Events that may force a shutdown (large gatherings with not Covid safety Measures)
- Lessons learned from other Districts
- Possibility of additional funding in the new calendar year (Federal)
- Full, in-school return = when social distancing requirements have ceased or eased

School Committee Comment:

Ms. Erdmann stated dates on the timeline are on the District web site. Ms. Erdmann also encouraged the District to plan for High School community building activities outside of athletics. It will dark earlier soon, athletics will be ending, and we want to continue to build socializing activities for the students.

Ms. Cameron encouraged planning for in school labs, arts and clubs to support getting kids back in the building and engaged. Superintendent Beaudoin assured the Committee the District will build opportunities for students to come into the buildings.

Ms. Whitman asked on behalf of parents who was involved in developing the proposed hybrid program. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the hybrid/cohort model was initially discussed by the School Committee in July 2020.

Mr. Warnock stated it was really good to see the program develop starting in July and improved through August. A lot of work has gone into making schools a safe place. The detail level of planning by the Administrators, Principals and staff has made what is being discussed this evening possible.

Ms. Cameron asked Superintendent Beaudoin to help establish expectations for parents around how long it will take to make the hybrid model work, how long will it take to find a rhythm. Ms. Cameron pointed out we have been working with the remote model for three weeks and we are about to change the plan.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the work and development of the hybrid model has never been done before. This is an entirely new platform following DESE health and safety regulations. The school year will not feel like any previous school year. The Hybrid model provides for personal contact a couple of times a week and supports a connection between students and teachers. The level of instruction prior to spring of last year is unlikely to be achieved in the Hybrid model and there are no signs of normal in the immediate future.

Ms. Erdmann mentioned that some Districts have their secondary students, grades 6-12 involved in the Hybrid program. Superintendent Beaudoin stated unfortunately MSHS building does not provide the amount of space necessary to move three cohort groups moving around the building while following current guidelines.

Ms. Wolf thanked Ms. Cameron, Mr. Erdmann and Superintendent Beaudoin for their time in developing the Hybrid Transition Indicators.

Mr. Warnock asked about the financial costs around personnel and expressed concern about the pool of candidates available to hire. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that within a ten-mile radius there are 200 positions posted in school districts, there is a lot of stress on the District around staffing. At this time, Administration is confident the elementary level in is solid shape to begin the Hybrid model.

The District has learned just from bringing in the small group of special education students that classes will need to be cancelled when a teacher calls in sick. And if a teacher needs to be quarantined for 14 days that presents a more significant challenge but these things will happen. The process is new and there will likely be ups and downs through the coming school year.

Mr. Harrington asked about data involved to decide to move from Hybrid to Remote. The State looks at a three-week trend prior to acting, however any decision the District makes will be in

consultation with the local Boards of Health. Mr. Harrington asked about families with a pod facilitator and going back and forth between Remote and Hybrid. Superintendent Beaudoin stated children in the Hybrid program will be at home three days a week and she encourages families to maintain their plans through winter because of the unpredictability of the environment.

Community Comment:

Lily stated this was her first meeting and was wondering if there had been discussions around prioritizing students in K-2.

Lauren Harrison thought that for surveillance the Committee should lean on the Community. Ms. Harrison believes it is important to access the classrooms for Social Emotional and physical health of students above everything. She agreed with Ms. Erdmann that MSHS interaction with other students was important for their socialization.

Lisa would like the School Committee to reconsider 6 feet of social distancing and thought it important to engage the kids for full day and would like to see the elementary students back for 4 days a week full time in person.

Betsy McKeen asked about the hybrid model moving forward and would like to know what will happen in classrooms during the hybrid day. She is interested in knowing because that will impact her family decision to send their children to school or to keep them at home.

Kate stated she would like to point out the amazing teachers and how they adapted their craft for onscreen and in classrooms. It is a huge ask and not optimal for in classroom students to receive the teacher's full attention. She would like the District to consider a sounder educational model.

Sara Scott stated she is balancing everything and synchronous is going better than anticipated.

Kimberly Lennox asked about the criteria the School Committee would use to revisit their social distancing decision. Ms. Lennox stated the DESE social distancing requirements were smaller.

Tamar asked if lunch will be included during the school day and if the School Committee would reconsider social distancing criteria. (Difficulty hearing full comment.)

Christine Oliver commented on Chromebooks issued and delivering content to 3rd graders. In her home it took 20 minutes to get all students online. Ms. Wolf stated technology challenges are frustrating and hopefully her challenges have been addressed and classrooms will start running with less start up time.

Ms. Wolf stated the School Committee vote on moving forward with Hybrid learning model will take place following the Budget discussion.

