

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 2, 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 6:32 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

Joe Bernard expressed concerns about equity in response to the Governor's orders to allow for "pods" to organize and operate during school days hours; would like to ensure that all students have equal access to remote learning and cooperatives and to what extent could the school department play a role in facilitating such access.

Lars ? expressed support for families necessarily relying on technology and how the district was ensuring alternate communication tools for families that could not rely on email.

Larry Schmidt shared his researched position on decision-making, as a professor of macroeconomics and finance, in catastrophic risk situations and requested that the district would 1) focus on what is unique to our town when problem-solving to live with the virus, utilizing Belmont-specific resources to solve Belmont-specific problems, 2) create more inclusion and participation; 3) meet more frequently and communicate more frequently, 4) allow for flexibility in the planning, allowing for all of us to rise to the occasion.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.4 Chair's Report

In the interest of time, the Chair did not provide a report.

School Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich welcomed Belmont High School students Alex Fick and Divya Natarajan, members of the Belmont High School Student Advisory Council. Divya asked a questions

regarding how students will get in and out of the buildings when parents are working. Students will be bused, walk and ride bikes. It may be challenging families to plan on early dismissal.

Alex asked where students will go for frees and how they will transition to classes. It may be necessary to remove free periods and students may have to wait for classes to empty before entering.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

In the interest of time, the Superintendent did not provide a report.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 Fall Opening Phased Plan Discussion

Superintendent Phelan presented an update on the fall opening plans. The district's top priorities are health and safety, social emotional wellness and academic engagement and return to rigor.

Supt. Phelan shared that staff were engaged in daily preparations for return-to-learning, and recently welcomed Kimberly Thomas for professional development, initiated by Rosa Inness, Lindsey Rinder and Deb McDevitt. Welcome to new principals Anita Mechlenburg (Winn Brook), Heidi Paisner (Wellington), and Karla Koza (Chenery)

The Air Exchange Assessment is currently underway. The Facilities Department has ordered 150 large and medium commercial grade air purification units from a local manufacturer to support the air exchange in the classrooms. The cost of these purchases and work to install will be reimbursed through federal grants related to COVID-19.

Middlesex Superintendents and Athletic Directors met recently to discuss the updated sports guidance received from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Middlesex League has agreed to assign the following sports to the Fall 2 Season: Football, Competitive Cheerleading, Swim and Volleyball. The following sports will be run with MIAA modifications: Boys and Girls Soccer, Field Hockey, Cross Country, Golf. Supt. Phelan recommends to follow the MIAA recommendations. The School Committee would need to vote on this agreement once the plans are finalized, to authorize the extracurricular program.

Mini proposals for remote or hybrid are in progress from clubs and social groups for high school and middle school, with the goal of engagement with students and teachers. Infrastructure is being set up to support this, as plans are in progress.

Superintendent Phelan provided updated hybrid learning models. At each level there is increased instructional time but decreased non-instructional time such as lunch. Feedback from parents showed an interest in increased scheduled in-person time during the remote learning phase. In response to this feedback, the district is proposing the "Bridge to Hybrid." The model will bring students in for academic conferences, SEL and will help build student/class relationships. Based on the current health metrics and the ongoing work with airflow, with a report due around September 11, it may be possible to move to a more in-person teaching and learning format sooner.

The updated Accelerated Phased Plan, which includes the Bridge to Hybrid Phase 1.5, would begin no sooner than September 18, which is two weeks after the remote learning start. Phase 2 would begin no sooner than October 12, Phase 3 no sooner than October 16. Advancement to each phase will be dependent upon the health metrics approved by the Belmont Board of Health and the review of the Air Exchange Assessment. The Director of the Belmont Board of Health has reviewed and supports the DESE metrics framework, which would be used to decide when to move from one phase to the next. The Director of the Belmont Board of Health also studied the weighted average of communities that employees reside in.

Class lists will be sent out next week. The district is reviewing guidance from the State on pods for classrooms.

