

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
APRIL 14, 2020

Present: Ms. Susan Burgess-Cox, Chair
Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Tara Donner
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to order

The School Committee returned from Executive Session at 7:07 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

Susan Burgess-Cox noted people were posting comments/questions for the chat. She explained it is the School Committee's practice not to address citizens' concerns at the meeting. They may be addressed by the administration of School Committee at a later meeting. Some of the comments are related to topics that the School Committee will address as agenda items this evening.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.4 Chair's Report

There was no report from the Chair.

1.5 Student Representative Report

There was no student representative in attendance.

1.6 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan commented on his newsletter which was sent out today at 2:30, explaining the newsletter is being sent out every Tuesday and Friday to provide updates regarding remote learning. The newsletter includes a link for parents/community members to

ask questions which will be answered in the next newsletter. They have discussed remote learning as well as different supports that need to be put in place for students during this time.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business.

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 2019/20 School Calendar Discussion on April Vacation (Vote)

Superintendent Phelan stated the School Committee had some dialogue regarding the cancelling of April vacation at their last meeting. The administration has been meeting with the Belmont Education Association (BEA) in Joint Labor Management meetings.

When the BEA was asked their opinion on possibly cancelling April break or having the break, they surveyed their staff for their thoughts on the topic. The BEA then reported that seventy six percent of the staff voted in favor of cancelling April break to continue with remote learning. Superintendent Phelan agreed to the suggestion of cancelling the break noting that the school year would end on June 17, which would be the 180th day of school.

Susan Burgess-Cox noted the School Committee was provided a list from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees regarding a poll they took on whether or not to cancel April break. The poll showed several districts have decided to work through April break. The School Committee discussed their views on cancelling the break and agreed it would probably be the best choice given students and teachers have been working remotely for the past couple of weeks and it might be difficult if the momentum is interrupted. They also noted some families are finding remote learning more challenging and may want to have a break.

Superintendent Phelan responded to a question from a School Committee member asking for clarification on the number of days students need to attend. He explained the two weeks of enrichment learning count as school days. April break will include four days of school since Monday is a holiday. Commissioner Riley stated the school year would be 185 days maximum. For Belmont the 185th day would be June 23rd. If you take into account the four days during the break and the five days built into the calendar minus one for a snow day, the last day of school becomes June 17.

On a roll call vote with a motion from Andrea Prestwich and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously to cancel the 2019-2020 April break.

3.2 Update on COVID-19 Impact on FY 20 and FY21

Superintendent Phelan updated the School Committee on the impact COVID-19 is having on the FY20 and FY21 budgets. All the town committees have been meeting and reviewing the town receipts for FY20. These receipts include parking fees, and restaurant tax the Town is not receiving due to the shutdown. Administrators are also working with State Senator Will Brownsberger to get a sense of what the state may or may not be able to provide the town in terms of funding, particularly for FY21.

For the remainder of FY20, the Town and Schools are implementing purchase freezes. Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias sent a memo to all Principals and Directors explaining all purchases must go through the Central Office administrators. The only purchase orders that will be approved will be related to expenses for remote learning.

The School Department has also implemented a hiring freeze. Superintendent Phelan explained there are several staff members going out on leave and substitutes have already been hired to replace them in the remote classroom. Those positions will stay because classes need to be covered. Other than that, there will be no additional staff hired for this fiscal year. Superintendent Phelan noted new principals have been hired for Burbank and Winn Brook who will start on July 1. The Chenery Principal search will go forward as well. An interim Principal for Chenery had been ready to take over for Michael McAllister who is the new Director of Human Capital at Central Office. In the end, a contract was not signed with the Interim Principal due to the school closings.

There should be a savings for this fiscal year due to the fact that water and heat are not being used during school closings so the budget for FY20 should not be impacted to a great degree.

Superintendent Phelan explained the Town hoped to ask for an override in November 2020. The override does not seem like a good idea at this time due to the impact the COVID-19 shutdown is having on families and their financial situations. The State budget will be impacted as well, due to payroll tax, restaurant tax and other income the State normally receives and will not be receiving. Belmont will need to wait to hear more about the State's revenues before knowing what the FY21 budget might look like. It is very possible the School Department budget, which has been presented over the last few months, will have to be reduced.

Superintendent Phelan discussed with the School Committee what possible essential purchases might be needed for FY21 such as remote learning technology especially if there is a need to close schools intermittently over the course of the next school year. They also discussed the potential need for a technology staff member who would work teachers as a support person for online teaching. It was also noted Belmont still does not have professional librarians at the elementary level. A modern library media specialist would be a great support for teachers seeking online resources.

3.3 Discussion of Reorganization Policies

The School Committee discussed the fact that under normal circumstances, the Town election would have taken place last week and this School Committee meeting would have been the organizational meeting where the School Committee votes on a Chair and Secretary. This year, due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Town election has been postponed until June 23.

School Committee member Michael Crowley presented a Town bylaw that governs the annual selection of committee officers. The Town bylaw requires committee members to select officers annually. School Committee policy 8007 states the School Committee will vote on the election of a Chair and Secretary after the Town election. The School Committee discussed whether they should vote now on the election of Chair and Secretary. Susan Burgess-Cox noted since the vote was not listed as an agenda item and had not been posted as a public meeting, the vote should wait.

The School Committee discussed whether it was necessary to vote on electing officers now or wait until a future meeting. Susan Burgess-Cox suggested voting now would set a precedent and would require the School Committee to set aside three policies related to electing officers and adopting policies. The School Committee decided the best course of action would be to speak to legal counsel and possibly hold a Policy Subcommittee meeting to discuss the topic further.

4. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

4.1 Finance Subcommittee

The Finance Subcommittee met last week and discussed the FY20 and FY21 purchase and hiring freeze.

4.2 Policy and Procedure Subcommittee

There was no report from the Policy and Procedure Subcommittee.

4.3 Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

There was no report from the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee.

4.4 Capital Budget Committee

The Capital Budget Committee will meet this Thursday.

4.5 Warrant Committee

The Warrant Committee will meet tomorrow night.

4.6 Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee

The Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee met last Wednesday morning. They discussed updates from the construction company on measures to protect workers from COVID-19. The steel continues to go up and progress is being made despite the situation with COVID-19.

4.7 Community Path Committee

There was no report from the Community Path Committee.

4.8 Financial Task Force II

The Financial Task Force II met this morning regarding the budget.

4.9 High School Traffic Working Group

There was no report from the High School Traffic Working Group.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Consent Agenda

5.2 Personnel Items - None

5.3 Business Items – None

5.4 Approval of Minutes

April 7, 2020

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to approve the minutes of April 7, 2020.

6. FUTURE BUSINESS

April 16, 2020
FSC Joint meeting with SC & WC Education Subcommittee
Remote Meeting – 3:00 p.m.

April 28, 2020
School Committee Meeting
Remote Meeting – 7:00 p.m.

7. ENCLOSURES

Strategic Plan
School Committee Goals
School Committee Policy 8006
School Committee Policy 8007
School Committee Policy 8013
Town Bylaw Governing Annual Selection of Committee Officers

8. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by 
Andrea Prestwich, Secretary