



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES March 2, 2021

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	March 2, 2021
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 Matthew Harrington
Absent:	Eric Bourke
Guests:	John Willis, Principal Memorial School, Jennifer Roberts, Principal, Essex Elementary School, Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology, Craig Macarelli, Academic and Behavioral Dean of Students
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order and moved the meeting into Executive Session
- B. Executive Session** – To conduct a collective bargaining session grievance hearing.
- C. Business Meeting Open Session**

1) Public Comment –

Caroline Weld, Manchester – Ms. Weld read a letter from her daughter, Charlie. Charlie stated she began participating in theater as a freshman and participating in online theater solidified a calm during the Covid crisis. For creative minds, our hearts are fulfilled by participating in theater. We recognize the importance of the arts and for us it is like playing sports. During Covid our creative minds have been denied participation in musicals and that lack of participation may be detrimental to our college application process. Charlie encouraged the School Committee and District to bring the arts back to life for the students who enjoy them. Ms. Wolf reported new guidelines allow for singing in school.

Erica Spencer, Manchester – Ms. Spencer encouraged the School Committee to reduce social distancing requirements and return to full in person learning. According to an article Ms. Spencer read in *The Lancet* 3 feet of social distancing is enough to assure safety in the community, the article also advocated for students to be vaccinated. Ms. Spencer noted students are committed to returning to school. Additionally, Ms. Spencer recommended the District have no additional School Choice students in the coming year.

Jeri Everitt, Essex – Ms. Everitt's interest is in the MDESE literacy advancement initiative and would like to be assured that moving forward the District will be implementing pre-school screening and that screening will be achieved more collaboratively working with teachers. Ms. Everitt stated structured literacy supports social emotional health and provides students with the supports they need.

Nate Kelleher – a junior who participates in the theater program. Mr. Kelleher stated as a result of Covid an upcoming show was shut down last year and during the close of school he felt isolated from his peers. The academic world moved forward and athletes participated in sports while the arts remained on hold. Mr. Kelleher stated something has been missing for students who participate in the arts and asked the School Committee to resume the theater program.

Cheryl Mulvey – Announced a SEPAC meeting on March 16th and encouraged parents to attend.

Sarah O'Leary – Manchester – Ms. O'Leary joined the meeting this evening to encourage the reopening of the Manchester Essex Performing Arts Program. Ms. O'Leary is part of an association that support the Performing Arts and read the Mission Statement for the Association. Ms. O'Leary asked the School Committee to make the return to Performing Arts a reality for the students.

Soshy Star Collins – Manchester – Ms. Star Collins spoke in support of the students who participate in Performing Arts. Ms. Star Collins mentioned there is no full time Director for Performing Arts like there is for the Athletic Program. She asked the School Committee to help make the Performing Arts a priority in the District.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf met with the Elementary School Principals around the K-2 students who were in school 4 days a week. Both Principal Willis and Principal Roberts were delighted and stated the transition went smoothly. The Principals are excited about returning to school full time for all students with current mitigation measures remaining in place: masks, hand washing and in school testing for teachers.

3) Student Report – Lukas Shan

Lukas started his report by congratulating the newly elected officers for the class of 2024. The Math Team had a meeting scheduled for this past week but the meeting was cancelled due to the need to move back to Hybrid.

Lukas outlined why some students preferred the remote learning model. In addition to feeling they were more productive working from home some students liked the flexibility of working from home and appreciated the lack of preparation it takes to get to school and into the building. Some students were came in but realized their friends were not coming in and decided to remain remote and working from home.

Ms. Erdmann thanked Lukas for his report and asked if friends and cohort groups were different. Lukas acknowledged that some people had come in and there were none of their friends in the cohort group and returned to remote. Ms. Erdmann asked if the school was fully open would students return. Lukas stated a lot of students would come back.

4) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 2/1/2021
- Acceptance of Warrants, Voucher #1034 & #1035

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

5) Sub-Committee Reports

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

Ms. Cameron reported the Memorial School project remains on budget and on time. There is a School Building Committee meeting next week.

