



**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES April 6, 2021**

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	April 6, 2021
<b>Location:</b>	Via Webex
<b>Attendees:</b>	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
<b>Absent:</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>	Patricia Puglisi, Principal HS, Jason Waldron, Facilities Manager
<b>Recorded by:</b>	Gail Hunter

**AGENDA**

**A. Call to Order** – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

**B. Business Meeting Open Session**

1) **Public Comment** – There was no public comment this evening.

2) **Chairman’s Report** – Ms. Wolf stated elementary students are in school full time and Middle High School students will be returning next week, she indicated it was all

extremely exciting. Mitigation protocols are in place including social distancing, mask wearing and frequent hand washing along with pool testing.

### **3) Student Report –**

Lukas indicated this was the last week of the third quarter and for many seniors it is their last week as they start their score projects. Friday is scheduled to be Senior Day and all other students will have an asynchronous day. The MHS is returning to school on Monday. Spring sports begin Monday, April 26, 2021 the day we return from spring vacation. Ms. Wolf thanked Lukas for his report.

### **4) Consent Agenda**

- Minutes –
- Acceptance of Warrants, Voucher #1038 and #103

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

### **5) Sub-Committee Reports**

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

Superintendent Beaudoin asked the Committee for direction around signage for the new Memorial School. Her question focused on including Manchester Essex Regional School District as part of the sign and if this rebranding should be considered for all buildings. Mr. Warnock believes MERSD should be on schools signage but not necessarily part of the school name. Ms. Erdmann agreed adding a MERSD school to the sign while keeping the name of the school. Manchester Memorial School a MERSD School and the same for Essex Elementary.

Ms. Wolf likes Ms. Erdmann's suggestion stating there are two elementary schools with unique community identities. Mr. Warnock agreed indicating there is a geographic identity for each elementary school. Mr. Bourke suggested same logo for both schools for consistent branding. Superintendent Beaudoin concluded the consensus appeared to be to honor the tradition with the name of the school and add a MERSD school and logo to the sign.

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

Ms. Cameron stated the Finance Committee had a good meeting concluding the All Boards meeting would be rescheduled to the beginning of School Year 2021-2022. There was some confusion around apportionment but the meeting was productive and provided clarity to outstanding questions.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – No Report

Mr. Bourke stated there were two issues addressed by the Policy Sub-Committee, transportation and donation policy. Around transportation the policy has not been amended, however, the sub-

committee is recommending expanding ridership from two miles to 1.5 miles effective April 12, 2021. The sub-committee is also recommending monitoring ridership to consider if there is available space for Middle School students. The sub-committee is recommending the donation policy and inclusion of a Community Build to the new Essex Playground be delayed until the current playground plan is in place. Additional discussions around the playground expansion and incorporating a Community Build will occur following completion of the current proposed surfacing and equipment installation.

Ms. Cameron asked for clarification around the busing policy and implications for service and the budget. Mr. Urbas responded by stating there will be no additional costs because there are no additional buses available to the District. However, ridership is low and the District has the capacity to add a small number of families by going down to 1.5 miles from school buildings.

Mr. Urbas clarified Middle School ridership is to be determined based on the elementary school increases. Ms. Cameron asked for clarification around who was now paying for transportation. Mr. Urbas indicated no one is now paying for transportation the District is fully reimbursed for riders at 1.5 miles or more.

Ms. Cameron asked about the Essex Elementary Playground. Confirming the Policy Sub-Committee was recommending going forward with the proposed build and revisiting additional modifications following installation. Superintendent Beaudoin stated additional work needed to be done reconciling conflicts among multiple donation policies. Following that work the how and what can be accomplished in Essex will be presented to the School Committee.

Ms. Whitman stated this is exciting and wonderful and looks forward to what is coming next. Mr. Warnock asked about concrete items like seating and trash cans following Phase I of the build indicating the timeline is unclear. Ms. Whitman stated the sub-committee needs to review the pieces of Phase II and specifically were concerned around consistency and parity between the two schools.

Mr. Waldron stated the installation of the new Essex Playground will begin over April vacation. Safety fencing will be installed during excavation with most heavy lifting over April break and completion by the end of May to the first week in June. Superintendent Beaudoin asked if the students will be able to use the equipment before the end of the year. Mr. Waldron stated current guidelines require the equipment to be wiped down after each use. He will follow up on playground guidelines, update the Committee and inform Principal Rogers of all playground protocols.

Mr. Warnock stated now that is closer to a reality it is important to review equity of amenities and outline the same playground rules on signage. Mr. Urbas indicated he would review the proposals and if necessary, the District's Operating Budget will cover preliminary seating and trash cans. Ms. Wolf concluded by thanking all interested parties and assuring the District will find a way for kids to use the playground safely.

Superintendent Beaudoin also indicated it was going to be important for the School Committee to identify new members for sub-committees. Stating the Collaboration Group is requesting an

18 month plan for field replacement. Sub-committee discussion needs to occur following Town Elections which are taking place on May 10, 2021 in Essex and May 18, 2021 in Manchester. The Committee agreed to further discuss during the May 4<sup>th</sup> meeting.

