



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES December 15, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	December 15, 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:	Patricia Puglisi, Principal HS, Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

A. Call to Order – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) Public Comment –

Caroline Weld, Manchester – Ms. Weld stated over the past year there has been high attendance at School Committee meetings around Covid, remote and hybrid models. She acknowledged the

value of community support and encouraged parents to participate in the FY22 budget process. Ms. Weld stated the Finance Committees are asking the District to cut the budget further than will support level services. The School Committee and District would like the support of parents in budget meetings to demonstrate and articulate the needs of their children.

Tamar Lipof, Manchester – Dr. Lipof stated she believed surveillance testing could provide a false sense of security and the proven strategies of social distancing, hand washing, and masking were the steps that needed to be reinforced. She recommended surveillance testing for teachers and staff to save the District the additional cost of testing of testing students.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf stated there was light at the end of the tunnel and thanked the parents online for joining the meeting this evening.

3) Student Report – Lukas is participating in an online pre-med conference this evening.

4) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 11.3.2020, 12/1/20
- Acceptance of Warrants, Voucher #1021 to #1025

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

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ann Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – Report

Ms. Cameron stated all is well with the Memorial School project.

- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – Report

Ms. Erdmann stated the Committee was up to date with a Collaboration Group Meeting scheduled for December 18, 2020.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) –

There is a SEPAC Meeting scheduled for Thursday, December 17, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. and the Committee is planning to work with SCAR.

- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) –

The Negotiation Team has met around the MOA, the meetings have been positive the group is working toward resolution and agreement followed by full faculty ratification.

6) Superintendent's Report –

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the MHS in person introductory hybrid days were rescheduled due to a critical staffing shortage. She indicated she appreciated the patience and understanding of students and parents. Additionally, the start of Winter Sports was postponed due to low subscription for swimming and pre-screening for basketball was not up and running.

Ms. Cameron asked to discuss athletics. She stated she is confused about what is driving the postponement decision. She asked to reconsider the conversation around basketball because she does not believe it is safe. Mr. Harrington strongly agrees with Ms. Cameron around basketball for winter and does not believe it is safe to play.

Mr. Warnock believes the subject bears discussion and is concerned about MIAA within and across communities in red zones. Ms. Wolf asked for additional clarification.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the decision to play is a week to week decision and the decision falls to the Athletic Director and HS Principal. Ms. Whitman stated Administration makes the decisions in coordination with Boards of Health. Ms. Erdmann agrees with Ms. Whitman stating she is confident in the work that others have done to present a successful path and process for winter athletes. Given the extensive and comprehensive work others have done to this end, I do not feel that we need to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Harrington stated getting kids back in the building is important and the first priority should be academics. He believes the School Committee needs to be consistent around the 6-feet of social distancing.

Ms. Erdmann stated the Committee cannot vote on something that is not on the agenda. She suggested a straw poll to see if there is enough concern around winter sports to discuss in a future meeting, where winter sports could be added to the agenda. Mr. Warnock stated hockey has the same proximity as basketball. Superintendent Beaudoin asked if the HS should participate in winter sports, indicating it appears to be a contradiction with the current remote status.

Ms. Erdmann stated the District is in hybrid and has blended students. Ms. Wolf suggested adding to the agenda for January 12, 2021. Ms. Erdmann recommended no determination without a public hearing.

Principal Puglisi stated the health and safety of the students in the number one priority. Winter sports include basketball, hockey, swimming and ski team. The goal is to provide a safe environment. She recommended revisiting the decision with a report on DESE guidance and assured the Committee decisions are being made cautiously .

Ms. Wolf, Mr. Bourke, Ms. Erdmann and Ms. Whitman agree the decision was made and they trust Administration to make decisions around playing. Given some School Committee members have strong reservations around winter sports it will be placed on the agenda for January 12, 2021.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated MHS is set for return to school in hybrid model on January 19, 2021. Staffing hurdle is 93% resolved with 76% of teachers returning and five approved leaves at the MHS level. The District is working to identify qualified substitute teachers.

