

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

FEBRUARY 1, 2022

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: March 9, 2022

TIME: 3:00 PM

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

Student Advisors: Duncan Beecroft, Kendall Higgins, Angela Kim, Xuetao Wu

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm

1.2 Adjustments to the Agenda

BHS Update will come before citizen's concerns due to scheduling conflicts with BHS student presenters.

4. MAJOR BUSINESS

4.1 Belmont High School Highlights

High School Principal, Isaac Taylor along with teachers and students, highlighted many events taking place at BHS this year.

- English teacher, Kim Masterson, began the "5 Minutes Ago" program last year in an attempt to help all students feel connected during the pandemic/quarantine. The program has mended a disconnect between upper and lower classmen. Ms. Masterson, along with students Molly Plunkett and Sergio Castillo explained how students record special video segments incorporating service announcements, sports and art updates, questions of the week and guest presenters. Teachers then play the show during school during a pre-set period. Follow up questions from Mr. Taylor revealed the program takes 45-60 minutes for filming, and editing may take as much as 6 hours.
- Theater Arts Director, Ezra Flam and students Leza, Alden and Katie spoke about Improv theatre. They described the different Improv opportunities, which accommodate various student time commitments and skill sets. During mid-terms, the Improv Ensemble performed for students, and they will host an upcoming show.
- Band Director Alley Lacasse reported on the Friday "play out" as students go home for the weekend. The symphonic band plays fun, pep band type music, which is chosen and learned that same day. Students Lili Rigoulot and Mark Guzelian explained the song choice is always a surprise and the play out is a time for everyone to have fun. The thought was to "play" the student out of the school, but kids stay around to hear the band, making this a great example of a community building experience.
- Teacher Gabby Garschina, Interim Director of Foreign Language Vicky D'Annunzio and student Ana Leham reported on the first Community Day, held January 28, 2022 - a student-led day focusing on developing school culture. Ms. Garschina commented on the collaboration

between staff, students, and administration. With lead speaker Anthony Valentine, the day worked on aligning personal values with creating a diverse building culture. Student leadership played a large role, as indicated by student Ana Lehman. Student leaders had input in the process and activities, which differentiated this day from service opportunities in the past. Ms. D'Annunzio spoke to Mr. Valentine's presentation of personal values and how they play into the community building process. Principal Taylor reported that an intern from Harvard will help analyze all data received from student forms/questionnaires and the data will also be used for the School Improvement Plan.

- President of the Parent, Teacher, Student Organization (PTSO) Rachel Bruno gave an update on the group's activities. PTSO has shifted from traditional tasks of supply textbooks to focusing on student support. The group seeks to spread comfort, stress relief and kindness by providing hot chocolate and comfort dogs during exam weeks and hand lotion during the harsh winter months. They also created a diversity, equity and inclusion subcommittee.

1.3 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.

John Loosman and Theresa Milstein (teachers) read a letter sent to the SC on behalf of the Belmont Educators Association on January 22. In the letter, the BEA invited SC members to visit classrooms and settle a fair contract

Colleen Cassidy, Aaron Ogilvie, Susanne Ackerman, Jenna Judge, Nate Markley, Clare Murphy, Ari Rosenthal – Teachers also in support of the BEA letter, classroom visits and settling fair contract

1.4 Chair's Report

Chair Checkoway made note of the CMS/BHS partnership with McLean Hospital which will host a webinar for parents on mental health challenges - Supporting Students Through Stress webinar, February 3.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Mr. Phelan offered congratulations for those who celebrate Lunar New Year – Year of the Tiger. In the interest of time, the Superintendent did not offer a formal report.

1.6 Student Advisors Report

Student Advisors to the School Committee Duncan Beecroft, Kendall Higgins, Angela Kim, and Xuetao Wu offered their second report of the year.

- Xuetao Wu spoke about recent adjustments to existing mid-term exam policies, which were made to help mitigate student stress-levels. For example, a decrease in the weighted percentage of the final exam and opportunities to receive partial credits.
- Angela Kim offered an overview of the COVID-19 vaccine and booster clinics.
- Kendall Higgins offered a student perspective on the recent Community Day. Anthony Valentine's motivational speech was well received.
- Duncan Beecroft reported on BHS athletics indicating the spectator limit of two parents was recently expanded to include student fans. Beecroft reported the boy's hockey team is doing very well, along with the basketball teams.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- School Committee minutes of January 11, 2022
- School Committee joint with Select Board minutes of January 26, 2022

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was VOTED unanimously, on a roll call vote (6-0-0) to accept the School Committee minutes of January 11, 2022, with edits.

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously, on a roll call vote (6-0-0) to accept the School Committee joint with Select Board minutes of January 26, 2022.

4. MAJOR BUSINESS

Begin Joint Meeting with the Capital Budget Committee

4.2 Capital Budget Discussion

Anne Marie Mahoney called the Capital Budget Committee to order at 7:35 pm
Patricia Brusch, Susan Burgess-Cox, Jenny Fallon, Meg Moriarty (SC liaison), and Rebecca Vose

CBC Chair Mahoney reported on their January 13 meeting with Facilities Director David Blazon to review needed work and requested funds for various school building projects for FY23. CBC is coming to the School Committee for approval of prioritized projects and funding, specifically for a fire alarm system upgrade at Butler Elementary School (\$66K) and a fire alarm and PA system Winn Brook (\$75K)

Other projects were noted, such as Chenery MS roof proposal (FY23 \$100K) for repairs to last 2-3 years and a finance plan for full roof and compressor replacement. The Butler School is in need of masonry repairs, as well as roof and window repairs (\$235K). CBC suggested the SC and SD think about the Butler School use and future needs, as it will require a lot of attention. Butler is the last school to be updated.