- Negotiation Committee (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – No Report

6) **Superintendent's Report –**

- Monthly COVID Report
  - ❖ COVID Metrics – Essex is in yellow, Manchester in Green 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 transmission through, Staff to Student Close Contact. Through the pandemic 15 students and 17 staff have notified the District they tested positive.
  - ❖ Testing – Ongoing with MHS Students – High School Participation is 48% and Middle School Participation is 44% – Goal is 75% with 97% Staff Participation. There was one positive pool tested but the test overlapped with a student self-reporting. There have been no incidences of a pool testing positive beyond this one overlap which was known in advance.
  - ❖ Staffing – There have been some challenges with vaccine reactions but overall absences are decreasing with 85% to 90% of staff vaccinated.
  - ❖ No Cape Ann communities are in red with the majority of communities in yellow and green. This metric impacts school sports participation with other communities.
  - ❖ Covid expenses. the District has received \$645K in reimbursements against an anticipated spending of \$1.6M nothing has changed in the expense line, however there will be a direct cost of \$125K for food service. Ms. Erdmann asked if the \$125K is all staffing no food supplies. Mr. Urbas indicated Chartwell's manages the food service program including benefits and the cost of contract. He stated Chartwell's had done an outstanding job managing the free and reduced lunch program through the pandemic.

Ms. Cameron asked what resources would come from the Recovery Act. Mr. Urbas indicated it was not yet firm but the grants were written for future expenses not past expenses. Superintendent Beaudoin requested this discussion be held for the Budget Discussion.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated overall the return to school is going well with 99% of all elementary students in person and only two classrooms with remote students. The Middle School anticipates at 91% return with the High School at 74% in person. Principal Puglisi will have a full report on Senior activities during the May 4, 2021 School Committee meeting.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated looking forward the District is prepared to slice into Hybrid and Remote is there is another surge. In the fall there will be no remote learning opportunities all students are encouraged to fully participate in school. If there are families interested in home schooling Dr Riley will facilitate their participation in an approved program.

Preliminary calendar for school year 2021-2022 plans for Holiday break starting with a half day on December 23<sup>rd</sup> with students returning on Monday, January 3, 2022. Graduation for the class of 2022 is planned for June 3, 2022. Full calendar review will be presented at the next School Committee meeting.

Ms. Erdmann asked about DESE guidelines for summer school and did that apply to the District. Superintendent Beaudoin replied she was not aware there may be a mandate to include a summer school program and if there is the District will partner with another Town. There are plans in place to expand the “Y” program to include Math and Literacy along with emotional support services for kids in need.

### Vision of the Graduate & Strategic Planning

#### Timeline

- Training and Document Review March 2021
- Survey going live April 8<sup>th</sup> through April 26<sup>th</sup>, with Data Review April 28<sup>th</sup>
- World Café Focus Groups May 5<sup>th</sup> – 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- Synthesize Inputs & Generate Recommendations in May
- School Committee, Administrative Team, Steering Committee meet in a facilitated goal setting session and draft strategic plan informed y work of Steering Committee May 24<sup>th</sup> or May 25<sup>th</sup>

#### 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 Departments.

Ms. Wolf recommended that both Ms. Cameron and Ms. Erdmann participate in the process to add their expertise, value and to help bring new members along with their historical perspective.

Superintendent Beaudoin concluded by stating the last day of school year 2021-2022 is June 16<sup>th</sup> with a School Committee meetings scheduled for June 2<sup>nd</sup> and June 15<sup>th</sup> School Committee meetings could also be scheduled ahead of Manchester Town Meeting on June 21, 2021.

- Goals Update

Superintendent Beaudoin stated at the beginning of the year she was reluctant to indicate her primary goal for the year would be Covid related. However, **Covid has driven everything**. There were three or four back to school periods and each transition held its own set of anxieties and worries. There was the day to day management of Covid along with the number of HR cases to process, and MOU’s to define what the school day would look like. People wanted something different and Superintendent believed the process was managed as well as it could be.

The other surprise was the budget. Superintendent Beaudoin had anticipated a routine budget process but again the budget also consumed a significant amount of time. In the middle of the

crisis, we looked at a crossroads in budgeting with long term writing and running of multi-year models around a growth rate of 3.2% to 3.5%. What became less reliable was the apportionment formula which is out of the District's control and moves year to year based on total enrollment and the Town populations.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated she had wanted to focus on strategic planning and the Vision of the Graduate which was pushed off. She asked if there were questions from the Committee. Ms. Wolf stated she had read through Superintendent Beaudoin's goal and she believed Superintendent Beaudoin had accurately captured what happened this year. She stated in spite of everything there were silver linings and we all learned so much. Ms. Wolf believes Superintendent Beaudoin's goals look good.