Hybrid update, Manchester went to red last week with another report this coming Thursday to see if the Town reverts to yellow. There is no evidence transmissions were passed in schools.

Ms. Wolf stated according to Superintendent Beaudoin's contractual agreement a 2.5% COLA has been added to her compensation as previously approved by the School Committee.

Snow Days: Superintendent Beaudoin stated school will continue fully remote on snow days unless there are extensive power or internet outages. She will watch the forecast and decide for each snow event.

7) Continued Business

- Covid Surveillance –

MERSD Testing Plan Proposal

Who: Middle High School Students & Pre K – 12 Staff

- Timeline: Monday, January 11, 2021 – Testing Clinic Staff/Students
Test Results due Back on January 13, 2021
Establish clearance to begin Hybrid on January 19, 2021 received January 14, 2021
- Week of January 19, 2021 begin Administering on weekly basis through end of year (21 weeks)
- Students: Wednesday Cohort Green – Friday Cohort White
- Staff Cohorts Testing Schedule to be established alphabetically by building
Teo Group Green and White Aligned with the MHS Student Schedule

Testing Format:

- Batch Testing Administered Weekly (proposed) Ginkgo Bioworks
10 People per batch = \$15 / 21 Weeks / 1000 people = \$31,500
Part-time Nurse Assistance @ approximately \$25K
Investigating partnering with DESE for potential cost savings and implementation assistance (may result in different test and provider)
- School team organizes data collection
- Company picks, up analyzes and reports back to District
Data posted to a dashboard for MERSD Nursing Team to review
 - MERSD Nursing Team Nurses review the data and notify positive batches of need for further testing
 - MERSD Nursing Team Manage follow-up and school reentry

To Do If Approved:

- Finalize collection pan details
- Notify Students, Staff and Parents
- Determine if there is any policy language that needs to be developed (counsel/Policy Sub Committee)

Ms. Cameron asked if the plan was to test everyone or random testing and would students be able to opt out. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the questions were for a Policy discussion and the testing will not work unless the majority participates. She also stated the objective is to keep a running record of what is happening in the MHS and to get ahead of and outbreak. This is a proactive proposal.

Mr. Warnock moved to authorize the District to proceed with the testing program and testing clinic, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Whitman stated she hopes the majority participate. Ms. Wolf stated the Committee is not suggesting testing is mandatory. Ms. Cameron asked if the testing policy could be projected by the level of participation in the vaccination policy. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that vaccination policy question and was a State mandate and the reasons for non-compliance are not yet defined. Hopefully, the community will support the testing program.

Ms. Wolf reinforced that it is important to follow the existing guidance in place, six feet apart, masks and good hygiene.

- Curriculum Update – Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum

MERSD Literacy Update

State of Literacy: USA, DESE & MERSD –DESE Strategic Plan for Literacy: Our purpose

This plan describes how we will work toward realizing our ambitious vision. This work is critical for two reasons. First, student ELA achievement in Massachusetts is stagnant. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed no significant difference in Massachusetts 4th grade reading achievement in 2017 compared to 2007. While Massachusetts currently leads the nation in reading achievement on NAEP, other states have accelerated growth over the last ten years, and particular student subgroups in other states have already surpassed their Massachusetts counterparts.

Furthermore, a recent report from the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership exposed the reality that Massachusetts is only “number one for some.” While we are at the top on NAEP, that ranking conceals inequitable achievement among student groups. On the most recent NAEP reading assessment, 4th and 8th grade Black and Hispanic students in Massachusetts attained the same score as white students in the *lowest-performing state in the nation*. A strengthened educational program in ELA/Literacy will contribute to closing the “opportunity gap” and enable ALL students in Massachusetts to reach their full potential as learners.

Nationally NAEP data shows a 10 year stagnation in reading attainment of grade 4 students.

