



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES May 5, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	May 5, 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 Eric Bourke Lukas Shan, Student Representative
Absent:	
Guests:	Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology, Patricia Puglisi, Principal MEHS, Jennifer Roberts, Principal EES, Jason Waldron, Facilities Manager and Kampon Representative
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Erdmann called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) **Public Comment** – There was no public comment prior to the meeting.

2) Chairperson's Report

Ms. Erdmann stated there is not much going on during these difficult times. However, the School Committee is about to engage in difficult discussions, the Committee takes these discussions seriously and welcomes your participation at the end of our deliberations. The Committee asks for your understanding and respect during this meeting.

3) Student Report –

Lukas reported there are not many changes in assignments or classes. However, he would like to mention social distancing and isolation. Lukas stated not being able to see or hang out with friends, not experiencing a normal close to the school year, and the possibility of returning to school in the fall has many students struggling.

Lukas stated he feels for Seniors who are finally leaving High School, Juniors who are getting ready to apply for college, Sophomores who are entering their AP classes and Freshman who had their first year interrupted by a global pandemic. It is overwhelming and difficult to take in the situation.

Ms. Erdmann thanked Lukas and stated his comments were astute and mature. She understands high school students do not have the frame of reference adults have who have been through hard times. Students do not have those experiences to draw on. She asked Lukas if his friends are talking about this or are kids isolated. Lukas stated his friends are reaching out, but it is not the same and it is something that you cannot replace.

Ms. Erdmann stated she believes it is harder for kids who are used to instant gratification. Lukas stated he had started a fundraising campaign among his friends for MGH. The group raised enough funds for 400 surgical masks and 100 N95 masks. Ms. Weld told Lukas that was awesome, and Ms. Erdmann asked Lukas to stay on if he would like and to enjoy the sunshine.

4) Consent Agenda

- Acceptance of Warrants –
- Minutes – 3.17.2020 and 3.31.2020

Ms. Cameron moved to accept the Consent Agenda, Ms. Weld seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

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

Ms. Cameron reported on the School Building Committee meeting held last week indicating the subcontractors are back on the job with carpenters and union workers now working under social distancing guidelines. W T Rich is developing a recovery plan there are currently no major scheduling impacts to the project.

Superintendent Beaudoin indicated with schools not reopening demolition of the Memorial School will likely take place earlier than originally scheduled. The District is working with the Board of Health to allow for teachers to enter the building to pack up and move out within the next week. Hopefully by moving up demolition the project will save money to cover costs incurred during the slow down of the past month.

Ms. Erdmann asked how far off schedule the project was indicating construction had been ahead of schedule prior to the pandemic. Ms. Cameron stated W T Rich is confident the project is not going to suffer from the delay and as project managers they own the delivery date and are not asking for any consideration outside of their current agreement.

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

Ms. Erdmann stated the Collaboration Group had held two meetings and the report on the meetings will be discussed during the FY21 Timeline/Shutdown Implications agenda item.

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

The Negotiation Team met with META to discuss Phase III DESE Guidelines and Recommendations and address MERSD implementation of Phase III. Ms. Wolf stated it was an upbeat meeting and excellent collaborative effort. She added parents and the community know the teachers are working hard.

6) Superintendent's Report –

Superintendent Beaudoin expressed her gratitude for how the communities have rallied and supported the changes and challenges over the past weeks. She outlined the end of year planning indicating that with the exception of the Middle School concert and 5th Grade play all activities are going to be held online thanks to the work of the Planning Committee. Kindergarten training and placements along with planning for summer literacy programs will be held virtually. The District will continue to share what information is available and answer questions regarding all class and program activities.

- School Closure: School Operations & Online Learning Update
 - New Guidance, Julie Riley, Director of CIT

Superintendent Beaudoin discussed the results of the check in survey conducted by the District. There were over 406 responses to the survey and each school received and reviewed the messages on how they were doing. Some families indicated they were doing okay and thought the District was doing the best we could.

As the District moves into Phase III the majority of parents thought the online programs were exactly right, 26% thought the programs could be more rigorous and 16% thought the

programming was too much. Regarding communication 60% of parents thought it was exactly right while 19% believed we were over stuffing their inboxes. Parents requested more communication from classroom teachers and an increase in audio visual contact. Parents also requested additional interactions among students.

Overall families believe remote learning is a big challenge but manageable. The District recognizes remote learning is a heavy lift for families. Moving forward the District goals are curriculum delivered in an audio-visual format with synchronous time increased to allow for students to feel more connected.

Dr. Riley's Presentation:

Remote Learning Phase III DESE Guidance MERSD Implementation Focus Areas

Overview of DESE guidance

As we prepare to continue remote learning through the end of the school year, this document:

- Further defines the recommended elements of a quality remote learning program, including a focus on teaching the content standards most critical for student success in the next grade level.
- Encourages districts to move all students towards successful engagement in remote learning, with a focus on addressing fundamental needs.

Districts and schools in Massachusetts have already established structured remote learning models based on their local needs and guidance the DESE released on March 26, 2020.

Instead, the hope is that this guidance can both affirm work already underway and provide some additional ideas and strategies.

We recommend that districts and schools take time to process this guidance and work to enhance their remote programs by early May.

DESE Teaching and Learning Goals

Goal 1: Strengthen the remote learning program for all students.