Ms. Erdmann stated when you put this on paper and looked back the year was overwhelming. Superintendent Beaudoin's goal highlight how difficult the year was. Ms. Cameron stated at the beginning of the year Superintendent Beaudoin was charged with assuring educational rigor and you delivered on the charge with time on learning and looking at the data points you were successful. It is also evident when the question was budget versus program that we were driven by budget not program and this needs to be discussed in the future with the Towns are they focusing on budget or an excellent educational program and what does that look like.

The School Committee committed to completing Superintendent Beaudoin's evaluation in May 2021.

## **7) Continued Business**

- SEPAC Update

Ms. Mulvey reported on March 18<sup>th</sup> SEPAC members participated in a Special Education workshop presented by Amy Rogers. SEPAC By-Laws are ready for presentation and approval at the April 16, 2021 meeting hopefully giving the group official status.

SEPAC Survey had 106 responses representing 50% of parents with children in Special Education Programs. The results of the survey are being reviewed. Ms. Mulvey reminded Special Education parents SEPAC meets the third Thursday of the month and all Special Education parents are welcome.

Ms. Wolf thanked Ms. Mulvey for keeping SEPAC going through Covid.

- META MOA

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the original MOA with META extended from December 2021 through March 25, 2021. The new MOA provides for working conditions specific to getting back in the buildings and was committed to paper and ratified on March 25, 2021 and has been posted on the District website.

*Mr. Warnock moved to approve the MOA with META, Ms. Erdmann seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

Mr. Warnock stated the document the School Committee is approving is an historical document. Ms. Wolf expressed her thanks to the META leadership and corrected some people who mistakenly thought the union was delaying the reopening of schools, there was no problem with the teachers union through the past year about reopening schools.

- School Choice – 2021 – 2022

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District's plan is to enroll 17 students to maintain FY20 School Choice enrollment.

Recommendation for Distribution of School Choice students:

- 12-14 students at the Elementary level with approximately 7 students in each school.
- 3-5 students in Middle School Grade 6
- Confirm Elementary enrollment with school Principals by May 3, 2021
- Lottery on May 5, 2021 with Notification on May 7, 2021

The District offers unused seats and receives \$5K each student in undersubscribed classes. There are seats left open for new residents.

- FY21 Budget Amendment

The District has received approval from the Department of Revenue to amend the FY21 budget. The request before the School Committee is to transfer \$481,694 into stabilization for a total in the stabilization account of \$970,803. The request for approval moves onto both Towns and will be adopted in 45 days. Given there is no change in the assessments to the Towns the transfer does not require a vote at Annual Town Meeting.

*Ms. Erdmann moved to transfer \$481,694 into the stabilization fund, Mr. Harrington seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

- FY22 Budget Update

Superintendent Beaudoin stated at the last meeting the School Committee was informed there was a decrease in the proposed FY22 budget of \$215K the result of a favorable decrease in Health Insurance. Over the past month Mr. Urbas and Dr. Collins have reviewed mandated Special Education programs and estimate an unexpected increase of \$125K due to high needs students requiring one-on-one support in SWING and SAIL programs and anticipated increases in Out of District (OOD) placements.

The question now is how to utilize the additional dollars. The District is projected to use \$960K in reserves for FY22 depleting the reserve pool to \$664K in FY23. The FY22 budget areas that remain an unknown are OOD, move-ins and possible facility issues. Ms. Cameron indicated there was no clarity around the Towns' CARES Act funding and their potential to support the District. Ms. Erdmann was concerned that reserve were dropping to \$646K.

Ms. Cameron indicated there is \$125K in the FY22 budget for technology in Essex Elementary for parity in active boards and the unknown spending required for field replacement. Superintendent Beaudoin mentioned the back up boiler for Essex which is less of a discretionary spending need. Ms. Cameron asked if there was a possibility of additional interest income. Mr. Urbas responded it would not be significant.

The remaining question for the \$215K which is now given projected increase in Special Education should the funds be used to offset reserve use, adjust assessments to the Towns or remain in the FY22 budget for unexpected expenses. Ms. Erdmann recommended leaving things as they are to address increased and unexpected costs.

The Committee discussed the FY22 budget needs and concluded the best approach to the anticipated savings was to hold the budget where it is. Ms. Wolf would like to build back reserves and provide a full educational program and make no changes.

### **8) School Committee Comment**

The School Committee traditionally does not meet in July but plans an annual retreat in August and starts back to regular meetings the third week in August. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested the Committee finish this year virtually and start back in the fall with face-to-face meetings. Ms. Wolf proposed assuming things go smoothly to include remote participation for interested parties in the fall.

Ms. Cameron asked about learning loss. Superintendent Beaudoin stated learning loss was a media conversation and a new cottage industry with all kinds of materials available to address the loss. She stated the District is aware it was a strange year and a half and students learned a lot of new skills. The District has run traditional benchmark assessments through the year and it appears students have not lost ground. Students have had different levels of support at home but Superintendent Beaudoin has not heard concerns out of traditional benchmarks.

### **9) Adjourn –**

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

