



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES March 31, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	March 31, 2020
Location:	Webex
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Shannon Erdmann, Chairperson Rachel Fitzgibbon, Vice Chairperson Sarah Wolf Ken Warnock Caroline Weld Ann Cameron Lukas Shan, Student Representative
Absent:	Eric Bourke
Guests:	Patricia Puglisi, MERHS Principal, Joanne Maino, MERMS Principal, John Willis, MS Principal, Jennifer Roberts, EES Principal and Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Erdmann called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
- 1) **Public Comment** – There was no public comment prior to the meeting.

2) Student Report –

Lukas stated he had spoken with several of his classmates and he and his classmates agreed learning is different and they are adapting. Distance learning classes are assigned one day with two days to complete the assignments. He has been interacting with his teachers and he believes the teachers are providing solid direction and he is in a good place with his class work. He believes most students are engaged with the work and are engaging in Zoom meetings. He has participated in Google Hangout with small groups of 4-5 students. He also stated he believes the current workload is appropriate.

Ms. Erdmann asked about how many hours a day he was spending on his assignments? Lukas is spending 1 to 1.5 hours daily. Ms. Cameron asked if the 1 to 1.5 hours included Zoom, Goggle Hangout, and completion of assignments. Lukas stated that was the total amount of time he was spending daily.

Ms. Cameron asked if Lukas had heard from each of his teachers. Lukas replied not all of his teachers offered Office Hours, his math, history, and foreign language teachers were on Zoom and Google Hangout. Ms. Erdmann asked if teachers are available if students have questions? Lukas stated not all teachers were responsive through email.

Principal Puglisi asked to join the discussion and pointed out the number of hours per day a student spent is a consideration of the student's learning style, 10 minutes for one student could easily be 45 minutes for another student. Teachers are posting work every other day. She has heard students feel the work is manageable and at this point it is important for students to not feel frustrated or for teachers to add to the stress students and families are already experiencing.

3) Chairperson's Report – Ms. Erdmann did not have a specific report this evening.

Mr. Boling, Chairman, Manchester Board of Selectmen had a question regarding the use of Memorial School for Manchester's Annual Town Meeting and Elections which will likely be rescheduled for the end of June 2020. Superintendent Beaudoin stated Memorial School will not be available, however the Middle High School will be made available for both Town events on the dates the Town decides to reschedule. The District will make their plans following the Town's decision.

4) Consent Agenda

- Acceptance of Warrants -- None
- Minutes – 3/17/2020
- Approval of Out of State Travel – None

Approval of the Minutes was deferred to the next meeting. There were no other items on the agenda.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Caroline Weld/Ann Cameron) – Report

Ms. Cameron stated the Memorial School Building project is on time and on budget despite Covid-19. Worker safety is a priority, it is important that workers remain safe and healthy. FFE new estimates have come in. FFE is \$13K over original estimates which is a huge savings over initial estimates and a significant accomplishment for the team. Technical estimates are \$9K over and within budget. She would like to commend the team for their efforts addressing the School Building Committee's budget concerns.

Ms. Cameron indicated there is talk about shutdowns, supply issues and work force availability due to Covid-19. In these unprecedented times there may be changes and delays. Superintendent Beaudoin stated as the days go by stress over Covid-19 and impact on the supply chain and equipment is growing. Ms. Erdmann stated the School Building Committee is highly organized and hopefully the supply chain will remain open.

- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – Report

The Finance Committee report will be discussed as part of Continued Business, FY21 Budget Timeline Update.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Rachel Fitzgibbon) – No Report
- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – No Report

6) Superintendent's Report –

- School Closure: School Operations & Online Learning Update

Superintendent Beaudoin ended the week on March 27th by expressing her gratitude to the outstanding faculty for the innovation and creativity that they have shown in order to get MERSD Online up and running. Although we are connecting with our students and families virtually, nothing can take the place of the regular school day. We miss our day-to-day interactions with our students, and we look forward to the time when the campus is alive with energy again. This week we have seen a few new developments that I would like to share with you.

Teaching and Learning

- **Remote Learning:** This week the MA Department of Education issued new guidance for remote learning during the shutdown that includes provisions for special education services. Although MERSD Online already aligns with the majority of the recommendations, we will be thoroughly reviewing the guidance and making any necessary adjustments to our current program. We hope to have revised plans communicated by the end of next week (April 3, 2020) and implemented the week of April 6th. Principals and Directors will be communicating school or department specific changes. In the interim, MERSD Online continues to provide Supplemental and Enrichment Activities to maintain skills and to keep students connected with their school community. The overall goal of our approach is to keep students in contact with the school and to maintain

their skills during the closure. We are not trying to replicate the school day, but we are making our best effort to keep students engaged.

- **MCAS:** MCAS is currently postponed and potentially canceled. The MA Department of Education has applied for a federal waiver, and there is state legislation pending that will give the Commissioner of Education the authority to make the final determination.
- **SAT's & AP Tests:** March/May SAT's have been canceled; however, the June 6th SAT is still scheduled. The College Board is currently targeting administering AP tests during the make-up window, which is the last two weeks of May. There is more information about AP testing expected to be released on April 3rd.

Operations

- The statewide school shutdown has been extended through May 4th. At this time, no decisions have been made with regard to the end of the year student activities.
- The MA Department of Education will issue a determination in the coming week as to whether April vacation should be used for instructional time.
- We will not need to make-up any school days beyond June 23rd.
- All buildings are closed through at least May 4th per the Governor's order.
- Construction at Memorial School continues unless guidance is revised at the state level.

Superintendent Beaudoin defined remote learning as learning not with people present and learning that provides students with a wide variety of experiences based on their learning styles.

To make sure these experiences are positive it is the District's responsibility to insure learning tools comply with confidential student internet privacy laws. The District has sought legal advice to support teachers and protect students in all formats. The District has a legal obligation to assure students and teachers are using appropriate tools. According to Superintendent Beaudoin there are different online rules for students above 13-years old and students below 13. Students below 13 do not have school issued email addresses and all communication must go through a parent's email address with parental permission.

Remote learning schedules do not necessarily follow a virtual school day. Families will develop asynchronous models that meet the individual needs of each home. The goal is for students to connect with one or more educators one or more times a week depending on student's time frames and access to resources.

Ms. Cameron asked about privacy issues. Mr. Warnock noted shared learning pathways must not be compromised. Superintendent Beaudoin is waiting for recommendations from lawyers. The District has contacted both Special Education and Labor attorneys to sign off on the tools the District is using. Google Hangout and Zoom have been utilized by the District and Zoom although there are concerns was on the recommended list of tools. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is not delaying engagement with students because of privacy concerns.

Ms. Cameron asked about professional development and available support for faculty. Dr. Riley responded stating the technical support team is pulling together resources District wide with updates, training, and tutorials for teachers needing support. The team is working to:

- Develop one-page information sheets
- Set up Thursday professional development sessions online
- Provide different District licenses for teachers
- Teachers are logging into planning sessions
- Calling, emailing, and texting technical staff.

Ms. Cameron asked about frequency and quality of student contact with teachers. Principal Roberts responded stating teachers at Essex Elementary copy her on all communication with families which is helpful for her to understand what is going on with each class. She stated some teachers are Zooming morning meetings, another teacher is providing an audio reading for his class and teachers are responding in a variety of creative ways to engage their students. Principal Roberts stated she has received several emails from parents all positive.

Principal Willis stated the lower grade teachers are using Zoom for morning meetings and upper grades are using Google Classroom. He stated parents may not see all exchanges between teachers and students depending on the format used. He stated the goal was to provide virtual-in-person contact and there is an expectation for teachers to email, use prerecorded YouTube videos and hold classroom discussions when possible.

Principal Willis stated everybody is working and teachers say there is ten times the work than in a regular school day. Moving into Phase Two will add structure and increase the time students are engaged to 3 to 3.5 hours. Every staff member is expected to hold office hours for one to two hours daily, to email back and forth and provide students their assignments.

Ms. Weld and Ms. Wolf asked about virtual-in-person contact and what were the expectations around the contacts. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is working to define the virtual piece and how it is defined will depend on the age of the student. Ms. Erdmann stated this is important and some parents are feeling there is not enough contact. Ms. Weld stated the sensory voice connection is important for children.

Principal Maino stated she is overwhelmed with pride in the teachers and the administrative team. Teachers have young children of their own they are home schooling, but they are managing to also engage with the children in their classes and somehow doing it all.

Principal Maino stated the District was ahead of many North Shore schools in developing a program for continuing students' schoolwork. She stated several schools borrowed the MERSD model. She reported that Guidance Counselors will be identifying students who are overachieving and underachieving and reaching out to the students and families. Principal Maino indicated parental feedback was positive.

Ms. Cameron stated she believed teacher contact with students was not consistent from grade level to grade level and asked if there was accountability for teachers in the Middle School.

Principal Maino stated that Middle School students have ten teachers and the teachers are sharing the outreach. Ms. Erdmann asked how the teachers were reaching out Google Classroom, Zoom class meetings and Videos and recommended building more consistency so parents understood what to expect.

Principal Puglisi indicated 85% of District students are engaged she is proud of faculty, students, and families. The kids who are not engaging will be contacted and encouraged to become engaged. Principal Roberts agreed with the Principal Puglisi on the level of engagement stating about 15% of the Essex Elementary students were not engaging. Some families have found the technology challenging and other families were under the impression the Enrichment Phase was optional.

Ms. Erdmann stated we are all trying to figure this out. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the experience was like building a plane while flying it. The objective is to develop a positive experience in a difficult time the works for each unique household.

Ms. Cameron asked about Special Needs students. Principal Beaudoin stated the District is working through the recommendations provided by the Department of Education and plan to develop a workable plan responding to the level of service to accordance to the guidance.

Mr. Warnock stated it was food to hear that local communities were working together he appreciates the cooperative effort. Ms. Cameron stated on behalf of the School Committee that we appreciate and thank everyone we care about all of the District faculty and administrators. We are hearing the parents want more and wanted to share that with you.

Sophia Johansson, 18 Bennet Street – Ms. Johansson thanked Ms. Cameron and Ms. Seamen for their help and support. She stated she had a positive experience working with Dr. Collins and the School Committee and wanted to share information about a new statewide coalition working to support families of developmentally challenged children. The Covid-19 event has presented a challenge to providing a free and appropriate public education for some children. She believes this event sheds light on the situation and presents an opportunity for change. Ms. Wolf has offered to work with Ms. Johansson to support her efforts and inform the School Committee of developments of the coalition.

Amanda asked about the guidelines from the Department of Education and the guidance that one or more educator is to be in touch with students one or more times a week and with that in mind how close to that will the District get. She believes the Middle and High School are along way from that.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated she felt the District was close to the guidance and will follow up on the question with the Principals. Principal Maino stated the new Phase with the referenced guidance goes into practice on April 6, 2020. Amanda stated the District was far from that now. Principal Maino assured Amanda she would see a change and this recommendation is realistic.

Theresa Whitman – asked about the free lunch and its availability to all students. Although her family does not qualify for free lunch, she has been taking her children out in the middle of the

day to pick up lunch and finds it a helpful break for herself and her children she indicated the language focuses on need and some families are not participating. Ms. Cameron stated she was aware the lunches were good, and families were participating in the program. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she would check the language and thanked Ms. Whitman for her feedback.

7) Continued Business

- Essex Elementary Playground Replacement Update

Mr. Warnock stated the Playground Committee anticipates meeting the deadline for design recommendation next week as planned. Mr. Urbas stated it looks like the budget will work with the design. Principal Roberts stated she was impressed with the group led by Jake Foster and how they had worked together in the changing and difficult times to move the project forward.

Ms. Erdmann asked for confirmation that the budget of \$300K not to exceed \$350K will be met. She also asked if the projected square footage of the playground met the needs of the students. Mr. Urbas stated the final design included the structure and surfacing and met both budget and student needs. Additional needs around the site like benches and final landscaping are not included in the final budget figure.

- FY21 Budget Timeline Update

Superintendent Beaudoin had a question regarding the EES Playground and the necessary budget discussion the School Committee needs to engage in moving forward. Ms. Erdmann stated that was a fair question especially if it is necessary for the District to cut the budget to the bone. The School Committee will have additional discussions regarding the EES Playground at their next meeting.

Ms. Erdman stated the District has heard from the Towns and although nothing is concrete budget reductions are likely to be requested. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated the proposed District budget included a sizable increase for FY21. Mr. Urbas stated the increase was just under \$1M.

Superintendent Beaudoin encouraged the School Committee to look at the big picture of finances and the potential need to consider budget reductions in relation to the Towns ability to fund the District budget.

8) School Committee Comment –

- Ms. Erdmann stated the Committee would reconvene next week and acknowledged the many throughout the District who have risen to answer the challenge.

- Mr. Warnock expressed his thanks to everyone including Administrators and Teachers for their adaptability and resilience during these difficult times.
- Ms. Weld recognized parents at home who are working to help their children and support teachers and the District.
- Ms. Wolf thanked all the parents who participated in this evenings meeting.

C. Adjourn

Mr. Warnock moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Wolf seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.