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

Ms. Erdmann reported an agenda is being developed for the All Boards summit scheduled for March 11, 2021. The School Committee will meet with Boards of Selectmen and Finance Committees from both Essex and Manchester to develop a path forward and discussion the impact of an annual 2.5% increase on the District when anticipated District is between 3% and 4%. Ms. Erdmann encouraged concerned parents to listen and participate in the meeting. In addition to letting their Finance Committee members and Selectmen know in advance how important District funding is to the education of our children.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – Report

The Negotiation subcommittee continues to meet with META leadership.

6) Superintendent's Report –

Vision of the Graduate & Strategic Planning

- Steering Committee Training 3.2.21 – Charge: Work with our partners at the Creative Education Foundation to facilitate the vision of the graduate and strategic planning process, listen to stakeholder input and provide actionable recommendations to the School Committee and Administration.
- Timeline
 - Training & Document Review – March
 - Survey week of March 29th
 - World Café Focus Groups week of April 26th
 - Synthesize Inputs & Generate Recommendation – May
 - School Committee, Admin Team, Steering Committee meet in a facilitated goal setting session draft strategic plan informed by the work of the Steering Committee, June 16th and or June 23rd
- Outcome – A Vision of the Graduate & Strategic Plan that provides a District wide framework to guide the annual improvement process undertaken by all schools and department.
- General Updates
 - Student Opportunity Act – Superintendent Beaudoin stated the School Committee addressed the Act through the budget process. The Act is targeted for low income communities with higher needs than MERSD. The District's request focused on ODD transportation in the amount of \$50K. Additionally, the District identified how funding would support high needs learners, MERSD identified the literacy program and the need for curriculum investment for the program. Superintendent Beaudoin stated given the question this evening she would be happy to add the discussion to the agenda. The current program is based on analysis and work and is a science based approach to literacy.
 - HS Team of Holly Brabson and Tricia Puglisi Serves on a NEASC Panel on Social Emotional Learning
 - Pre-K and K Registration Underway
 - Building Project and Essex Playground on schedule
 - The priority is getting more kids back in school.
- K-12 Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racist Work
 - Curriculum and Training – Dr. Riley stated this summer there will be ongoing work around District inclusion and we will be taking a deeper look across all

grades. Below is a 30K foot vies and teacher are have done an amazing job developing the program.

MERSD Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism District Collaboration Training

- Summer teacher work meeting and work groups
- Affinity Network (Beverly) teachers participated
- BC High's National Anti-Racism Teach in a 5 part series
- K-12 ECLS Seed Project Critical Conversations about Race and Equity

Middle High School Focus

- SCAR group led by Mr. Macarelli
- Safe Studies Curriculum Realignment and Update
- ELA Curricular Units Grades 8-12
- Music Black History Month Presentations with Band Director

Elementary School

- Staff Book Club and Shared Reads

7) Continued Business

- SCAR (Student Coalition Against Racism) Update – Craig Macarelli, HS Dean of Students

SCAR Craig Macarelli

Mr. Macarelli shared he is married to a Black woman and the father of two mixed race boys. For the past year he has been working with between 5 and 6 students to develop the Student Coalition Against Racism (SCAR).

Initial SCAR meeting was held on October 15, 2020 with meetings through November 5, 2020 dedicated to establishing group norms and going through the letter presented to the School Committee and Administration. Areas of focus in the letter were: Curriculum, School Culture, Discipline, School Resource Officer and Faculty & Administration.

Mission Statement – As a group, we worked to create a strong and sustainable Mission Statement: *Our mission is to further the diversification of our school culture. We aim to build a community where equity, access and equality is present and sustainable for all.*

Civil Rights History and Martin Luther King, Jr. In preparation for Martin Luther King Day, discussion in December were centered primarily around the history of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr. These discussions were followed by a presentation to the school community in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 18, 2021.