- FY21 Budget Update

FY20 Revenue Updates

- Chapter 70:
Discussion at State level to strive for level funding but full year uncertain
Ongoing discussion re: Hold Harmless Aid
Potential impact from home schooling
- Regional Transportation – TBD
- School Choice – MERSD did not replace graduating SC student (12) in FY 21

Covid Revenue/Cost Tracking

- CARES Act Grants: \$403K
- Spending Planned to Date: \$675K (Tech: \$525K, PPE \$100K and HVAC \$50K)
- FEMA reimbursement pending: 75% max for PPE/HVAC, but FEMA lowering expectations
- Net potential deficit of \$100-\$200K prior to staffing
- Staffing: \$85K/month K-5

Reserve Update

- \$2.75M unassigned/available, excluding: \$969K stabilization set aside for facilities, \$335K devoted to FY21 operating budget gap, \$100K to \$200K Covid hit plus staffing

Identified Capital Needs: 1-5 years Winter 2020 Assessment totaled \$1,870,000

Multi-Year Budget

- 335K reserve usage in FY21 likely to grow in future years
- \$1.9M potential usage over next 4 years

Ms. Erdmann asked if the multi \$1.9M was the roll forward of \$335K, Mr. Urbas confirmed that was correct.

Ms. Cameron asked at what point in the multi-year process is the District's credit rating impacted. Mr. Urbas stated spending reserves will have an impact. Ms. Cameron asked if the District would require a correction in FY24. Superintendent Beaudoin stated it is too early to tell and will likely depend on the duration of the situation.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated at some point in the FY22 budget season the District will know the full impact of the Covid crisis and after that start to plan to put things back together. Ms. Cameron would like a recommended dollar amount for Hybrid Model. Superintendent recommended capping staffing at \$300K for K-5. Ms. Cameron asked how the Committee watches the expenditures. Superintendent Beaudoin stated it is easy to track staffing and can be reviewed every 4 weeks.

Mr. Warnock moved the School Committee authorize the Superintendent to implement a graduated hybrid learning model at the elementary level for as long as health and safety,

educational program, staffing and budgetary conditions are met subject to negotiations. Ms. Cameron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Wolf asked the Committee is there was interest in considering the six-foot social distancing requirement for the District. The Committee is not willing to make that change this evening but recognizes this is a fluid situation and will review in the future.

- School Committee Goals

- Target resources to support the unique educational, logistical, and social/emotional needs of students across the District during the Covid Crisis.
- Manage the District's budget and budget reserves, allocating resources for both near-term and long-term financial health of the District.
- Continue to manage the construction of the new Memorial School, ensuring it remains on time and on budget. Ensure parity between Essex Elementary School and Memorial School in key facility-related areas in order to maintain educational parity (technology, security, and playground). Plan and execute construction of the Essex Eagle's Nest playground.
- Stand up the appropriate working groups and establish goals and benchmarks to address the commitment the School Committee made in adopting the anti-racist policy.

Resolved: that Manchester Essex Regional School District and the school districts in the Commonwealth must guarantee that racist practices are eradicated, and diversity, equity, and inclusion is embedded and practiced for our students, families, faculty, and staff.

Ms. Whitman asked how the Committee evaluated the goals. Ms. Cameron stated the goals apply when the Committee is required to act and decide on behalf of the District. Ms. Whitman stated the goals are a guiding principal. Superintendent stated hopefully the School Committee will be able to focus on strategic planning, the TA contact and preparing for the 2022 META contract negotiations during school year 2020-2021.

Ms. Cameron stated she would like to return to discussing programs. Ms. Wolf stated goals presented are a first read and with some editing will be finalized at the next Committee meeting.

- Superintendents Goals

Superintendent Beaudoin's goals: Superintendent Beaudoin indicated her FY20 goals were not completed due to the Covid crisis. She plans to move forward key planning goals with hope that the District can settle into some level of routine this year. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she was not adding a specific Covid goal as it is more a crisis management activity than a planned goal.

- Professional Practice
Labor Management Relations: Utilize interest-based bargaining to successfully negotiate a multi-year META Teacher Assistant contract and follow-up work for META Teacher agreement.
Work in collaboration with META Co-Presidents to achieve mutual goals.

- Student Learning/District Learning
 - Develop a multi-year strategic plan to guide District Improvement.
 - Utilize the vision of the graduate to drive the development of the District Strategic Plan
 - Reestablish the District Health & Wellness Committee
 - Collaborate with Director of Curriculum & Instruction on Phase 3 Roll-Out RULER
 - Collaborate with District Leadership Team to identify action steps for Phase 4 Roll-Out Parent/Community education and information.
 - Complete Task Force work to review overnight school trips and travel policies and make formal recommendation.

- District Improvement
 - Redesign of annual budget document.
 - Work collaboratively with Town Partners to manage budget uncertainty related to Covid-19 Crisis impact to state and local education funding and resources to minimize impact to MERSD educational program.
 - Continue to Manage Memorial School Project.

7) School Committee Comment

Ms. Cameron asked if the EES playground could be on the agenda for the next meeting. She also asked that the money ear marked for the playground be discussed as part of the FY22 budget process.

School Committee meeting scheduled for November 3, 2020 will begin at 5:00 p.m.

8) Adjourn

Ms. Erdmann moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.