

## BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING  
NOVEMBER 23, 2021

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: January 5, 2022  
TIME: 2:39 PM

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair  
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary  
Ms. Kate Bowen  
Mr. Ralph Jones  
Mr. Jamal Saeh  
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

Absent: Mr. Michael Crowley

### 1. OPENING BUSINESS

#### 1.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm and welcomed new SC member Ralph Jones to the meeting along with the Student Advisors to the School Committee.

#### 1.2 Citizens' Concerns

*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.*

*Heather Rubeski – Appreciated the Friday email communications reminding families about upcoming School Committee meetings and suggested the district continue the practice.*

#### 1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

- Postponed item 3.7 – Vote on Superintendent Goals.
- Due to the amount of content this evening, community comments will be taken after all major business items.

#### 1.4 Chair's Report

Chair Checkoway did not have a formal report but was looking forward to the night's discussion and future discussions about strategic budget planning with a focus on student needs.

#### 1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan provided a health update (*SC Doc: Superintendent\_Update\_SC\_11-23-21*). The Test and Stay process will switch to an at home process for elementary students after Thanksgiving. He thanked the Belmont Health Department for hosting a vaccination clinic for the 5-11 age group. Initial 5-11 year old vaccination rates were presented:

Grade K	52.5%
Grade 1	49.3%
Grade 2	48.5%
Grade 3	52.8%

Grade 4            56.6%

- Burbank and Butler Principal finalists have been interviewed by community and staff and offers will be made to the preferred candidates on November 24 (tomorrow).
- Installation of the Chenery Solar panels started thanks to the Facilities Department and Belmont Light.
- The new HS auditorium will host its first concert on December 2 with the HS Band alongside the Boston Brass.
- Superintendent Phelan also reported on happenings at the elementary schools, including fun runs and library readings.

#### 1.6      Student Advisory Council Report

Chair Checkoway welcomed the new student advisors to the School Committee who introduced themselves: Angela Kim (Grade 11), Xuetao Wu (Grade 11), Kendall Higgins (Grade 11), and Duncan Beecroft (Grade12)

Angela Kim reported on the new high school space indicating it is much brighter and promotes community building and collaborative teaching/learning. Xuetao Wu reported that extra-curricular clubs have increased this year to over 100 and thanked teachers for giving of their time and the use of their classrooms. Kendall Higgins covered the Performing Arts Company (PAC), which is back after a 2-year break due to COVID. Two recent performances have gone very well and the group was able to use the Black Box Theatre. Duncan Beecroft spoke on recent homecoming event, which was held on November 13 in the high school cafeteria.

## **2.      UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### 2.1      No unfinished business

## **3.      MAJOR BUSINESS**

### 3.1      Fall Athletic Season Update

Superintendent Phelan introduced the Interim Athletic Director Adam Pritchard, who gave a summary of the fall sports season. Pritchard stated the annual Pep Rally is back and will take place on Harris Field tomorrow morning in preparation for the Thanksgiving football game. It was reported that 404 student athletes along with 33 coaches took part in the fall season with the following athletic teams: cross-country (boys and girls), soccer (boys and girls), cheer, football, field hockey, swimming (girls), golf and volleyball.

As part of the Middlesex League, Pritchard reported Belmont High School had more teams and athletes than any of their counterparts, with ten varsity teams, five junior varsity teams, five freshman teams and the return of middle school cross-country team. He gave a recap of the fall teams along with their All Stars. Mr. Pritchard mentioned the High School Principal Taylor, Assistant Noreen Dugan, and the coaching staff were pivotal in helping with athletic season logistics.

School Committee members asked questions regarding student participation and team offerings.

### 3.2      Chenery Middle School Update

Superintendent Phelan introduced Middle School Principal Karla Koza, who offered an overview of what is happening at the middle school in general, and an introduction to new learning systems for Chenery: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Koza reported each day begins

with intention – a meditation moment and “Marvelous Moments at Chenery”. The focus is on building connections through service and SEL, supporting staff, and building relationships.

During the 2021-22 school year, Chenery staff will focus on implementing MTSS with universal screening, teacher referral process, consult and team meeting student reviews, upper school and lower school MTSS teams, and will begin growing capacity around MTSS and Universal Design for Learning. Chenery will practice MTSS referral and analysis in 2022 and refine the system as needed.

Principal Koza stressed that community and connections have been a focal point this fall. The Chenery administration has utilized community days, school council (parent and student reps), student council quarterly meetings with principal, and PTO opportunities (enrichment staff support, coffees, meet and greets) to connect.

The School Committee members were pleased that Chenery was moving to UDL and MTSS and asked what the school needs to implement the process. Principal Koza clarified that this process begins at the elementary level and indicated it is a 3-5 year implementation plan and adjustments may be needed along the way. Assistant Superintendent Darias highlighted the need for funding to hire a universal screener (math, reading, and behavioral assessments) at CMS.

### 3.3 FY22 Budget Update

Superintendent Phelan gave an update to the FY22 Budget to inform the community of the current status and needs. At the last Finance Subcommittee meeting (November 17), building Principals presented a list of needs to help principals and educators in schools. The administration will provide data requested by the FSC and the corresponding costs at the next Finance Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday, November 30. Mr. Phelan encouraged all to attend.

### 3.4 FY23 Budget Strategic Planning

The district is working on a three-year budget to focus on student needs and enrollment. Community feedback via future community forums will be used to inform the budgeting work. The district will strive to align the budget to meet the identified needs, while taking the current fiscal reality and challenges into consideration. Proposed dates for the forums are December 14, 2021 and January 4, 2022.