DESE Mass Literacy

The Background

- In the MA school system today, some of our children receive the instruction and support they need to develop a strong foundation for literacy – and some do not. Only about half of MA third-graders today are meeting literacy expectations. This statistic reflects not student effort or ability, but opportunity and support to learn. To achieve equity, every student in our schools must receive the high-quality curriculum and evidence-based instruction they need and deserve.
- Starting in 2018, staff in the Department’s Office of Literacy and Humanities engaged educators and other stakeholders statewide to develop the Department’s Literacy Strategic Plan, which is entitled *An Excellent Education in ELA and Literacy for ALL*. This strategic plan responds to the concerns of educators along with ELA/Literacy achievement data. As a result, it identifies two areas of focus for the Department’s instructional support for English Language Arts and Literacy: high-quality core instruction and evidence-based early literacy.

A Focus on Evidence-Based Early Literacy

- To address the need for enhanced early literacy instruction, over the next several years the Department will issue guidance for early literacy programming paired with implementation supports, including resources, professional development and grants. The guidance on this website serves three purposes:
 - To provide information about literacy acquisition and instruction that is based in current evidence
 - To describe evidence-based literacy practices that DESE seeks to see used in schools and taught in educator preparation programs
 - To compile quality instructional resources and useful references to support educators.

DESE Literacy Goals and Expectations Statement

Being able to read, write and speak are essential for full participation in our society. Literacy affords access to ideas, opportunities and so much more. But in Massachusetts’ school system today, many children do not receive the instruction and support they need to develop a strong foundation for literacy in grades pre K-3.

Mass Literacy is a statewide effort to empower educators with the evidence-based practices for literacy that all students need. Evidence-based instruction, provided within schools and classrooms that are culturally responsive and sustaining, will put our youngest students on a path toward literacy for life.

Massachusetts Literacy Guide: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/>

Reading Stages: Pre-Reading, Initial Reading, Confirmation and Fluency, Reading for Learning, Multiple Viewpoints, Construction and Reconstruction

Core Reading Systems: Phonemic Awareness, How Reading Works, Word Identification – Sight Words, Phonics, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Fluency

Mental Systems: Attention, Perception, Memory – General Knowledge. Domain Knowledge, Word Meaning, Language – Syntax, Semantics, Thinking and Reasoning – Comprehension, Inferencing, Interpretation Understanding

Proficient Reading: Skill in coordinating core reading systems to accomplish reading tasks.

DESE Mass Literacy – Next Steps

- GLEAM Grant: 5-year implementation grant for K-12 literacy support and instruction. \$20 million state-funded grant to support literacy curriculum, support and training. Early and adolescent literacy.
- Regional: Northshore Leadership Series for Administrators
- State: MASS Superintendents-Representative for Curriculum and Instruction in Literacy-support rollout
- DESE Sponsored Workshops & Webinars from researchers who helped develop the guiding documents
- MA Literacy Guide: <https://www.doe.edu/massliteracy/>

MERSD Summer 2020 Summer Literacy Program

- Collaboration between YMCA, MERSD and Hill for Literacy
- Summer program designed to support elementary-aged struggling readers
- Trained Existing MERSD staff in evidence-based instructional practices

Virtual PD training on discrete set of reading skills including:

- Skills for Early Reading & facilitation of high quality reading instruction
- Development of routines for systematic instruction with active practices in Foundational Skills
- Developed lesson plans which included modeling, guided practice and corrective feedback
- Instructional routines set to target needs in phonological awareness, sight word knowledge, phonics and decoding, fluent text reading, reading comprehension and encoding.
- All instruction was delivered via Zoom

MERSD Program Structure and Results

- 21 rising second and third graders from Memorial and Essex participated in the summer school program

- Students were identified by school personnel and/or parental sign up to close significant gaps in their literacy development.
- Students were assessed during the first week of the program and grouped according to grade and skill level.
- Throughout the for week program, students received small group instruction three days per week for 30 minutes.