January 15, 2021 meeting with Dr. Kenann McKenzie of the NAACP North Shore Branch, discussed ways for our students to get involved with in ways that would assist us in our mission and goals in Manchester and Essex. Dr. McKenzie invited our students to a student-led book or movie discussion based on the book or movie “The Hate U Give”.

Mid-January 2021 – Instagram page creation – the Instagram page is for current students as a previous page was being managed by alumni. Currently there are 100 followers and the groups does their best to update the page daily. Black History Month February 2021 focus of our conversations and social media activity the month of February was black History Month.

Upcoming events and activities our group will attend the Connections Conference – Listen, Learn, Act: Fighting for Justice in our School Communities with is being present virtually by the MA School Administrators Association (MSAA).

Ms. Cameron asked Dr. Riley to schedule time around content and how we teach our vulnerabilities and how we communicate there are people in our own communities who do not value work around systemic racism. There appear to be 5 students in the choir and the rest of the population needs to know how to discuss and talk about this in a thoughtful and responsible way. Ms. Cameron encouraged SCAR to make kids see get into the classrooms. This is very humbling work and the students need to know how to have these discussions when they get to college.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated when the vision of the graduate is crafted SCAR will be included. Ms. Cameron would like to have Mr. Macarelli return at the end of the year with the students.

- Memorial Proposal – High School

The School Committee has been asked to approve a bench in memory of Gloria Tanner to acknowledge her role and commitment as a teacher at Manchester Essex Regional High School. The memorial will be moveable, not a permanent memorial according to the guidelines.

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the memorial in honor of Gloria Tanner in the school courtyard, Mr. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- FY22 School Choice Preliminary Report

School Choice Overview – Current budget includes replacement of 17 school choice graduates (\$85K), there are 109 Applicant and 6 Sibling Applicants

Financial – Staffing reductions limit school choice placement opportunities. Loss of school choice placement created a loss of revenue. Acceptance of school choice created financial obligation for staffing resident growth

Covid – Social Distancing and space limitation may impact ability to bring in additional students. Currently the only grades below recommended minimum are grades 2 and 3.

Superintendent Beaudoin wanted to present the information to the Committee and proposed making a recommendation in April 2021.

- FY22 Budget Update –

School Committee voted to approve the budget. There are no additional updates and there is an All Boards meeting scheduled for March 11, 20221.

- Revision of Social Distancing Guidelines

Hybrid Transition Indicators Monthly Report

- ❖ COVID Metrics – Essex and Manchester in Gray and there has been no evidence of in-school spread. < 1% Student Positive Reported to Date, 7.5% Staff positive Reported to Date with 0 Student to Staff – Staff to Student Close Contacts
- ❖ Testing – Began MHS Student – Faculty Pooled Testing on 2.23.21 with 44% Student Participation – Goal is 75% and 97% Staff Participation Goal is 75%. There were no positive pools. Elementary and District Support Staff to be phased in with State funding to continue through 4.18.21.
- ❖ Staffing
 - Ongoing challenge to maintain substitute pool and coverage
- ❖ Program DESE Performing Arts Guidance updated 3.1.21 – Allows for indoor singing at 10 feet with masks and Fall 2 Athletics Underway
- ❖ Personnel Costs – \$436,200 (up \$109K with implementation of MHS Hybrid)

Return to In-Person Learning Next Steps

Recommendation for Consideration and Discussion

Revise current MERSD policies to align with DESE guidance: Amending the MERSD social distancing standard (6 Feet) to align with the DES social distancing guidance (3-6 Feet) will allow us to bring back grade K-5 to full in person and begin work on a plan to return Middle High School Students this spring.

Why Now

- It is in the best interest of students' social emotional and academic health.
- Indicators are met and local Covid metrics are highly favorable.
- State/CDC guidance identified returning students to school as a priority and established guidelines which allow for flexibility in social distancing as long as there are robust mitigation efforts in place.
- Three months of local data have shown no in-school transmission. Schools using lower social distancing standards since October have not experienced in-school transmission (ex. Gloucester/Beverly)
- Vaccination program is underway but not a prerequisite to return to in-person learning per DESE and CDC.