We recommend that districts and schools focus on the following elements to ensure a strong baseline remote learning program.

Please note, the only area where we are materially modifying our initial recommendations is the focus on covering the prerequisite content standards (#2 below):

1. Prioritize meaningful connections with educators and peers.
2. Provide engaging core instruction focused on the prerequisite content standards that are most critical for student success in the next grade.
3. Offer opportunities for enrichment, exercise, and play.

4. Ensure programming is accessible and secure and communication is streamlined for students and their families.

Addressing Academic Needs

To address academic needs:

- Align to newly released Power Standards for ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies
- Provide regular feedback on student work, identifying multiple positives and one area of growth. Loop back on that area for growth in the next assignment to note progress and celebrate successes, even if small.
- Schedule synchronous and asynchronous gradual release “workshops” to help students navigate remote learning assignments through an “I do, we do, you do” model.
- Teach strategies that help students persevere through a task (e.g., breaking down elements in a task, chunking a complex reading, using color-coded highlighting to navigate important elements in a text or word problem).
- Schedule regular “study halls” for students to complete assignments at the same time while on a group phone call or video conference platform with their teacher.

Goal 2: Prioritize meaningful connections with educators and peers

It is well-documented that meaningful relationships can insulate children from the effects of trauma and serve as a buffer against toxic stress.

Particularly for students who value their relationships with educators and peers at school, maintaining regular connections that provide an opportunity for supportive two-way interaction is critical.

Examples of strategies that facilitate these connections include:

- Start blocks of synchronous (“live”) lessons with “morning meeting” or “opening circle” activities designed to build connection.
- Synchronous weekly advisory group meetings led by an advisory teacher or student leader.
- Regular teacher “office hours” when students can drop in via computer or phone to get help with assignments and/or check in with their teacher.
- Individual calls to students from educators and staff to check on students’ well-being or to review feedback on student work.
- Opt-in, interest-based peer groups, such as a book club, drawing workshop, sing-along group, etc. led by educators, paraprofessionals, or students.
- Counselor-facilitated peer support groups organized around a common need.

Asynchronous vs Synchronous

Prioritize asynchronous (e.g., recorded) lessons for remote learning

We generally recommend that schools and educators deliver instructional lessons for all students in an asynchronous format (e.g., record a video of the lesson as opposed to asking students to tune in at a specific hour to watch it “live”).

Benefits of this approach include:

- Freeing up educator time during the school day to provide synchronous (“live”) support to students who may need extra support.
- Accessibility for all students and families who may have conflicting commitments or responsibilities during the school day.
- Ability for students to watch lessons multiple times as needed while completing assignments, if synchronous (“live”) lessons are preferred based on local needs or preferences, we recommend:
- Offering the lesson in multiple time slots if possible.
- Separately recording and posting the lesson asynchronously (this must be done separately to ensure, no students are recorded).

Schedule of MERSD Technology Trainings (not provided here)

Addressing Social Emotional Needs

To address social emotional needs:

- Run regular virtual social emotional groups where students can connect with peers and support staff (e.g. a counselor, social worker, paraprofessional, aide, etc.)
- Set up phone call buddy system where students are matched up to support each other with academics or to connect.
- Have a teacher or staff member communicate with families (or families and students together who need Tier 2 or 3 support for a quick check in at the beginning of the week to set goals for work completions and engagement. Celebrate student progress toward goals with a call or text at the end of each week.
- Set up an advisory system where each student is assigned to an adult in the school, including ancillary staff beyond core teaching staff to decrease the student-staff ration.

Developing Supports for Disengaged Students

Develop a system for identifying and supporting students not effectively engaged in remote learning.

We recommend that districts and schools:

- Collect information to understand each student’s level of engagement in remote learning.
- Provide supports to further engage all students, with a focus on meeting foundational student needs.

Grading and promotion

We recommended that academic content be graded as “credit/no credit” so as to incentivize continuous learning while acknowledging the challenging situation we face.

Specific high school guidance on grading and graduation will be forthcoming from DESE.

With the extension of remote learning through the end of the school year, we want to expand on this recommendation to encourage districts and schools to promote students to the next grade level, and action supported by research.

Committee Comments

Ms. Erdmann was happy to see the inclusion of exercise and play. It appeared the DESE heard the parents. Ms. Cameron stated short bits of instruction appeared to be most effective. Principal Roberts agreed. Ms. Cameron thanked all the educators for the teaching and planning time they were investing in this new world.

Ms. Cameron asked Dr Riley how teachers are going to know how to teach in September. Dr. Riley stated the District is preparing for Phase IV. There are 800 students whose foundational skills need to be incorporated into a universal assessment. The District will move forward meeting State expectations and students will move forward with varying needs of support and remediation which will be the focus for fall 2020.

Mr. Warnock stated he believed it was awesome to see how teachers have moved forward with remote learning.

Dr. Riley stated the District will be setting up training for parents. Dr. Riley went on to state learning is messy and parents are seeing that at home with scheduling of space and time.

Teachers are posting online from 6:00 a.m. to midnight and that will evolve into a more regular schedule.

Ms. Weld stated it was important for teachers to allow for students to work collaboratively. She stated kids are social beings and believes there is a way for kids to complete their homework together. She would like to see teacher’s give permission for kids to work together more. Principal Puglisi agreed and will speak to teachers about encouraging small group discussions.

- End of Year Planning – