

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 15, 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 Call to Order

Andrea Prestwich called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

There were no citizens' concerns.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.4 Chair's Report

Chair Andrea Prestwich thanked the community for their emails to the School Committee. She assured everyone the emails are being read even if the members are not able to respond to each one.

Ms. Prestwich explained she has been looking for ways to incorporate COVID testing in the district. She has been in communication with Dr. Kate Jeffreys, an expert in infectious diseases. Dr. Jeffreys has located a lab who is prepared to work with Belmont Public Schools on a testing protocol. Ms. Prestwich acknowledged the testing would be expensive but it may be a way to reassure everyone prior to starting school in a hybrid model.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan stated his report would be part of the major business items.

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 Belmont Educators of Color & Allies Presentation

Belmont Educators of Color & Allies (BECA) is a group of educators in the district who have been working for the past two years to support equity in Belmont schools. The group was formed in 2018 due to concerns about the racial climate. Their goal is to educate others about the history of racism, create supportive relationships among educators of color and allies and confront inequities while building a more just community. BECA has hosted meetings, workshops and other events for Belmont Educators of Color and Allies and they have collaborated with other communities to work on the issue of racism.

During the summer of 2020, BECA along with Belmont educators, students and community members held two educator Book Groups and student/community Book Groups. BECA offered recommendations such as a landing page on the Belmont Public Schools website with information on anti-racism education, a recommitment to METCO, improvement in the diversity of staff and the commission of an equity audit.

3.2 Air Exchange Executive Summary Update

Steve Dorrance, Director of Facilities provided an overview of the work being done on the air exchange assessments. The decision was made to have this assessment done in order to assure everyone the buildings will be safe for students. The consulting firm BALA, which is a large firm with a 30-year history, was employed to do this work and they have collected data from every classroom in the district, which is being processed. All spaces were tested with windows closed for baseline. The initial reports from BALA were provided to the Committee immediately prior to the meeting and would be posted later in the week. They will provide a detailed report to the district as soon as their assessments are complete.

The district has purchased 150 large and medium commercial grade air purification units to support air exchange in classrooms. These units add 3 air changes per hour, with the goal of 5 air changes per hour for each occupied space. Mr. Dorrance explained the systems in the schools were designed to a different standard than we have today, noting MERV 13 were used where the goal of 5 ACH would not be undermined. The solution involves bringing outside air into the building, mechanical systems and open windows. In some areas that may not be possible so those rooms would not be used until the issues can be fixed.

Recommissioning is recommended by BALA for some systems. Long term improvements are needed overall. The Committee discussed the need for maintenance and upkeep of buildings.

3.3 School Opening

Hybrid Opening Update

The School Committee was provided an update on the plans for hybrid openings. The plans for hybrid models will be put in place once there is more data on the remote plans. The goal for hybrid is to keep students connected to schools and classmates. Remote students will have the same curriculum as in person students and all instruction will be from Belmont Public Schools staff. There will be academic workshops for all students and lunch breaks will take place at the same times.

Each student has been provided a device and at the elementary level, students were provided "at home learning kits" with materials they will need throughout their day. Some of the disadvantages to remote learning is the lack of face time with teachers and peers. Remote learning also requires more support from parents.

Isaac Taylor, Belmont High School Principal, Karla Koza, Chenery Middle School Principal and Seeley Okie, Burbank Elementary School Principal; representing all the elementary principals provided individual updates on their hybrid schedules.

School Committee members acknowledged the work and expressed their thanks to the staff, they discussed the plans. They asked questions on additional staffing needs - Unit D positions and Certified teaching positions. School Committee members agreed to revisit the timeline for the hybrid opening.

Remote Opening (Vote)

Principals have sent out communication for opening of schools. Parents can email questions to studentsupport@belmontschools.net. The Technology Department has sent out information to families on how to access online classes. Thanks to the Technology Department, staff who have provided chrome books for all families. Students have received schedules with the exception of grade five who will meet their team teachers and get their schedules tomorrow.

Principals provided an overview of the remote schedules explaining the pros and cons of each. Committee members acknowledged some community concerns and discussed start times and lunch times. The administration explained that the start times were kept similar for all grades due to transition towards hybrid, which will involve transportation. School Committee members expressed concerns about the limited time for lunch and common hour.

Acknowledgement that there would be trade-offs in all scenarios. Member Checkoway suggested a small group to look at challenges with start times and lunch hour. Member Gomez asked about testing and phasing times. The recommendation from DESE was to transition between modes in 3 week intervals, the administration responded to community interest to shorten that period to 2 weeks.

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to accept the Remote Learning Plan presented on September 15, 2020.

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to address the later start time and common later lunch hour in three weeks as well as the 5 minute transition times.

3.4 Fall Athletic Fee

Fall Fee (Vote)

At their September 8, 2020 meeting, the School Committee voted to accept the altered fall sports season recommended by MIAA and Middlesex League. Additional coaches were needed to administer the season, funding could be supported from the COVID grant for these additional stipends and for additional bussing needs. The Committee discussed the need to prioritize COVID funding for other general district needs and minimize the funds being lost to run the athletic fee-based programs. The district and School Committee discussed reducing fees due to the season being shortened and modified, and supporting families to mitigate some risk. General support for reducing fees was expressed by all members with acknowledgment that the district is not in a position to eliminate fees. The reduction was discussed in the Finance Subcommittee meeting at the recommendation of the

Director of Athletics and Superintendent Phelan. The Subcommittee supported the proposed one-time reduction from \$450 to \$325, as a fiscally neutral solution.

The Committee discussed what other districts were doing relative to reimbursement. Districts that had fees were not offering reimbursements due to any COVID issue. There was also agreement not to reimburse families if the season had to end early due to a COVID issue.

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to reduce the first fall 1 season payment from \$450 to \$325 for the fall 2020 season.

Reimbursement (Vote)

The School Committee agreed to reimburse families the difference if they have already paid \$450 for the fall season. Families will not be reimbursed the \$325 if the season has to end early

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote not to reimburse the sports fees if the season has been cancelled, once the season has begun.

4. **SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)**

4.1 Finance Subcommittee

The Finance Subcommittee met this morning to discuss fees and the FY20 closeout.

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

There was no report from the Capital Budget Committee.

4.5 Warrant Committee

The Warrant Committee meets on September 16 to complete their discussion on Town Meeting Articles and take votes.

4.6 Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee

The Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee (BMHSBC) met last Wednesday. The FFE Group met today and the next meeting is in two weeks. The BMHSBC will be meeting on site in a couple of weeks.

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 will meet on September 18.

4.9 Rink Working Group

There was no report from the Rink Working Group.

4.10 EDCO

EDCO will meet on September 17.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There were no minutes to be voted on.

6. ADJOURN

*On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted by


Catherine Bowen, Secretary