

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
OCTOBER 20, 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

Also in attendance: Ms. Rosa Innis, Director of METCO
Ms. Kathryn Bonfiglio, President of Belmont Against Racism

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Andrea Prestwich called the meeting to order at 6:39 p.m.

1.2 Adjustments to the Agenda

Chair Andrea Prestwich explained the Committee will take citizen's concerns and agenda items 2.4 and 2.5 will take place right after 2.1.

1.3 Citizens' Concerns

Chair Andrea Prestwich invited community members to ask questions not related to agenda items, comments on major business would be heard with those agenda items as time permitted.

Elshad: When will a forum for remote families take place? Superintendent Phelan responded the plan is to hold the forum on October 26.

Cassandra Page asked how many positive COVID cases there are in the district. Andrea Prestwich referred her to the Health Department but also noted the number of cases have not gotten anywhere near the level that DESE would expect the district to shut down.

The School Committee reminded the public of their office hours scheduled for October 23 at 11:00 a.m. The Zoom link can be found on the Town of Belmont calendar and BPS website.

1.4 Chair's Report

Chair Andrea Prestwich shared the School Committee's letter of response from Commissioner Riley regarding Belmont's vote to enter into hybrid learning. DESE expects a "robust" experience.

Chair Andrea Prestwich shared the questions from the School Committee Google Form.

1. Why not use live streaming to offset the loss of instruction time? It cannot be imposed on teachers and must be negotiated.
2. Why is the passing time at BHS longer than Chenery? The longer time is due to students having to socially distance and one-way corridors.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan explained this meeting with Boston parents is usually held in Boston each year. Parents and School Committee members along with district administrators gather for some social time before talking about the school year.

Superintendent Phelan reminded everyone all students Prek-12 will learn remotely for the remainder of this week. This will allow the facilities staff to redistribute air exchange equipment. The district received updated data earlier in the day from BALA, which will be discussed at this meeting.

Superintendent Phelan reported two new cases of COVID-19 at Chenery Middle School this week. A letter with information was sent to families yesterday. He thanked Belmont Health Director Wes Chin and Nursing Director Beth Rumley for their ongoing work to keep students and staff safe.

2. MAJOR BUSINESS

2.1 Facilities Report Out on BALA Update

Superintendent Phelan introduced Steve Dorrance, Director of Facilities. Mr. Dorrance provided an overview of why BALA was asked to do a second assessment of certain spaces. Several months ago, BALA was hired to gather air assessment information in each of the school buildings. They were asked to produce results within a short timeline. When the data was received and reviewed by Mr. Dorrance and members of the district, they had some questions, which prompted them to ask BALA to return a second time to do additional assessments.

Keith Prata is Director of HVAC at BALA in their Boston office. Mr. Prata explained there was a discrepancy in the data sets. The second set of data gathered indicated the need for more air purifying equipment. When data was gathered the first time and entered into a spreadsheet there was a mistake with the multiplier in the cell. Mr. Prata relayed that mistakes happen, that there are 62,000 cells of data and was glad that Mr. Dorrance brought it to his attention. Mr. Prata stated his confidence in the data now is ninety percent. In answer to a question from a School Committee member, Steve Dorrance stated any room that does not have appropriate ventilation would be taken offline. In answer to a question from Ms. Gomez, Mr. Prata said there were no errors in the air exchange rate. Larger rooms will need lower ACH but would use more HEPA air purifiers if used. Each room will have a sign on the door with "rules of the room" explaining if windows need to be open or air purifiers need to be on. There will also be occupancy limits posted on the doors.

BALA has committed to submitting an executive summary once all the data is reviewed. This might be available by October 30. They will do another walk-through with Dorrance this week.

2.3 B.A.R. Donation (Vote)

Superintendent Phelan introduced Kathryn Bonfiglio, President of Belmont Against Racism.

Kathryn Bonfiglio explained B.A.R. is an all-volunteer non-profit that was established in 1992. The members have been working with schools on anti-racism and equity issues. Kathryn presented the School Committee with a \$10,000 check for the METCO Support Fund. The fund has been used to support after school activities and late transportation for Boston students. The late bus allowed students to participate in sports and other activities. The METCO Support Fund has also funded programs such as visiting authors at Chenery and poets at Belmont High School.

Kathryn Bonfiglio thanked Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias, METCO Director Rosa Innis and B.A.R. member Charlene O'Connor for their support over the years.

2.4 METCO Update – Rosa Innis

Superintendent Phelan introduced Belmont METCO Director Rosa Innis who provided the School Committee with an update on the Belmont METCO program.

The METCO program currently has 91 students; 33 at the elementary level, 30 at the middle school level and 28 at the high school level. The current enrollment is slightly lower than in past years but there is a representation of students from all parts of Boston. Last year the program focused on Social Emotional Learning, academic support and community building and hope to continue to build on that work. Chenery students have taken part in workshops focusing on identity development run by Stephanie Harvey. Faculty members have also taken part in Professional Development, which will support students directly. Rosa is exploring partnerships with other METCO districts to provide tutoring for students. The district has been committed to anti-racism work. Recent events nationally highlight how critical these efforts are now. Rosa and the district are developing district-wide Professional Development on anti-racism.

Last year a bus was added for METCO high school students. It was well received and a number of stops are being added. METCO, Inc. facilitated the distribution of passes to students. Late transportation will also be offered to students who are staying late for extra help or extra-curricular activities.

Seniors have been provided the opportunity to work with college consultants and a virtual college workshop took place on September 30. Elementary students started hybrid learning on October 8th and Chenery will begin on October 22nd. Of the students, 40% of K-4, 40% of Chenery and 19% of high school have chosen to stay in remote learning when hybrid is available.

Superintendent Phelan noted the School Committee recently voted on the creation of an Equity Subcommittee, which everyone is excited to implement this year.

In answer to a question from a member of the community, Rose explained school buses will abide by the DESE seating plan and students will be safety distanced. She is currently working on creating cohorts.

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Tara Donner, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to accept the \$10,000 donation from Belmont Against Racism (B.A.R.).

Superintendent Phelan explained all students PreK-12 will learn remotely for the remainder of the week. This decision was made to allow facilities work to be completed following the updated report from the Air Exchange Assessment from BALA Consulting, Inc. The elementary cohort schedule will be adjusted to increase the in-person days for Cohort B.

At the middle and high school level, educators were willing to take the risk of teaching students in person and remote only students will join the class virtually through live streaming. This model will allow student schedules to be kept the same if at some point it is necessary to pivot back to all remote. The district has been working to provide remote access for educators who need to work from home. This has also enabled the district to save money by not having to hire additional educators.

Superintendent Phelan provided examples of in-person and remote only schedules for middle school and high school students. Students were put into cohorts using certain principles such as keeping families together, deepening relationships between educators and students by keeping classes together and supporting robust teaching and learning. Students, who chose hybrid learning and would now like to switch to remote, should let their principal know by 3:00 p.m. on October 22. Students who chose remote and would like to switch to hybrid, will make the switch at the start of Term 2.

The district is planning a community forum to answer questions and hear feedback from families for remote-only students. This forum will take place virtually on October 26 at 6:30 p.m.

The School Committee was provided a presentation from two parent groups. The parent groups each created a survey on how parents felt about the high school hybrid model. The majority of people who responded to the survey were not in support of the high school hybrid model.

School Committee members took questions and comments from community members.

Christine McLaughlin suggested people who want to stay in remote should have that option but people who want to return to in-person learning should also be able to do so.

Danielle Lemack requested students be able to return to in-person learning.

Judy Phalen asked School Committee members to request support from parents in pushing back against DESE who is requesting the district move to hybrid learning as soon as possible.

School Committee members discussed the surveys and agreed the community feels they are not being heard, no perfect solution. School Committee member Evelyn Gomez suggested the School Committee form a task force or work group to create a survey that represents all community members. School Committee member Amy Checkoway suggested pausing on the return to hybrid at the high school level. She read a proposal suggesting a process and plan for moving forward. School Committee member Catherine Bowen suggested moving forward with the plan for hybrid learning at the high school level but should also continue trying to improve on it. Evelyn Gomez suggested the district prioritize in-person learning for those federally recognized groups that are marginalized. Student Representative Alix Fick favored staying with the remote model.

The School Committee agreed to take a vote on pausing the plan to start hybrid learning at Belmont High School until improvements could be made on the plan.

On a motion offered by Michael Crowley and seconded by Andrea Prestwich, it was VOTED 4-0-2 to pause the Belmont High School Hybrid Plan that was voted favorably at the October 13, 2020 School Committee Meeting.

School Committee members discussed forming a task force to review hybrid plans for Belmont High School. They discussed the possible composition of the task force as well and timelines.

On a motion offered by Michael Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED 5-0-1 to ask Superintendent Phelan to set up a task force to review hybrid options for Belmont High School in the next two weeks. The School Committee will discuss the composition and charge of the task force at their meeting on October 27, 2020

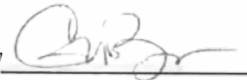
2.5 Appointment of School Committee Member to Structural Change Impact Group (Vote)

The School Committee agreed to postpone the vote on the appointment of a School Committee member to the Structural Change Impact Committee until October 27, 2020.

6. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Michael Crowley and seconded by Tara Donner, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by



Catherine Bowen, Secretary