

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**REMOTE MEETING**  
**April 12, 2022**

**RECEIVED**  
**TOWN CLERK**  
**BELMONT, MA**

DATE: May 9, 2022  
TIME: 9:05 AM

Present: Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Chair  
Ms. Amy Checkoway, Secretary  
Ms. Kate Bowen  
Mr. Michael Crowley  
Mr. Jeffrey Liberty  
Mr. Jamal Saeh  
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations  
  
Mr. Xuetao Wu, Student Advisor

Per School Committee Policy, the first meeting following the annual town election is an organizational meeting where a new Chair and Secretary are elected. The most senior member of the SC present shall preside as Chairperson Pro Tempore.

1. ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

1.1 Call to Order

Senior School Committee member Kate Bowen called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

1.2 Nomination/Election of Chair

Ms. Bowen asked for nominations for School Committee Chair. Member Crowley nominated Meg Moriarty for Chair. Ms. Moriarty accepted the nomination.

**On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) to elect Meghan Moriarty as School Committee Chair.**

1.3 Nomination/Election of Secretary

Ms. Bowen asked for a nomination to elect School Committee Secretary. Jamal Saeh nominated Amy Checkoway for Secretary and Ms Checkoway accepted the nomination.

**On a motion offered by Jamal Saeh and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) to elect Amy Checkoway as School Committee Secretary.**

**On a motion offered by Jeff Liberty and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was voted unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the Organizational Meeting.**

2. OPENING BUSINESS

2.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Meghan Moriarty called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm and offered to work together with Administration to improve upon our education system, as there are areas that we agree need to be improved such as equity, math outcomes, and student mental health and social and emotional well-being. In doing so, we also need to prioritize our relationships with the community.

## 2.2 Citizen's Concerns

Colleen Cassidy – Indicated there are other individuals from the Belmont Education Association present to read a letter.

Marc Lefebvre – Read part one of a letter on behalf of the Belmont Education Association in regards to negotiations.

John Bracey – Read part two of a letter on behalf of the Belmont Education Association in regards to negotiations.

2.3 Adjustments - Rink Update will be moved to a future meeting.

## 2.4 Chair's Report

Chair Moriarty does not have a report, and thanked DEI chair Chon'tel Washington for reviewing DEI-related professional development information and will report back to the SC with options.

## 2.5 Superintendent's Report

- Boys Ice Hockey team Middlesex League champions MIAA Division I quarterfinalists Captains Joseph Gaziano, Cam Fici and Peter Grace were present. Student athlete Grace thanked the community for their support throughout the season.
- The Belmont High Cheerleading squad also went far in their season and will come to the SC later in April.
- The Unified Basketball Team presents anew opportunity for LABBB student athletes to play with 6 BHS Basketball team students.
- The purpose, members, and next steps for the Equity Action Planning Steering Committee were reviewed.

## 3. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

### 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

#### 4.1 Approval of Minutes

- School Committee Meeting of March 23, 2022

**On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Mike Crowley , it was voted (5-0-1) to approve the School Committee minutes of March 23, 2022 (Liberty abstaining).**

- Finance Subcommittee Meeting Joint with School Committee of March 29, 2022
- Finance Subcommittee Meeting Joint with Warrant Subcommittee for Education of April 6, 2022

**On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was voted (3-0-0) to approve the Finance Subcommittee Joint Minutes of March 29, 2022 and April 6, 2022.**

## 5. MAJOR BUSINESS

### 5.1 Library Update

Library Trustees Corinne McCue Olmstead and Kathy Keohane provided a Town Library spring update. Ms. Olmstead gave an overview of programs and activities available to student from e-resources, mentoring, community service opportunities, reading programs, and elementary school visits. Next, Ms. Keohane

offered an update on the plan for a new Belmont Public Library. The design includes collaboration and quiet study space as a result of many requests. The current design includes six small rooms and two larger rooms which will be named for the public schools, both past and present.

Chair Moriarty took comments and questions from the School Committee.

Member Crowley asked Ms. Keohane to comment on a Select Board candidate's comment that it might be possible to update the existing library and not build a new building. Ms. Keohane indicated all recent studies recommended a new structure is necessary for economic reasons.

Member Liberty asked about zero net coding with the Library Design. Ms. Keohane indicated a ZNC assessment was done for sustainability.

Member Checkoway expressed appreciation for the rooms being named after Belmont schools and asked for additional details about the library collaboration with student groups.

Superintendent Phelan thanked Ms. Keohane, Ms. Olmstead and Director Struzzieri for their partnership and support of BPS students. All school devices are loaded with library software to access research materials and students are given free library cards.

## 5.2 Math Update

Chair Moriarty explained that the math presentation tonight is specific to the Math Working Group, which will run from May-November 2022. The group's charge is to study best practice in mathematics in order to make recommendations to the School Committee and School Department that will ensure the district effectively meets the needs of all students, and increases readiness and access to advanced learning in math for all students, Kindergarten through 12th grade. Over the summer months, all working group members will read literature/research on best practices, review data from the BPS math program, and consider programs from other districts. Assistant Superintendent Darias outlined the make-up of the group, and the anticipated schedule. Ms. Darias reported that Principal Koza and Director Golden will co-facilitate the working group, with math expert, Dr. Jon Star from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as a resource and support. Next, the member selection process was reviewed, and selection is set to open to the community on April 13. The working group will be represented by the following subgroups:

- Belmont Public Schools math educator(s);
- Parent(s) or caregiver(s) of student(s) from historically underrepresented or underserved groups (specifically, African American, Black, Latin/x/Hispanic or other underrepresented groups);
- Parent(s) or caregiver(s) of student(s) who receives special education support; and
- Parent(s) or caregiver(s) who is/are member(s) of the math group.

Chair Moriarty took comments from the SC members.

Member Crowley appreciated the inclusion of the math/psychology expert for the group and asked if the math parents group would be allowed to choose their own participants.

Superintendent Phelan and some SC members were not in favor of allowing one group to choose their own participants but not others in an effort for all parents to feel equally valued.

Member Liberty asked for clarification about governance and who is establishing the math group.

Superintendent Phelan indicated the group is under the School Department as it is a curriculum topic. Recommendations from the group will be brought to the Superintendent, and Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee.

Member Bowen offered reflection on group constituents and asked if there will be an opportunity to support elementary students through the working group.

Member Liberty asked about the likelihood of teacher participation in the process. Mr. Phelan gave an overview/history of the accelerated math program. Mr. Liberty asked questions regarding teacher suggestions and supporting data. Assistant Superintendent Darias reiterated that the goal is to move the work forward with a focus on equitable learning.

Member Saeh stated he would like to stay focused on the agenda topic of the Working Group and feels some questions are re-adjudicating things that were decided as a committee weeks ago.

Member Checkoway commented that the School Committee and Department should build trust with stakeholders and requested the group regularly report out to the community. Ms. Checkoway also encouraged Superintendent Phelan and Asst. Superintendent Darias to be open to expanding the group or changing composition and/or process, as needed.

Member Saeh asked about the process of choosing Professor Star as the math expert and what cost will be associated with his services. Member Saeh underscored the group is about math in general, and is not a group solely focused on accelerated math.

Member Liberty asked why the middle school does not create more advanced math opportunities. Member Liberty also asked that math data to be reported out to the public.

Chair Moriarty encouraged the School Committee members to stick to agenda-focused specific questions.

Member Checkoway suggested that the selection survey to the community clarify the “other” field.

Member Bowen hopes the group will collect and examine data from many years and not just COVID years. She would like to understand specific mental health data. She would like written information from the working group, not necessarily a presentation.

Chair Moriarty commented on the capacity for looking at students’ mindsets. Other districts have entire departments that collect data, but Belmont’s administrative capacity is slim.

Member Saeh asked that the working group’s documents/materials be posted to the website.

Ms. Darias indicated the documents could be posted to the website for the community, but also wants to ensure co-facilitators have a safe space to share opinions and do the work.

Chair Moriarty took comments from the public.

*Sterling Crockett – Happy to see changes for accelerated math, but did not see anything about students struggling in math in the presentation document. Mr. Crockett asked who is able to help students struggling in math now.*

*Jason Ketola – Commented on math parents group being referred to as “advanced math group parents”. Mr. Ketola voiced that the group includes individuals willing to help all students’ ability.*

### 5.3 Last Day of School 2021-22 (Vote)

Janice Darias reviewed regulations regarding the school calendar and snow days, which traditionally includes five (5) snow days built in to the last day of school calculation. To date, two (2) snow days have

been used. The anticipated last day of school for the 2021-2022 school year is June 22, 2022. If school is canceled for some reason, the additional day(s) would be added on to the end of the year.

**On a motion offered by Jamal Saeh and seconded by Kate Bowen, it was voted unanimously (6-0-0), to set June 22, 2022 as the last day of school for the 2021-2022 school year.**

#### 5.4 Budget Update

Superintendent Phelan gave a brief outline of the current standing in the budget process. In response to concerns about the initial proposed district general fund budget amount from the Select Board and Warrant Committee, the School Department presented updated reductions to the initial budget at a joint meeting of the School Committee, Select Board, Warrant Committee, Capital Budget Committee, and Long-Term Capital Planning Committee on April 11, 2022. (*SC Document: FY23\_Budget\_Changes\_Draft1-Draft2\_4\_11\_2022*). While previous budget discussions were productive, many School Committee members and administrators noted the change in tenor at the April 11 joint meeting. Superintendent Phelan commented on the recent productive channel of communication with the Warrant Education Subcommittee, timely responses to WC questions, and his surprise by the tenor of the April 11 meeting given the recent positive tenor of the joint Finance Subcommittee/Warrant Education Subcommittee meeting on April 6.

The district is committed to reducing targeted budget areas while hoping to request need-based positions and still remain fiscally responsible. Included in these budget scenarios is the hope to add the following positions:

Elementary SpEd Behavior Specialists – 2.0  
CMS Math Specialist 1.0  
CMS ELA Teacher 1.0  
CMS Music Teacher 0.2  
BHS Mental Health Professional 1.0  
BHS Campus Monitor 1.0

The change from the Draft 1 to Draft 2 budget is reported at approximately \$2.3M less with two viable options. The first option would further reduce the General Fund special education (SPED) tuition by \$200K, retain the 6.2 additional positions, and yield reductions of \$2,365,166 from Draft 1 to Draft 2. The second option would reduce the General Fund SPED tuition by \$200K, retain only 3.2 of the additional positions, and yield reductions of \$2,588,166.

School Committee members discussed the joint meeting and budget proposal preferences. Member Checkoway expressed the need to communicate better so town committee members could better understand the school presentation and feel that their questions have been answered. Member Crowley suggested a follow up meeting with the chairs of Warrant Committee, Warrant Subcommittee for Education, School Committee, Finance Subcommittee, and School Administration to determine a way forward and finalize the budget presentation.

Member Saeh felt there might be support across town committees for the Option 2 budget strategy to request an additional 3.2 FTEs as a prioritization of needs and use some combination of ARPA/staff exchange/Chapter 70 funds for the opportunity to hire the remaining needed positions.

Member Crowley supports requesting all 6.2 positions in light of the School Department's recent compromises. Member Crowley would like to see confirmation of the School promised ARPA fund allocation of \$1 million and would like to discuss drawing on unspent Town ARPA funds to support the school department budget.

Member Bowen also supported moving forward with Option 1 and added other concerns with school needs in areas like World Languages, Early Childhood education, and Music/Theater/Arts. Ms. Bowen would like to hear more from the Select Board and Warrant Committee on new sources of revenue in the town.

Member Checkoway highlighted her assumption of having ARPA funds in the amount of \$1M for one more year. Ms. Checkoway would like to go to Town Meeting with a consensus, and prefers advocating for Option 2 (3.2 positions), especially keeping in mind future district expenses with the new 7/8 school.

Member Liberty inquired about what can be done to help build trust from the WC and SB for the School budget process. Mr. Liberty also suggested looking at the core budget more carefully, and touched upon differentiating fiscal responsibility and the use of one time/emergency funds.

Member Saeh thanked the Superintendent for his work on the budget, and Superintendent Phelan in turn reminded the public to review all iterations of budget, which are available on the BPS website on the Budget page and SC Documents page.

Chair Moriarty summarized that the SC appears to be split on a decision about the number of additional positions for the general fund budget presentation. Superintendent Phelan indicated that the SC has time to decide on the path forward and a specific number for Town Meeting, based in part on additional feedback from the upcoming April 26 SC budget hearing.

Chair Moriarty took comments from the public.

*Mariola Magovcevic- Hopes reasonable pay raises for teachers are included in the budget.*

April 26 is the formal district budget hearing and May 10 is the School Committee budget vote.

6. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

7. OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Consent Agenda

- Approval of Surplus Items-Technology April 2022

**On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) to approve the technology items as surplus.**

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Moriarty acknowledged student advisor Xuetao Wu, who thanked the School Committee for the opportunity to hear issues and politics in the town.

**On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:44 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