Requires School Committee Policy Revisions

- Revise Social Distancing Guidelines to allow for the DESE guidance to be in effect. DESE recommends 6 feet of distance where feasible and a minimum of 3 feet when all other mitigation measures are in place, which is supported by the WHO, local public health experts, infectious disease physicians, the Massachusetts Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics and the Governor's Covid 19 Medical Advisory Board.
- Accept DESE Revised Busing Guidance
In all cases, maximum distance between students should be maintained during boarding and transportation and all other safety protocols are still required, including wearing masks and opening windows a couple of inches.

Target Start March 22nd or March 29th

K-5 Students attend a full school day M-F in a typical schedule.

All Current Mitigation Efforts Remain

- Masks, Sanitization Schedule, Handwashing, Distancing, MedBot Attestation, Contact Tracing
- Maintain 6 feet distancing a lunch and at times when cohorts may interact outside of classrooms (ex. hallways)
- To Be Added Prior to Start Pooled Testing for K-5 Staff

Classroom Distancing

- 6 feet between students in majority of classrooms and gym (24 of 28)
- 4.5 for smaller classroom (4 of 28)
- 6 feet plus between teachers station and student desks

Discontinue Hyflex Model at Elementary Level and Transition Remote Only Students to a Remote Academy Model

- Families electing full remote will be transitioned into a multi-aged, district-wide, remote only classroom.
- It will follow the MERSD curriculum and it will be staffed with an educator (teacher or teaching assistant) who will act as liaison to classroom teacher.
- Exploring connections back to the classroom via morning meeting or livestreaming.

Mr. Warnock moved to accept and go forward with the recommendations for revised social distancing in person and on the bus and to include changes to fully remote learning. Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion was withdrawn.

Ms. Whitman and Ms. Cameron requested separating the issues, revised social distancing and the changes to remote learning.

Mr. Warnock asked if the mitigation included all aspects of HVAC systems. Mr. Urbas replied all protocols currently in place meet or exceed standards. Mr. Warnock confirmed testing in K-5 was only for staff no students were included. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that was correct and added the School Doctor does not support testing younger children. Although Superintendent Beaudoin stated she was open to adding students if that was advised.

Ms. Whitman asked Mr. Urbas to confirm the HVAC systems met guidelines, indicating there were a number of teachers listening. Mr. Urbas restated there is no question the District has met or exceeded all HVAC guidelines, maximum filtration is in place. Ms. Whitman asked if revised CDC guidelines talk about 6 feet of social distancing as ideal and lower rates and other mitigating factors means 6 feet not necessary. Ms. Wolf stated the School Nurse is doing all and more to make everyone feel comfortable. Ms. Wolf went over the new guidelines in detail. Ms. Whitman confirmed cohorts and pods are being kept separate. Ms. Wolf responded discussions with the Elementary Principals indicate passing in hallways and at lunch students will remain at 6 feet of social distancing.

Mr. Warnock added that starting last year safety and comfort for staff remains first and foremost. If necessary, the District can move back to hybrid or fully remote depending on factors in the communities and in the schools. Superintendent Beaudoin stated social distancing remains a challenge in the MHS 3 feet does not get us where we need to be for all students to return but we are working on creative solutions.

Mr. Warnock moved to amend the MERSD social distancing standard (6 Feet) to align with the DESE social distancing guidance (3-6 feet) will allow us to bring back grades K-5 to full in-person and begin to work on a plan to return Middle High School students this spring. The amended social distancing guidance as applies to buses. Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Wolf stated when the District closed in March of 2020, we were fully remote and returned to school in a hybrid/hyflex model. The District is moving to fully in person in the elementary schools and it appears 7% of elementary students will opt for remaining fully remote.

