

## BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

### REMOTE MEETING

August 10, 2021

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: September 24, 2021  
TIME: 10:39 AM

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair  
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary  
Ms. Andrea Prestwich  
Mr. Michael Crowley  
Mr. Jamal Saeh  
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

Absent: Ms. Kate Bowen

#### 1. OPENING BUSINESS

##### 1.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

##### 1.2 Citizen's Concerns -

*Mary Lewis* – Voiced concerns on a number of items: screen time for students in classrooms; student access to websites; default timing for student work submitted via Google classroom (11:59 pm); over reliance on computer-based homework.

##### 1.2 Adjustments to the Agenda

##### 1.3 Chair's Report

Chair Checkoway shared upcoming community meetings: August 17 –public meeting with BMHSBC and Select Board regarding Concord Avenue street design, construction, and High School traffic; August 18 – Public Forum regarding American Rescue Plan with Warrant Committee, Select Board and School Committee. Chair Checkoway confirmed Meg Moriarty will be the School Committee representative on the Ice-Skating Rink Finance Group and the School Committee annual retreat will be September 14. At one of the September meetings, the SC will summarize the Superintendent Evaluation along with setting Superintendent goals for the 2021-2022 school year.

Chair Checkoway read two questions that were submitted to the School Committee via the Google form. These questions were not immediately addressed by the Chair. The Chair will follow up with the community member if the questions are not addressed during the meeting.

*Christine McLaughlin* – If DESE does not require masking will the School Department follow their guidance or adhere to the Belmont mask mandates?

*Christine McLaughlin*- In a recent communication from Principal Taylor regarding no student parking onsite at the High School, was her referring to the first day of school only or all year?

## 1.4 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan reported that Phase I of the Belmont Middle and High School will be completed on time to welcome students in September. Phase II will begin immediately after with the demolition of the old building and the completion of the Grade 7/8 wing by September 2023. Student tours will occur on September 7. The BPS staff's first day back is September 8 and all students will return on September 9.

The administration completed the third round of elementary registration and placements. Current enrollment numbers (fully enrolled) are as follows: K=287, Gr1=280, Gr2=334, Gr3=347, Gr4=335. Partially enrolled students number 30-40. Middle and high school registration numbers will be presented in September.

### 2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS – none

### 3. MAJOR BUSINESS

#### 3.1 Back to School Health/Safety Protocol Plan (Vote)

Superintendent Phelan thanked Board of Health member Dr. Adrienne Allen, for joining the meeting along with Health Department Director Wesley Chin, and BPS Director of Nursing Marybeth Rumley.

He stated the School Committee objectives are to open school safely and to keep school open and minimize disruptions to teaching and learning. To achieve these objectives, the latest guidelines and requirements from federal, state, and local agencies and associations (CDC, AAP, DPH, DESE) have been reviewed. This guidance must be measured against the July 30 DESE expectations for the upcoming school year, which include a return to in-person 5 days a week, maximizing distancing to the extent possible in classrooms, a move towards more traditional lunch conditions, and a requirement for full masking on buses and in the school health clinic.

Superintendent Phelan also noted local guidance from the Belmont Board of Health "strongly recommend the SC use universal masking for staff and students" and from the Belmont Select Board "face coverings are required for all individuals aged two years and above in all indoor public spaces."

Superintendent Phelan stated the district will continue with mitigation strategies to minimize disruptions to the 2021-2022 school year based on Health Team recommendations.

Director of Nursing Beth Rumley indicated she is concerned about the workload and time required to implement the test and stay program. Director Rumley will listen in on the DESE webinar tomorrow regarding testing.

Chair Checkoway introduced Dr. Adrienne Allen of the Board of Health who offered her thoughts with the understanding that COVID is constantly changing and not everything is known about the virus. The Board of Health voted an indoor mask mandate to mitigate the spread of the disease. She indicated the mandate included schools.

The Chair announced her goals for the following masking discussion: 1. provide a plan to families and staff for the start of the school year; 2. amend the current SC masking policy to reflect current state; 3. discuss gaps in existing town-wide mandate for school population; 4. acknowledge who has authority to mandate masks in the Belmont Public Schools.

Each School Committee member offered his or her view. There was agreement among members with respect to beginning the school year requiring masks for K-12. SC members voiced the need to re-

evaluate the situation over time. Some members were hesitant about waiving masks at the High School based on the sunset clause in the BOH mandate for the town and would like BOH recommendations.