Butler Elementary School Principal Danielle Betancourt presented the hybrid model for elementary schools. Students will be separated into two cohorts. Each group comes in for two consecutive half days and alternating Wednesday half days. The second group will stay home during that time and will work on independent practice. All students will take part in "life" learning in academic workshops at home for the second half of the day. All specials will be pre-recorded. Students will have lunch at home to eliminate any risk involved with eating at school.

Chenery Middle School Principal Karla Koza presented the hybrid model for the middle school explaining the benefits of a hybrid schedule allow for the following: in person connection for educators and students, in person connection for students and their peers, in person service delivery for Special Education, ELL, and a needed break from home to build independence. Some challenges of a hybrid model include large cohort class sizes and the need for highly controlled movement of students and faculty. Students will stay in one classroom throughout the day and have to wear masks with strictly monitored mask breaks. Ms. Koza explained "WIN Block," which is different for each child. There can be time for teachers to meet with students one on one or in small groups, RTI or Special Education. The students who are at home during that time can have quiet time, lunch or family time.

Isaac Taylor, Principal of Belmont High School provided a sample of a hybrid schedule for a Belmont High School student. He explained a main goal was to keep the Program of Studies, allow for transfer easily between in person and remote, ensure contact with a teacher every day. Two cohorts were created by cutting the student population in half. One cohort will come to school Monday and Tuesday and go home for lunch each day. Students who are asynchronous in the mornings will become remote students. On Wednesdays, all students will be remote.

School Committee members provided input and asked questions related to the team and cohorting structures at school levels, aftercare programs, complexity of lunch at the middle school, and how homework would be considered at the grade levels and coordinated. Desire to bring younger students in earlier was shared, as well as continuity and student experience. Superintendent Phelan explained once air assessments are complete a decision will be made on aftercare. Members of the public asked questions and offered comments, including a desire for later start times for older students and live streaming from classrooms to maximize curricular advancement.

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to accept the DESE metrics for health for moving between phases unless there are extenuating circumstances identified by the Belmont Health Department.

3.2 Full Day Kindergarten Fees (Vote)

Belmont Public Schools has been charging for full day kindergarten for the past several years. Four years ago, the State stopped offering the grant to support full day kindergarten. The Town and School Department would like to cover the \$400,000 fee for full day kindergarten for this year. Next year the State would reimburse for the total number of kindergarten students, at a full student rate. This will alleviate the tuition burden on families who would like to have their children attend kindergarten all day. The change would not impact the ability to go hybrid.

*On a motion offered by Michael Crowley and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to eliminate Full Day Kindergarten fees this year and forever.*

4. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

4.1 Finance Subcommittee

The Finance Subcommittee met recently to discuss the elimination of the full day kindergarten fee and costs related to remote and hybrid learning.

4.2 Policy and Procedure Subcommittee

The Policy and Procedure Subcommittee will schedule a meeting in the near future to discuss masks, self-screening, and other COVID-19 related policies

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 met recently to discuss warrant articles for Town Meeting, and whether or not a Planning Board member should sit on the Capital Budget Committee.

4.5 Warrant Committee

The Warrant Committee met recently to discuss warrant articles for Town Meeting.

4.6 Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee

The next meeting of the Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee will take place on September 9 at 8:00 a.m. They will discuss timeline and work done over the summer

4.7 Community Path Committee

The Community Path Committee will meet on September 4 at 7:00 p.m.

4.8 Financial Task Force II

There was no report from the Financial Task Force II

4.9 Rink Working Group

There was no report from the Rink Working Group.

4.10 EDCO

There was no report on EDCO.

5.4 Approval of Minutes

August 4, 2020 School Committee Minutes

August 6, 2020 School Committee Minutes

August 27, 2020 Finance Subcommittee Minutes

Due to the time, the School Committee agreed to vote on the minutes at the next scheduled School Committee meeting.

6. **ADJOURN**

*On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Catherine Bowen, it was **VOTED** unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 10:12 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted by 
Catherine Bowen, Secretary