

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
OCTOBER 27, 2020

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

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Return to Open Session

The School Committee returned from Open Session at 6:36 p.m.

1.2 Recognition of Teachers Receiving Professional Status

Michael McAllister, Director of Human Capital, welcomed the teachers receiving Professional Status, stating, we celebrate these educators usually with a reception and presentation of certificate and gift. This year we are celebrating virtually. The certificate and gift will be sent to all the teachers being honored.

These 26 educators have met those standards and, in many cases, have even exceeded them. They have also successfully participated in the new teacher induction program, the year 2 mentor/mentee program, and they have undergone countless observations, evaluations, and feedback sessions. They have continued their own education, attaining their own advanced degrees and additional licenses. These educators are an example of professionals who believe in constant improvement, in their students, and in themselves. Especially this year, more and more is expected of teachers every year. These teachers really are taking on challenges that their predecessors were never expected to, and doing it admirably well. Dedicated educators like these are intent on meeting those standards. These educators understand that they will continue to be held to high expectations after their third year, and after tonight's ceremony. Both our regulations and our expectations will require them to continue to pursue graduate study, recertify their license, engage in ongoing professional development, and grow. These educators are a great example of the "constant improvement" and "lifelong learner" mantras that they tell to students all day long in their classrooms.

These educators fulfill a lot of different roles -- they are classroom teachers, specialists, and leaders. They work in many different places -- in classrooms, in offices, and in multiple schools. They all contribute to the larger mission of the Belmont Public Schools: Educating children and preparing them for their future. Thank you to all 26 of them for their contributions to Belmont's children and their families over the last three years.

Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias presented the names of each educator being honored.

LAST	FIRST	SCHOOL	POSITION
<i>Ahlborn-Hsu</i>	<i>Eleanor</i>	Chenery	Special Education
<i>Averill</i>	<i>Marella</i>	Wellington	Special Education
<i>Berson</i>	<i>Steven</i>	Chenery	Art
<i>Bettinelli</i>	<i>Kassie</i>	Winn Brook	Music
<i>Carlivati</i>	<i>Lisa</i>	High School	Math
<i>Carson</i>	<i>Sara</i>	Chenery	Music
<i>Chalmers</i>	<i>Melissa</i>	Burbank	Kindergarten
<i>Chan</i>	<i>Stephanie</i>	Chenery	Nurse
<i>Communiello</i>	<i>Emily</i>	Chenery	Math, Grade 7
<i>Dagon</i>	<i>Margaret</i>	CMS/Elementary	Music, Strings
<i>Eaton</i>	<i>Kerry</i>	Chenery	Grade 5, ELA/Social Studies
<i>Frisone</i>	<i>Nicole</i>	Wellington Preschool	Preschool
<i>Gallagher</i>	<i>Meghan</i>	Butler	English Learner Teacher
<i>Giusti</i>	<i>Scott</i>	High School/ Wellington	Physical Education
<i>Grossi</i>	<i>Lauren</i>	High School	Math
<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>Kaitlyn</i>	Wellington	Guidance Counselor
<i>Lewis</i>	<i>Tawnya</i>	High School	Science
<i>McInnis</i>	<i>Sarah</i>	Winn Brook	Grade 4
<i>Monnin</i>	<i>Catherine</i>	Winn Brook	Grade 2
<i>Neuburger</i>	<i>Sonia</i>	High School	Science
<i>Normile</i>	<i>Brianna</i>	Burbank	Grade 2
<i>O'Connor</i>	<i>Elizabeth</i>	High School	Physical Education
<i>Richards</i>	<i>Jennifer</i>	System-wide	Physical Therapist
<i>Stoppel</i>	<i>Elise</i>	Burbank	Grade 4
<i>Walsh</i>	<i>Lea</i>	Wellington Preschool	Preschool
<i>Willis</i>	<i>Elizabeth</i>	Chenery	Special Education

1.3 Citizens' Concerns

Amy Kirsch: parent of high school and elementary student asked for faster communication to parents since things are moving so quickly.

Minami Shizuka: parent of Kindergarten and grade four students at Burbank asked when BASEC programs might be able to move inside. Superintendent Phelan stated the Aftercare Directors will be discussing plans with the building Principals. Wes Chin, Health Director, will assess all plans.

1.4 Adjustments to the Agenda

1.5 Chair's Report

Chair Andrea Prestwich announced a survey would be forthcoming asking who might be interested in free COVID testing. This will be a collaborative effort with other districts.

Dr. Prestwich shared the following questions and answers from the School Committee's online questionnaire:

Why are we not able to use live streaming to offset loss of instructional time? It cannot be imposed on teachers and must be negotiated with educators. The remote-only students will have access to live streaming; currently we are not at the point where live-streaming is available as two cohorts.

Do you have clear guidelines of health metrics that would need to take place to cause a move back to fully remote? Belmont would have to be in red for three weeks per DESE guidelines but this may be too long and we are consulting with the Belmont Health Department to determine.