Ms. Whitman stated at the beginning of the year families made hard choices and some families decided to remain fully remote because being fully remote met their needs. Now the District is proposing putting those families in a remote learning academy instead of being with their peers which was part of the original selling point. The fully remote students will now be in a mixed aged, mixed school group and it is not fair. This is technically a remote option but it is subpar to what is familiar and I cannot support the option.

Principal Roberts replied, in Essex Elementary there are 3 classrooms with no remote students and the teachers and students are excited to be together. When there is one student remote it is very tricky for the teacher to manage the classroom and address the one student at home. Ms. Wolf stated it is different for MHS students they are not looking at a screen all the time and elementary students have higher needs even when remote.

Principal Willis stated it is difficult for teachers to split their attention 50/50 and manage a classroom with 15 students. He stated he understands that people at home will feel let down. It is different when we are bringing kids into school full time and off their screens. Principal Roberts stated it is not ideal there are 15 desks in rows 6 feet apart with the teacher in front but the students are no longer looking at a screen. Principal Roberts stated you cannot teach, manage 15 students in a classroom and engage in hyflex at the same time. Hyflex made sense but it no longer does.

Principal Willis stated he supports teachers and suggests if your child is one of 17 and the teacher is staring into a screen it is an impossible task and there needs to be a way to support the teachers. Ms. Whitman stated the District needs to find a way to keep the students in the class and to make this work. Principal Willis stated the program has organically changes and the hyflex model is no longer the most sound model. Ms. Whitman stated we need to clarify what this looks like.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated she understands what Mr. Whitman is saying but bringing back the students changes the model. Ms. Erdmann stated the idea through this whole process is the District is always moving forward and now we are moving away from where we were to back to in person. Ms. Whitman stated that does not provide for immune compromised children.

Ms. Cameron stated the Committee needs additional clarity on exactly what is being proposed. Superintendent Beaudoin stated teachers are no longer teaching 2 ways at once. The students are live in the classroom and they are going to have a structured day with an educator.

Ms. Wolf suggested a connection to classroom with morning meeting if it is one child out that child is looking at all the other children in the classroom. Principal Willis suggested children could be watching during a science experiment. Essex School Psychologist, Ms. Pennoyer stated she has been working with the children since September and the joy on their faces when they return to the classroom is immeasurable.

Mr. Warnock agreed with Ms. Cameron that what is being proposed for children fully remote needs more definition. We need to know what their day will look like and he supports not leaving these children behind.

Ms. Cameron moved to discontinue the hyflex model and requested more detail for students who are remaining remote, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed with 5 members in favor and 1 member opposed.

Ms. Whitman stated the Committee was voting to approve without knowing what this will look like. She asked does this involve taking children who are fully remote out of their classrooms and placing them in a different class. Ms. Erdmann stated at points during the day the District will make a commitment for the children to participate with their class. Ms. Wolf suggested the children come in for morning meeting and at one additional time during the day.

Superintendent suggested pulling the vote and Administration will come back with a refreshed plan. Ms. Cameron proposed the motion go forward.

Ms. Wolf reopened public comment following Ms. Pennoyer's comments. There was no additional public comment.

- SC Advocacy Letters: Performing Arts & Teacher Vaccination

The letter in support of Performing Arts will be held. However, the letter in support of vaccinations for teachers will be sent.

Ms. Cameron supports sending the letter in support of vaccinations for teachers but requested language around a specific vaccine be removed. She stated the letter from the School Committee is simply supporting teachers being vaccinated.

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

8) School Committee Comment

Ms. Whitman stated the School Committee discussed families who are home schooling and committed to remote learning for the year and made that commitment based on information the District presented. Following that discussion, we agreed that someone would reach out to those families. To date no one has been in contact with the families. Ms. Wolf stated we did agree to reach out to those families and Administration decided to contact the families after February break. Superintendent Beaudoin apologized for not clarifying the timeline and for not reaching out to the families. Superintendent Beaudoin committed to being in contact with all home school families.

9) Adjourn –

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