A draft Overarching Goal for teaching and learning was presented. Superintendent Phelan then presented seven students needs along with possible solutions that may be the basis of the community conversations and subject to change. The presentation finished with a look at the multi-year position plan, taking into consideration federal funding and free cash amounts that have filled the staff gap in BPS and the Town. It is anticipated that \$3M will be needed to support COVID issues during FY22, FY23.

School Committee members gave their thoughts on the budget process and discussed if a detailed draft should be presented first or if community input should begin the process with details incorporated later. The Finance Subcommittee will be used to provide general a structure.

### 3.5 Equity Audit Special Education Component

Superintendent Phelan introduced Ken Kramer, Director of Student Services and Jonathan Libby, Assistant Director of Student Services who reported on Special Education Disproportionality (*SC Document: Sped\_Disproportionality\_Presentation\_SC\_Nov\_23\_2021.pdf*). The district is working towards educational equity, as part of the larger initiative from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. IDEA requires states to have calculations for significant discrepancies, disproportionate representation and

significant disproportionality in identification, placement and discipline. Mr. Kramer explained the equity calculations in detail. Last year, BPS was sighted by DESE for over identifying black and brown students as Specific Learning Disabilities. In the 2019-2020, Belmont had identified 120 students (out of 4794 students) with SLD. 15 of these students were Black/African American (out of 152 total Black/African American students). Mr. Libby reported on the district's response plan to the citation. Student Services Department conducted an analysis of the SLD reporting with a Disproportionality Workgroup led by Jonathan Libby.

The following steps have been taken to address the citation:

- consulted with DESE and professional learning community;
- conducted a root cause analysis and a SWOT analysis;
- attended a virtual conference in April 201;
- reviewed policies and procedures to comply with IDEA;
- reviewed SPED procedural guidelines and manual for recommendations;
- developed mandated action plan which was approved by DESE in June 2021.

This plan included a revision to IDEA Budget with 15% of IDEA grant reallocated to address disproportionality by hiring an elementary special education team chair. The plan also led to evaluate and further develop general education MTSS. DESE informed BPS in October 2021, they were no longer cited for significant disproportionality based on data from the 2020-2021 school year.

School Committee members asked questions around BPS historic record pertaining to DESE citations and voiced their support of special education team chairs that were recently hired. Mr. Libby reported that many districts were cited but for varying reasons and is encouraged by the move to MTSS.

Chair Checkoway stepped aside at 8:57 pm and returned at 9:25 pm.

### 3.6 Equity Audit update

Superintendent Phelan introduced Equity Auditors, Elizabeth Borneman and Belicia Smith, who reported on findings of the recent equity audit of the SPED Procedural manual and policies. (*SC Document: [SPED Manual Audit Presentation 11 23.pdf](#)*) The purpose of the audit was to identify biases and inequities in the manual, provide recommendations for more equitable policy language, determine and analyze whether the manual aligns with Equitable Mindsets, Practices and Consequences framework and make recommendations for improvement.

The auditors reported on four major findings: 1. overall equity language and goals, 2. parental role and participation, 3. Team members, meetings, and decisions, 4. documentation and data.

Major recommendations to the district:

- Ensure the most appropriate persons are assigned to students' Teams
- Consider the family experiences and reflect that in the language/goals
- Make data involving "eligibility and historical review" proceedings readily exchangeable between school teachers and Special Education Department;
- Organize documents so that SPED staff may locate them easily.

The overall equity audit is ongoing with surveys, focus groups and leadership meetings. The final report will be shared in January.

School Committee members commented and asked questions of the auditors' process. Borneman confirmed the special education charge was to audit the manual itself. Due to the timing of the audit, some documents were not readily available as teachers were not available in the summer. Student

confidentiality was another factor with document access. Mr. Kramer reminded the group that analysis of the procedures shows a blending of DESE mandates/timelines with audit findings and recommendations.

Member Jones voiced the need to support transportation and other needs of METCO and encourage parental engagement. Member Saeh asked for clarification of “properly vetted” team chair and the roadblocks to sharing documents/information with the auditors. Superintendent Phelan thanked the auditors for reporting on this one part of the audit and reminded the SC that more artifacts have been sent for review and will look at different topics like scheduling, program of studies.

Chair Checkoway took comments and questions from the community.

*Ye Zhang Pogue- Asked how students were selected for the interviews and what questions were included in the survey.*

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

#### **5. OTHER BUSINESS**

##### 5.1 Consent Agenda – Donation from YDRC program

**On a motion offered by Meg Moriarty and seconded by Ralph Jones, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (5-0-0) to accept the donation of \$100 to Belmont High School.**

##### 5.2 Personnel Items

##### 5.3 Business Items

##### 5.4 Approval of Minutes

- School Committee Minutes of July 2, 2021
- Joint School Committee/Select Board/Warrant Committee/Capital Budget Committee minutes of August 18, 2021

**On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED (4-0-1) on a roll call vote to accept the SC minutes of July 2, 2021.** Jones abstained

**On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED (3-0-2) on a roll call vote to accept the SC, SB, WC, CBC minutes of August 18, 2021.** Jones and Bowen abstained

#### **6. ADJOURN**

**On a motion offered by Jamal and seconded by Kate, it was VOTED unanimously (5-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 10:06 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

  
Meghan Moriarty, Secretary