Can the bleachers at the high school be used? Yes, but at your own risk. If lack of social distancing is discovered the privilege will be suspended.

Can signs be placed in classrooms with COVID rules before students return? All rooms in use will have signs with occupancy and mitigations required for adequate ventilation.

Will closing windows during the winter reduce class size further? Some classrooms will need extra air purifiers with windows closed but the hope is class size will not be an issue.

Can more aides be placed in classrooms? Yes, if necessary but availability and expense might be an issue.

Which remote model will we go back to if we go back to all remote instruction? For brief pauses, we will remain in the hybrid schedule but instruction will be remote.

1.6 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan listed the agenda items to be discussed at the meeting.

2. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

3. **MAJOR BUSINESS**

3.1 Discussion of Belmont High School Hybrid Task Force (Vote)

Cheryl Grace, parent of two high school students provided an overview of her plan for getting students back into the high school without losing any instructional time. The plan includes allowing students to access the synchronous remote part of the class in person. All students would be taught remotely in the afternoon. This would allow remote students to be fully integrated with all students, total flexibility and no problem with cohort syncing if a few days of instruction need to return to all remote. The synchronous remote live streaming is already in place in hybrid and it will make little difference if there are six or twenty students. Many high school teachers in other districts and college professors are already doing this.

School Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich explained this type of learning must be negotiated with educators. She invited any high school educators to offer their perspective. Steve Kirby offered his perspective as a high school teacher, relaying he saw live-streaming as beneficial overall. Additional teachers individually spoke to a range of preferences and quantities, challenges of remote teaching, and range of subject matter that lends well or not to remote and live streaming. Supt. Phelan presented a ppt relating to the topic and the newly formed advisory group.

TRANSITIONING FROM REMOTE TO HYBRID

The School Committee agreed to at their last meeting the creation of an advisory group to research a return to in-person learning at Belmont High School. Supt. Phelan presented a timeline for that work and the comparison districts for the advisory group, as well as surveys for parents, students, and staff. He proposed the advisory group review district plans for high school hybrid and remote implementation, review input from stakeholders and study hybrid models from other districts. The group will then make recommendations to the Superintendent for consideration. The advisory group will consist of two parents, two students and two educators. Belmont High School Principal Isaac Taylor will lead the group.

The Committee expressed thanks and discussed the presentation plan, including alignment with the academic calendar-terms, recognition of the community's desire for livestreaming, evaluation of trade-offs with comparative models, compression of program offerings, data collection in context of state trends. The Committee agreed that the advisory group would need to continue for ongoing assessment.

Dr. Prestwich took citizen comments. Charlie Conroy expressed thanks for pausing and re-examining the model and asked about teachers being remote or in person for the students would be in person; Larry Schmidt commented on his teaching experience in the "high-flex" mode at a nearby university, and Jamie Shea commented that they were not asked to live stream to the whole cohort, a range of interest in it, and concern with how to connect to kids, Belmont is a great district with great leadership and teachers.

Chair Andrea Prestwich presented a motion for the School Committee to review. They discussed the language of the motion and came to agreement on the following:

The Belmont School Committee is committed to developing a schedule that moves into an in-person hybrid schedule as soon as possible.

Moved: that the Belmont Public School Administration set up an advisory group to work with the administration to propose a new hybrid schedule for Belmont High School. The proposal should:

- Be more robust in terms of minutes of synchronous instruction
- Should incorporate more student input
- Should incorporate more community input
- Should incorporate more educator input

The revised hybrid plan should be presented to the Belmont School Committee no later than November 24, 2020.

Motion offered by Michael Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote.

3.2 Facilities Update

The district has been working with BALA Engineering on an air exchange assessment for each school.

Steve Dorrance, Town of Belmont Facilities Director introduced Ed Dolan from BALA who provided an overview of the additional work that was done to confirm all the data collected was correct. A decision was made last week to close the schools while BALA could re-check some data that was inaccurate.

Ed Dolan explained the new data has gone through internal reviews and reviews with senior officials at BALA and he stressed that he is confident that everything is now correct. They measured airflow of the HVAC systems then evaluated the window information in order to understand the room's ability to have access to fresh air. The number of air purifiers placed in rooms is based on that data. Ed Dolan, Steve Dorrance, Principal Taylor and a member of the Belmont Educators Association spent time last week walking through the buildings and checking all the rooms. The district will likely have more air purifiers than are needed but everyone will have peace of mind. Steve Dorrance relayed that APUs were placed any room that was less than 4 ACH. They have purchased 347 units total. The units look like printers, operate at low noise level, and are programmed so that teachers will not need to adjust them.

Chair Prestwich invited members of the community to state any questions for comments.

Charlie Conroy, parent of high school students asked when the executive summary would be complete. Ed Dolan stated the plan is to have it completed by October 29.

Cassandra Page, Belmont parent asked if students would be allowed to use the dark room. Steve Dorrance explained the dark room would be used with two air purifiers and only one or two students at a time.