Chair Checkoway took questions and comments from the community. *Note: These meeting minutes may include statements by members of the public. Although the School Committee tries to reproduce these statements faithfully, the School Committee does not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed in these statements and cannot guarantee that the information contained in these statements is accurate.*

*Mary Lewis – Thanked the School Committee/Administrators for differentiating students in Chenery Middle School from the High School. She is concerned about lifting a masking mandate after one month.*

*Jin Xu- Questioned whether masks are doing harm to young children with breathing difficulties.*

*Danielle Lemack- Stated that masking and distancing is having negative impact on children and asked the SC to mandate vaccinations when possible.*

*Jeff Liberty- Voiced his support for “making a decision” and revisiting that decision later. He would like the SC to defer to the Board of Health and encouraged Town governing bodies to communicate together as to how mandates will be enforced.*

*Elshad Kasumov- Shared his opinion that vaccines are excellent, but do not prevent the spread of the virus and encouraged the SC to continue with additional layers of mitigation.*

*Mariola Magovcevic- Stated her support for mask mandates and asked whether the children should keep 6’ distancing during lunch.*

*Larry Schmidt- Asked that the SC consider the difficulty of hearing when masks are being used. He encouraged the SC to look at the MIT masking policy allowing teachers and students to unmask temporarily when speaking or asking questions.*

*Stephanie Buckler- Voiced support for universal masking with no clauses of relaxing mandates. She would like to hear more about logistics for lunchtime.*

*Didier Moise- Would like mask mandate for all schools and asked if teachers could be surveyed on their vaccination status. He is concerned about adults interacting with kids who are not vaccinated.*

*Sandi Clement McKinley- Would like the district to require teachers and staff be vaccinated. She is surprised the SD is still waiting for legal opinion on this subject.*

Chair Checkoway presented the existing School Committee policy on face coverings (5005A). The School Committee engaged in further discussion regarding the wording of a motion to be put forward for a vote. In response to a question from a SC member, Director of Nursing Rumley confirmed the District’s capacity to distinguish which students are or are not vaccinated is limited. The SC agreed to revisit the wording of the current mask policy and make any necessary changes at an upcoming meeting. Chair Checkoway will reach out to the Chair of the BOH to set up a meeting to discuss strategies to increase vaccination rates.

Superintendent Phelan suggested the School Committee make a motion that SC accepts the mask mandate by the Board of Health and ask that the BOH review the policy’s sunset clause with schools in mind at their next meeting.

**On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED on a roll call vote (4-0-1) to accept the universal mask mandate recommended by the Board of Health for the school district for the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, and will revisit the mask policy and discuss strategies to increase vaccination rates with the BOH by the end of September 2021.**

Crowley-aye, Moriarty-aye, Prestwich –abstain due to technical difficulties, Saeh-aye, Checkoway-aye  
Upon her return from technical difficulties, member Prestwich voiced her support of the motion.

The group broke for recess and will resume at 10:12 pm

### 3.2 Federal Funds Update

Superintendent Phelan offered an update to the FY22 Federal ESSER II, III Budget Proposal (SC Document: FY22\_ESSER\_FEDERAL\_Funds\_SC\_Meeting\_08\_10\_21.pdf) from the June 29, 2021 School Committee Finance Subcommittee meeting.

The amount of federal funding to be received is \$456,001 from ESSER II and \$1,001,654 from ESSER III. The funds will be used for two areas of need: 1. to support students academically and from a mental health perspective; 2. COVID needs in the upcoming year. To date, the use of American Rescue Plan funding is still being determined by the Town. The strategy is to expend \$700K from ESSER II, III grants and \$700K from ARP funds in year one and the same amounts in year two, while being flexible with the needs of the Town and free cash figures.

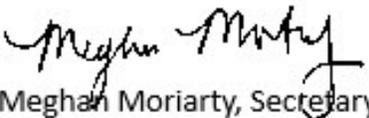
Superintendent Phelan reviewed the potential needs of the district (COVID parking lot) which included tents, vaccination/ testing costs, PPE, filters, cleaning, home and hospital learning services, technology integration specialists, and RTI para-professionals for Math /English. Specific positions to be hired with ESSER II and III grant funds were presented ranging from summer academic recovery to building substitutes. Many of the positions indicated on the document are in process for hiring and others (approximately \$300K worth) are held back until the administration meets with the Town on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The School Department will continue to collaborate with the Town.

## 6. ADJOURNED

**On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Meg Moriarty, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (5-0-0) to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

  
Meghan Moriarty, Secretary