MERSD Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) – Words Correctly Read per Minute (WCPM)

Pre-post data indicates that students made significant gains across measures of decoding, work reading and oral fluency.

Teacher Feedback The following quotes were gathered from the two teachers regarding their experience during the YMCA reading program and the impact on their teaching as a result of the training and coaching model.

- I really appreciated all the training and guidance we received from the HILL.
- The gradual release of responsibility model of coaching helped me to build my confidence so that I was not overwhelmed with learning the whole routine at once.
- I was nervous about this at first, by now I am so glad I did it!
- The teaching routines move at a quick pace which helps keep students actively engaged, especially remotely.
- I can easily see myself incorporating these skills into my lessons.
- Students learned to use the strategies on their own to sound out and blend unfamiliar words.
- The PD was more valuable than many other classes or workshops.
- I loved feeling the support of the coaches so that I did not have to listen to a lecture and go teach. The lesson was broken down and I mastered step by step before moving on.
- The materials we used were so easy to understand and use.
- The teaching strategies involved error correction procedures that helped all students to feel supported and successful.
- I will take everything I learned back to my classroom this fall.

Parent Feedback

- Eight respondents on a parent satisfaction survey proves to be overwhelmingly positive.
- One parent shared, “the online instructors were very engaging and kept our child focused and interested.”
- Another parent enthusiastically shared that their child “was engaged and the teachers were fabulous!”
- A third parent stated, “My husband and I were impressed. To offer a complementary program to families to keep their kids reading out loud and in practice plus offering the Camp Dory option. I was just splendid! And Appreciated!”
- In the additional comments section, the dame parent added that they were “pleased with how well organized and how well run this was. Thank you so much to those behind the

scenes of the Literacy program, those at Camp Dory, the Y and all who made the literacy camp opportunity possible. It was a bright light in an otherwise uneventful summer of social distancing.”

These comments were a few of many that conveyed that program met the needs of the families whose children attended.

Final Thoughts on Summer Literacy Learning

Over the last decade, parents, researchers, educators and policy-makers have raised concerns about the nature of literacy instruction. At the same time, extraordinary scientific progress has revealed insights into learning processes that are critical for supporting struggling readers and those with dyslexia. Initiatives like this summer program highlight the effective literacy instruction for educators by simultaneously building teachers’ capacity, lesson planning, delivery of instructional strategies and supporting the needs of various your readers. Increasing literacy skills to a level where all students have the tools for achievement is not a simple task, but it is perhaps one of the most critical issues facing our society and it is certainly worth our investment.

MERSD Elements of Core Literacy Instruction

- Whole Group: Engages children in standards-aligned lessons that build language and vocabulary, develop close reading skills and learn to write analytically.
- Small group: Students benefit from small-group targeted support during teacher-guided small-group lessons. Teachers use data to group students and plan targeted lessons to meet students at their level of need.
- Independent Practice: During small-group time, students practice skills and extend learning by engaging in workstation activities, independent reading or independent writing. Children might work in groups, pairs or on their own to complete activities at workstations or online.
- Each unit of instruction focuses on high-interest themes with lessons that help to introduce and reinforce skills and strategies, including strong phonics and foundation skill at the early graded.

Wonders is an evidence – and research-based English Language Arts program designed to support children in Grades K-6 to build a strong foundation in literacy in all foundational aspects of literacy.

Research Background-Ed Reports:

The materials for Wonders K-1-2 meet the expectations of alignment, including instruction and practice to develop grade-level skills and literacy understanding.

