

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
April 27, 2021

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Andrea Prestwich
Mr. Jamal Saeh
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

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

1.2 Citizen's Concerns

Elshad Kasumov – Asked about indoor snack time and the checkerboard pattern.

Charlie Conroy – Asked that class size numbers be reported to include the class size before the teacher reduction and after the reduction.

Heather Rubeski – Asked if the Chair or Committee will continue to answer questions that are submitted via Google Form.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

1.4 Chair's Report

Members of the School Committee had an opportunity today to tour and see the progress with the new Middle and High School Building.

Many students in Middle and High School will be returning to full in-person this week.

On May 4, the First Church of Belmont Social Action Committee with the Belmont Human Rights Commission, Belmont Against Racism and LGBTQ Committee sponsoring community talk.

Chair Checkoway answered various questions previously submitted from a former member of Chenery Hybrid Advisory Committee.

Google form questions will continue to be answered. There were no recent submissions but two older questions not previously addressed were new state dyslexia guidelines and when School Committee meetings will return to in person.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

The second Superintendent's coffee hour will be Thursday morning. Going forward, the time of day will change to accommodate all community schedules.

The Superintendent met with the Health Department and BPS Director of Nursing Rumley to go over community questions:

Pooled testing – The district will continue with pooled testing and hope to increase amount of students taking part in program.

Mask wearing – There are no changes in the current mask protocol.

Snack time precautions – New protocols have been set up in the schools prior to April break. There will be snack time outside and no inside snacks unless it can be done at 6 feet apart. With inclement weather, snacks will allowed in tents when available. When none of these options are available, students will go without snack.

Cleaning protocols- This is not a high priority and will be reviewed with facilities director

Contact tracing/Quarantining - DESE guidance received two business days ago changed to 3 feet marker.

Superintendent Phelan will meet with Health Department to review the new guidance.

2. MAJOR BUSINESS

2.1 Eagle Scout Project Proposal (Vote)

Superintendent Phelan reported on a recent project proposal from Eagle Scout Alexander Wong. Mr. Wong originally approached the Select Board with a project to add an information kiosk at Clay Pit Pond. After reviewing the proposed kiosk location, the Board believes the property is under the purview of the School Committee. The Conservation Commission envisions an educational component to the kiosk to support research for the High School AP Biology class. The Veterans group has expressed an interest in posting on a second face of the Board, to raise public awareness of Belmont's military connections and contributions. The third face of the kiosk will likely be filled by the Conservation Commission with initial information on the recently revived Ruth Ippen Tree Walk, located on the south side of the pond.

Superintendent Phelan supports the proposal.

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Andrea Prestwich, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (6-0-0) to approve the Eagle Scout project proposed by Alexander Wong for a kiosk at Clay Pit Pond.

An adjustment to the agenda was made to accommodate outside presenters. Agenda item FY22 Budget Update before BWC-SEL Survey Data Presentation.

2.2 FY22 Budget Update

Superintendent Phelan reviewed the non-contingent FY22 budget and Federal Fund Utilization (*SC Public Document: FY22 Non-Contingent Budget and Federal Fund Utilization Presentation April 27, 2021*).

Based on a "no" override vote the district agreed to reduce their budget by \$2.07M. The presented budget has no additional positions for next year in amount of \$870,500, reductions in existing staff of \$634,740, reductions in athletics, music, co- and extra- curriculars of \$418,800, and reductions of \$145,960 in supplies, texts, materials.

Superintendent Phelan next gave details of \$418,000 plus in proposed reductions to athletics, visual and performing arts and revolving accounts that were based on recommendations from the respective directors. Listed items are in excess of the needed cuts to allow for flexibility. More specific reductions will be presented at next week's School Committee meeting/public forum.

Staffing Reductions will include four (4) rounds of reductions: 1. non-renewals due to performance 2. reductions based on COVID related changes hired for one year only (46 educators; 22 of these will be returning to their pre-COVID positions) 3. Long and short term assignments that were hired for one year only 4. Reductions based on non-contingent budget scenario.

The administration noted if funds are received via Federal grants, the district will use those dollars where the need is greater, as in middle and high school teachers. Some Committee members voiced their desire to support the core curriculum over extra-curriculars, while others emphasized the value extra-curriculars play in SEL and the college process. There was a request for more data to indicate the level of student involvement in extra-curriculars.