School Committee members asked questions regarding prioritized building needs in light of the small amount of discretionary funds (\$1.5M) for all Town projects. Superintendent Phelan indicated the activities revolving account shared between Town and Schools (rental income) could support one of the alarm projects. The account is relatively low because COVID interrupted rental income the last two years. Member Crowley indicated he would not want to pull money out of school operating accounts for repairs and Member Bowen suggested use of MSBA grants and Green Communities programs and a possible review of the facilities revolving budget line by the Finance Subcommittee. The question was raised whether a vote is required to transfer money from the facilities revolving account.

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Meg Moriarty, it was voted unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote, to allow the administration to charge up to \$66K in expenses for the replacement of the Butler Elementary School fire alarm system. (\$127K balance)

Conversation then circled to ARPA funds and MSBA grants for projects. CBC member Brusch cautioned if considering MSBA, the group will need to look at their regulations that do not allow a district to go back to MSBA for same school twice. Member Mahoney will meet with Facilities Director Blazon to confirm the next steps in the fire alarm process.

The Capital Budget Committee adjourned at 8:16 pm

End Joint Meeting with the Capital Budget Committee

4.3 Health Update – 10 Day Isolation Discussion

Superintendent Phelan provided a health update for the community. (SC Document: Health_Updates_SC_2_1_2022) The district is participating in voluntary, weekly take-home antigen test kits for students and staff, and will continue with pooled testing parallel to this program. Tests kits will be distributed the week of February 7. The Health Department is reporting lower daily case counts, BPS attendance rates have gone up from the start of January, and vaccination rates are up, as well.

School Committee members made comments and asked questions.

Member Saeh inquired to the number of students that signed up for the take-home test kits (1009 students, 434 staff) and the recommended use of PCR v. Antigen tests. Member Crowley reiterated he was uncomfortable with the SC policy mandating unvaccinated positive students quarantine for 10 days, as it is an equity issue. He would like to revisit the quarantine policy. Members Moriarty and Bowen would like to wait a little longer to see where vaccination rates go before revisiting the policy. Bowen asked how student extracurricular participation was with the vaccine mandate. Superintendent Phelan reported on the recent vaccination events and nurse outreach to unvaccinated students to confirm choice or access issue.

The Superintendent will report back on the extracurricular vaccine mandate.

The School Committee will monitor COVID cases and vaccination rates. The SC will hold on the current policy and revisit if needed.

4.4 FY23 Budget Update

Superintendent Phelan reported out on the FY23 Budget. (SC Document: *FY23_Budget_Discussion_4_0_2022_Feb_1_SC*) with the goal of differentiating the general funds budget from federal funding. At this time, the FY23 General Fund Budget is \$68,930.22, which is 4.12% over FY22 figures. Superintendent Phelan reviewed budget working assumptions previously reported.

The FY23 budget includes anticipated student needs of 6.2 FTE for the following prioritized positions:
Elementary - 2.0 SPED Behavior Specialist
Middle School - 0.2 Music, 1.0 Math 1.0 ELA
High School – 1.0 Campus Monitor, 1.0 Guidance;

Next, Superintendent Phelan gave a summary of FY22 Positions status for the FY23 budget:
Fractional positions added during 2021-2022 (6.85 FTE student needs) – *included in the FY23 budget*
FY22 positions hired through reallocation GF Budget (13.1 FTE) – *not included in FY23 budget*
Positions funded through ESSER/ARPA - *not included in the FY23 budget*
New Positions anticipated need (6.0FTE) – *included in FY23 budget*

FY23 Rollover Budget (\$68,930,222) with anticipated new positions (\$507K) totals \$69,437,622, which is \$244,541 over the FTF2 suggestion for the FY23 budget. Superintendent Phelan suggested possible funding sources to offset the overage are Chapter 70 and FY22 Medicaid reimbursement.

Chair Checkoway took comments and questions from the School Committee members.

Member Crowley advocated for mental health positions. Member Saeh asked how the district is meeting the needs of students and would like teacher caseload numbers. Member Jones noted the FY23 budget would be largest FTE increase in over 10 years. Member Checkoway asked for a SPED organization chart. Member Bowen asked if the restored Athletic Director responsibilities will include wellness, extracurricular, and nutrition. Member Moriarty encouraged the group to not lose sight of the upcoming opening of the new 7-8 grade school and how it may impact staffing needs, which need to be planned for.

5. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES

Rink Design Committee- Committee Chair Haley met with Superintendent Phelan, SC member Moriarty and Director of Athletics Pritchard on January 28 to discuss programming needs of a new rink.

Structural Change Group- Individual reports are being reviewed for the larger report. The Chair has been asked to present to the SC when it is completed.

BMHSBC-upcoming Building committee meetings on Thursday and Friday. The committee is working on closing a budget gap.

Policy subcommittee – Upcoming meeting Monday, February 7

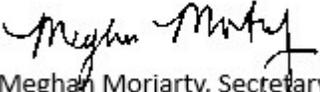
Finance Subcommittee meeting - Tuesday, February 8

6. OTHER BUSINESS - none

7. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Jamal Saeh and seconded by Kate Bowen, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:


Meghan Moriarty, Secretary