The materials include many high quality texts and tasks that support students’ development of literacy skills. The materials are vertically aligned and organized to build knowledge of topics and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate integrated skills. Instruction for foundational skill includes the core components necessary. <https://www.edreports.org/>

MERSD Implementation August 2020 – December 2020

- Wonders Materials Ordered and Delivered
- Professional Development for Staff: September 8 through December 7
- Grade Level Meeting Dates (October – December)
- October & November: Drop-In Sessions with Wonders Coach
- November & December: School-based Coaching
- Created cope and Sequence Unit Guides for Remote Learning (K-5)

Next Steps:

- Continue to assess our data, implement and train staff
- Focus on DESE research on science of reading
- Assess the application of K-5 elementary implementation and the bridge to adolescent literacy
- Determine application of practice of reading skills to 6-12 content area literacy.

Ms. Whitman asked about implementation and what parents could expect during implementation. She also asked about universal screening, tiered intervention, RTI and how the District would assure parity between Essex Elementary and Memorial.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated part of the goal of a scientific based program is to follow research and research indicated 10-20% of students need intervention. The District is in the process of determining what the data indicates and the long term answers. It is anticipated there will be better results in tier 1 reducing the need for intervention by Grade 3. Dr. Riley indicated she is working closely with Dr. Collins and decisions around intervention will be made over a period of time and not made in a single meeting. Dr. Riley and Dr Collins will define consistent evaluation and next steps. She also stated options are built into the curriculum with criteria to measure the progress of students.

Ms. Erdmann asked how often data will be analyzed. Dr. Riley indicated data will be collected over three to four months and will be evaluated around how the curriculum supports students' needs. Ms. Wolf stated she is enthusiastic about the Wonders curriculum. She asked how Dr. Riley thought it was going in remote and hybrid learning models. Dr. Riley stated the program shift was going well considering there is a lot to learn. She believes the teachers are doing an amazing job.

Ms. Wolf asked if elementary students are being allowed to work in Zoom break out rooms. Dr. Riley stated that was happening and she has been in some of the rooms and it is really fun to see how students are learning. Dr. Riley believes the hybrid program is resulting in a more natural flow into project based learning which was in the planning and is now happening. Ms. Wolf believes all students are experiencing success due to the amazing ability of teachers to engage students at home and in the classroom. She knows the students are better at rolling with the changes than “we” are.

Ms. Cameron asked about teachers and their need for more training and materials. Dr. Riley indicated trainings are scheduled and set up with teachers when it is needed. Materials were ordered over the summer and have come in slowly.

- FY22 Budget Hearing Follow-Up Discussion

Superintendent stated the follow-up to preliminary budget meetings is the District needs to bring in the budget within a 3.75% to 3.50% increase. If the District comes in at a 3.75% increase, we will need to cut \$230K from the current proposed FY22 budget.

The big issue is Covid costs and the impact those costs could have on level services in this budget cycle. In the past the District has struggled to provide level services. Superintendent Beaudoin cited with a 28% increase in health insurance costing the District \$1.5M and the District still managed to provide level services and meet the Town's request for a 3.50% increase to their budgets.

The current reality is Covid and FEMA reimbursements are unknown, and the District is using reserves to cover Covid costs and reserves are dwindling.

Ms. Cameron stated the Collaboration Group is meeting on Friday, December 18, 2020 and will review the multi-year model with the Group and discuss the use of reserves to cover expenses. The plan is to not diminish the program and to look at one year at a time and solve the longer term problem in time. It appears there is some understanding among the Towns that level services is not the same as level funding.

It has been proposed the District use OPEB funds this year and revisit any other funds the District has. However, using these funds means there needs to be a plan and defined strategy for resolving the long term impact these decisions will have on the District.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated the Town Finance Committees will discuss data needed for an override and the District could spend to the number.

Ms. Cameron wanted to reiterate the Essex Finance Committee supports education but is also mindful of the suffering of the Town's small businesses.

- 8) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Whitman confirmed if someone sends an email to the School Committee the Chairperson responds and if a question is to be discussed the interested party reaches out directly to the Chairperson and the Chairperson responds, is that the protocol. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that was correct.

- 9) Adjourn** –

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