

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**REMOTE MEETING**  
**MAY 12, 2020**

Present: Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair  
Ms. Catherine Bowen, Secretary  
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

Also in attendance:

**1. OPENING BUSINESS**

1.1 Call to order

Andrea Prestwich called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Andrea Prestwich announced Friday, May 15, 2020 as the deadline for anyone interested in applying for the open seat on the School Committee. Applications are available on the Town of Belmont website.

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

There was no report from the Chair.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

The Superintendent's Newsletter is normally sent out on Tuesday and Friday. It was not sent out today so information from this meeting could be included. The newsletter will go out tomorrow instead.

**2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

No unfinished business.

### **3. MAJOR BUSINESS**

#### **3.1 Graduation Discussion**

The School Leadership has been working hard to determine the best way to handle graduation. It is understood that anything less than a traditional graduation is a disappointment to seniors and families. A proposal was sent out to families last week with suggestions for an alternative ceremony and it was met with some criticism. School leadership had decided to review all the options suggested and taken them under consideration over the weekend. They were reviewed again on Monday morning with the Leadership Team which includes staff from the School Department, Police Department, Fire Department and Health Department. There have been four elements from community suggestions that have been incorporated into the graduation ceremony. Unfortunately, the plans cannot include a live ceremony due to social distancing concerns. Seniors will be able to come to the high school on a particular day to pick up diplomas, caps and gowns. Staff members will be there to greet them as they exit. Individual photo sessions for graduates will be arranged. The graduation will take place virtually. The Saturday before graduation it may be possible to have a rolling rally that allows students to drive by the high school in procession. These plans have not been confirmed yet.

School Committee members thanked the School Administrators for the thought and work they have put into trying to make the best of a difficult situation and provide students with a way to acknowledge their graduation, and were supportive of the events described.

Anna Biondo, Belmont High School senior spoke on behalf of the senior class. She expressed her thanks to the School Department and School Committee for their time and effort trying to plan a safe graduation for seniors.

Mr. P.J. Looney presented some ideas for an in-person graduation while trying to follow state and social distancing guidelines.

#### **3.2 Parent Survey Update**

Janice Darias presented the results of a survey presented to parents and students regarding remote learning. There were 1597 responses representing students at the following grade levels:

735: PreK-4

536: 5 - 8

325: 9 – 12

The first part of the survey asked parents questions related to their child's experience of remote learning. Parents were asked questions about opportunities for students to connect with teacher regarding social/emotional learning; daily or weekly structure for learning activities; ability to have questions answered or receive support; feedback from teachers on progress, learning opportunities for new content; learning opportunities to review previously learned content; learning opportunities that are done offline. Part two asked parents questions related to opportunities to connect with teachers, technical support and issues if a child is on an IEP.

Parents and students seem to feel comfortable with most of the remote learning. In areas where they feel more or less is needed, the responses will be helpful for staff to know where improvements are needed.

### 3.3 FY21 Discussion

The School Administration and School Committee has been working with the Warrant Committee Education Subcommittee to find ways to reduce the budget due to the revenue shortfall caused by COVID-19 shutdown.

The School Department has reduced their budget by \$920,000. This number represents some teaching positions that will not be added next year, along with custodial overtime, and materials and supplies. The Town is planning for some capital-based and overtime reductions.

Tony DiCologero shared a chart explaining the items planned for reduction in FY21. All the reductions will impact students due to the continued growing enrollment. The Chenery Middle School will have the largest number of students in many years, in grades 6 and 7 next year, approximately 400 students per cohort. School Administrators had hoped to create two half teams and add a teacher for each team. This will not be possible with the reductions.

The budget for FY20 will have some positive balance of funds. These funds will be necessarily used to address potential challenges related to COVID-19 for the next school year. Once the numbers are more concrete in July or August, adjustments may be needed to hire additional nurses and social workers, depending on what types of wellness monitoring are needed. A Technology Integration Specialist will be needed to provide targeted professional development to support teachers with remote learning, as well as planning for a 1:1 device ratio to ensure learning continuity. School Administrators have been working with the Facilities Department to plan for and secure disposable supplies (e.g., masks, gloves, hand sanitizer), as well as hygienic fixtures and small equipment that will be needed for next year.

School Committee members discussed the spending priorities in preparing for multiple learning environments for next year, acknowledging that the per pupil expenditure in Belmont is well below the state average. Concerns for maintaining the quality of services were shared, and recognition of stretching the budget in a time of student growth in order to positively work with the Town to address local and state revenue shortages. Potential federal aid was discussed.

### 3.4 EDCO Discussion and Vote

Belmont has been a member of the EDCO Collaborative for many years along with twenty or so other districts. EDCO has provided great professional development for teachers. They have also branched out to provide needs for students.

EDCO has faced financial challenges over the last few years. The EDCO Board hired a new director who has done an outstanding job trying to support the financial needs. Belmont currently does not have any students in the EDCO program. There are concerns about the ability for EDCO to be financially feasible. EDCO has discussed the need for more money from member districts. It may not be in Belmont's best interest to be a member of EDCO going forward. School Administrators have sought advice from legal counsel for guidance on how to separate from EDCO.

School Committee members expressed the respect and appreciation for all that the EDCO Collaborative has done but agreed it might be best to separate as members given the financial concerns and EDCO not currently being a proper fit for Belmont students.

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to initiate the withdrawal and/or termination of Belmont Public Schools' partnership with EDCO.

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Kate Bowen, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to permit EDCO School Committee Representative, Amy Checkoway to vote for withdrawal or termination.

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

##### **4.1 Finance Subcommittee**

The Finance Subcommittee has been discussing the FY20 budget. They have reviewed the third quarter financial report in detail with the School Committee and Warrant Committee. They are looking at funds that can be expended in FY20 for needed materials for the COVID environment.

##### **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 will meet tomorrow night to review the third quarter report for the school budget.

##### **4.6 Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee**

Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee will meet tomorrow and Thursday. They will review the GMP [Guaranteed Maximum Price] for the project and next steps moving forward.

##### **4.7 Community Path Committee**

The Community Path Committee is meeting on Thursday night. This will be a discussion of the conceptual design report and updated design feedback from the MBTA. There are plans for another public engagement meeting where the public will be able to share feedback.

##### **4.8 Financial Task Force II**

The Financial Task Force II will meet on May 21 at 8:00 a.m.

##### **4.9 High School Traffic Working Group**

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

4.10 Rink Working Group

The Rink Working Group is in the process of scheduling another meeting to review proposals but no date has been set.

**5. OTHER BUSINESS**

5.1 Consent Agenda

5.2 Personnel Items - None

5.3 Business Items – None

5.4 Approval of Minutes

There were no minutes voted at the meeting.

**6. FUTURE BUSINESS**

May 14, 2020

Finance Subcommittee Joint Meeting with SC and WC Education Subcommittee – Remote – 3:00 p.m.

May 18, 2020

School Committee Joint Meeting with Select Board – Remote – 7:00 p.m.

May 26, 2020

School Committee Meeting – Remote – 7:00 p.m.

**7. ENCLOSURES**

**8. ADJOURN**

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was voted unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by



Catherine Bowen, Secretary