

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

AUGUST 9, 2022

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: September 14, 2022
TIME: 2:05 PM

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
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations
Absent: Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Chair Moriarty called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. MAJOR BUSINESS

2.1 Extracurricular Vaccination Mandate

Chair Moriarty opened the meeting with noting last year's changing health circumstances, particularly in terms of COVID, and voicing her appreciation for the SC members' responsive work throughout the year. Superintendent Phelan gave a health update and an overview of the extracurricular vaccination mandate in preparation for the upcoming school year. (*SC Document: Healthupdate_VAX_policy_Presentation_8_9_22*).

The first part of the presentation covered a general health update indicating DESE/DPH will no longer fund pool testing or take home tests for schools. Weekly reporting on positive COVID cases will not be required. Superintendent Phelan stated that BPS will draft a symptom checker, provide take home tests to students/staff who present with symptoms in school, and continue with current CDC guidance of a positive COVID case, which is to isolate for 5 days and wear a mask on days 6-10. A review of the current vaccination status for students grades K-12 was provided. The district will focus on hosting vaccine and booster clinics in conjunction with the Belmont Health Department.

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

Member Liberty asked clarifying questions regarding the vaccination rates and if the district could differentiate between those receiving 2 and 3 shots in the reports. Superintendent Phelan said this information could be provided by the district as follow up. Member Checkoway indicated that the Town Health page shows differentiated numbers (2 vs. 3 shots) and that some test kit expirations have been extended. Member Bowen referenced the Health Department site which includes CDC guidelines.

Member Saeh asked when the SC could receive detailed vaccine information, and what the expectation is with regard to supplying test kits to students/staff generally. Superintendent Phelan replied there would be a cost to the budget if the SC were to supply kits to students/staff. The Health department has free kits available from their office and the Town Library. Member Crowley stated that families should bear the responsibility of obtaining test kits in general, which the Superintendent agreed with. BPS is not testing in school but giving take home kits if students present with symptoms. Mr. Saeh encouraged the

Superintendent to set the expectation to the community of intended test kit distribution. Mr. Phelan confirmed it is up to families to self-test.

Chair Moriarty asked if the district has a supply of high quality masks. Superintendent Phelan indicated there are some leftover from last year and more can be purchased, if necessary. It was stated the district is mask optional except for DESE guidance mandating masks in the nurses' offices. Member Bowen inquired if the district is still maintaining nurse waiting rooms for the long term, and received a response that they will be maintained.

Chair Moriarty suggested the group move to the second part of the presentation, which is specific to Vaccine Mandate and Extracurriculars Policy 5005-B. Superintendent Phelan reviewed the original passage of the policy, which was voted on October 5, 2021 (and put into effect December 1, 2021) and later paused on April 26, 2022. The policy was implemented in fall 2021 during a time of low vaccination rates and less access to vaccines. The Health Team recommends to rescind the extracurricular vaccine mandate policy. There is also a current legal challenge to the policy in Belmont and other towns.

Member Bowen expressed support for suspending the policy with the current high vaccination rates but has a question regarding language: rescind vs. suspend. Chair Moriarty indicated the existing policy language referenced "rescind" and noted it may be confusing to have the policy in the manual if it is not in effect. Bowen prefers not to lose the policy in case it is needed in the future. Member Liberty asked a question regarding the advantages of amending or pausing a policy. Superintendent Phelan indicated the district can rely on MASC for guidance and template language and that there is practically little impact in terms of amending or pausing.

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 suspend Policy 5005-B Vaccination Mandate and Extracurriculars indefinitely.

Member Saeh asked if air exchange filters will be changed before the start of school year. Superintendent Phelan explained that there is a different schedule for each type, and that the facilities department has the schedule and is keeping up with it, and that this will continue this school year.

Member Checkoway expressed that similarly to if additional tests are needed, if additional filter purchases are needed, would like the school department to bring this to the School Committee and that she would support this purchase.

Member Liberty asked if the intention is to communicate to families that they should test at home before school begins. Superintendent Phelan indicated that they are waiting on DESE guidance and will discuss this at the next health team meeting. Liberty encouraged for this communication to happen.

Chair Moriarty requested future meetings via Google Meet be recorded and posted, if possible.

3. 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 6:53 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Amy Checkoway