3.3 Special Education & English Learner Education Update

English Language Learners

Lindsey Rinder, Director of K-12 English Learners noted the English Language Department carried out 122 required English language screenings in-person during the last two week of August. She invited Yujin Kim, a parent to share her positive experience of the ELL program. The department continues to provide screenings but by appointment since school reopened in September. New registrations continue to come in. Screenings usually take place within two weeks of a student's first day. There is currently a backlog of 33 English Language Education screenings. English Learners in K-12 and Foundational English Learners in 5-12 received in-person services during Phase 2. During Phase 3, staff will work to schedule additional in-person services, for English Learners in grades K-8. Lindsey explained some of the challenges with English Language education such as communication barriers, complicated service schedules and remote attendance challenges for the youngest students. Some successes include English Language curriculum being delivered remotely and/or in person, strong turnout for family engagement programming, and positive classroom communities. Families can take advantage of interactive supports like two-way translated texting using Talking Points, the English Language Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC), a multilingual Parent Support Group and a WhatsApp group run by Donna Stantin.

Special Education

Ken Kramer, Director of Student Services provided an update on how Special Education and English Learner students are doing with school so far this year. These students are facing similar

challenges as general education students. Many are doing very well and others are experiencing challenges, sometimes-severe needing extra services and support. Staff has been setting up IEP meetings that did not occur during the closure last spring. They are being scheduled in order of due dates. Due to COVID issues, the IEP meetings are being conducted using Google Meet or phone calls. Due to the volume of evaluations left over from the spring, it will take time to work through them. The Department of Student Services has been recruiting contract evaluators in all areas of expertise to help complete the testing. It has been difficult to find a clinician willing to take on this work since it needs to be done in person. SEPAC arranged a parent meeting last week. Parents requested more transparency around the backlog. When the school year began, the staff was about 80 evaluations behind and they are trying to work their way through those. Options for remote assessment are being explored, but reliability is a factor. Teams have been advised to review initial and re-evaluation cases pending to see if there are any that could be addressed with data we already have on hand. Many cases require a level of diagnostic objective testing that this approach may not allow.

Teams have been advised to review re-evaluation referrals in the context of necessity. Services and supports are being provided according to the student's IEP. The delivery model and time frame may be modified to allow for remote vs in person delivery within the context of the schools current daily and weekly schedule.

Ken Kramer introduced Tim Flood, Co-chair of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC). Tim noted there has been some disconnect with services not being provided. The common consensus as a Board is we need more work in Special Education. He thought the work in Springfield and Hadley was exemplary. The school staff is working hard but it seems other towns are having more success with the Special Education community than Belmont.

School Committee members acknowledged the frustration parents are feeling trying to get their children the services they need. In answer to a question from a School Committee member, Ken Kramer explained we could not get into the practice of telling parents we will pay for reimbursements if they have their child tested privately but we do review information that parents provide. During Phase I 65 students were in person. In Phase II an additional 160 began in-person learning. Ken Kramer explained it is difficult to get traction with Special Education without a firm continuous model since it works in concert with the non-SPED student schedule.

3.4 Appointment of School Committee Member to Structural Change Impact Group (Vote)

The Town is forming a group to review revenue or structural change in advance of the override vote. They have requested a member of the School Committee take part in this group. After some discussion, Amy Checkoway volunteered to take part.

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Tara Donner, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to appoint Amy Checkoway as School Committee Liaison to the Structural Change Impact Group.

4. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

There were no subcommittee updates due to the late time.

4.1 Finance Subcommittee

4.2 Policy Subcommittee

- 4.3 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee
- 4.4 Capital Budget Committee
- 4.5 Warrant Committee
- 4.6 Belmont High School Building Committee
- 4.7 Community Path
- 4.8 Financial Task Force II
- 4.9 Rink Working Group
- 4.10 EDCO
- 4.11 Long Term Capital Planning Committee
- 4.12 Equity Subcommittee

5. OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 Consent Agenda
- 5.2 Personnel Items
- 5.3 Business Items
- 5.4 Approval of Minutes

September 29, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes
September 29, 2020 School Committee Minutes
October 5, 2020 Policy Subcommittee Minutes
October 6, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes
October 6, 2020 School Committee Minutes
October 13, 2020 School Committee Minutes
October 20, 2020 School Committee Minutes

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to approve the minutes of: September 29, 2020 Finance Subcommittee, September 29, 2020 School Committee, October 5, 2020 Policy Subcommittee, October 13, 2020 School Committee and October 20, 2020 School Committee. The minutes of October 6, 2020 Finance Subcommittee and October 6, 2020 School Committee were not voted on.

6. FUTURE BUSINESS

November 10, 2020
Finance Subcommittee Meeting
8:00 a.m. – Remote

November 10, 2020
School Committee Meeting
6:30 p.m. – Remote

7. **ENCLOSURES**

8. **ADJOURN**

***On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, it was VOTED
unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 10:11 p.m.***

Respectfully Submitted by 
Catherine Bowen, Secretary