Superintendent Phelan presented three scenarios for Federal fund utilization to cover items listed in the district COVID “parking lot” (mandated remote only services, nurse support, mental health/SEL recovery, COVID testing, PPE, tents/equipment). He stated current funding variables include the exact amount of state aid, unknown limits and uses of Federal aid to the Town of Belmont/Public Schools (American Rescue Plan), and the allocation of ESSER II and III funds for anticipated COVID related costs not included in FY22 operating budget. Additionally, the district still awaits guidance and concrete mandates from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Under Scenario 1, the COVID parking identifies potential needs of up to \$3.8M to fund summer school K-12, hire social workers, purchase mitigation materials including tents, and fund remote only school if it is required by DESE. Scenario 2 uses an anticipated \$1.4 million in ESSER II and III funds- to cover some COVID parking lot needs and retain or “add back” 3 high school positions, 3 middle school positions and 3 District Wide special education positions, thereby keeping reductions to elementary positions, supplies and materials, clubs, athletics, and administrative costs. Scenario 3 also uses American Rescue Plan funds to pay for COVID parking lot priority items, restore current employee reductions, restore projected positions. The School Department and School Committee would work with the Select Board and Warrant Committee to determine appropriation of those funds per the Plan’s specifications.

School Committee members discussed the budget scenarios, questioning whether the district can use Federal funds creatively for one time use for ongoing needs. Other topics discussed included raising fees to avoid staff reductions, and the necessity of continuing with the one-to-one technology program. Looking ahead to the community forum, the School Committee requested another budget option with no staff reductions. Assistant Superintendent Darias reminded the group that this year, the overall hiring process is late. The presented scenarios do not include staff retiring, or resigning; therefore, some position cuts will not affect existing staff.

2.3 BWC-SEL Survey Data Presentation

Assistant Superintendent Darias introduced Lisa Gibalerio, Ann Wang and Sofia Suarez-F with Wayside Youth and Family Network who conducted a student survey with Belmont Wellness Coalition. The group presented the results of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) survey, which was given to understand how the pandemic was impacting students at Belmont Middle and High schools. Approximately seven hundred (700) students from the middle and high schools responded to the survey. Overall students felt safe but felt stressed.

Based on the data that was received and analyzed by the Belmont Wellness Coalition, the highest student stressors were school demands and expectations (assignments/homework) and worrying about the future (college, career) with stress not so much COVID related. When asked about suggestions to improve mental health and wellness, students responded to give more social time in school and more focus on mental health. Assistant Superintendent Darias noted that ninth graders felt less connected than other grades and the most overwhelming stress and theorized that coming into a new school in a virtual format this year may have been a contributing factor. With Committee member Saeh’s question of how the administration should interpret 56% of students are feeling bored, Ms. Darias highlighted the need to come back to the district’s visioning work, project based learning, and inter-disciplinary models. For academic recovery, the High School will offer project-based learning experiences this summer especially to ninth graders. Superintendent Phelan reminded everyone that the new Middle and High School building was planned for such visioning work and project-based learning and the curriculum has been shifting towards this work with the Capstone Program option to the senior thesis. He indicated the district’s work with Wayside Youth and Family Network and the Belmont Wellness Coalition will continue.

2.4 Subcommittee Assignments

Chair Checkoway shared a spreadsheet of the School Committee assignments for existing and a newly proposed Community Engagement subcommittee. After the document was reviewed, committee members discussed concern with the increased number of subcommittees/groups and whether some were redundant. Committee member Bowen suggested the new School Committee members may want to take the Massachusetts Association of School Committee courses and the existing School Committee members may want to complete self-evaluations at end of year before changing subcommittee roles. The group decided to keep subcommittees as is and will review new proposals at a future meeting.

2.5 Policy 8006/8007 Reading #2 (Vote) – postponed to a future meeting

2.6 Community Path Letter

A letter of support for the Belmont Community Path project was drafted by the School Committee and will be sent to the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization. Superintendent Phelan voiced his support of the letter and project.

On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Mike Crowley, the School Committee voted (5-0-1) to allow the Chair to make any non-substantive changes to the letter, sign and submit the letter of support to the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Prestwich - abstain

3. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

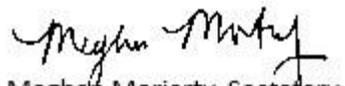
- 4.1 Finance Subcommittee- Joint meeting with Warrant Education subcommittee on April 27
- 4.2 Policy Subcommittee-
- 4.3 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee -
- 4.4 Capital Budget Committee meeting –
- 4.5 Warrant Committee –
- 4.6 Belmont High School Building Committee-
- 4.7 Community Path-
- 4.8 Financial Task Force II-
- 4.9 Rink Working Group
- 4.10 EDCO-
- 4.11 Long Term Capital Planning Committee-
- 4.12 Equity Subcommittee- no report
- 4.13 Structural Change Impact Committee-

4. OTHER BUSINESS

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

5. ADJOURNED

On a motion offered by Mike and seconded by Andrea Prestwich, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:49 p.m.


Meghan Moriarty, Secretary

Respectfully Submitted by: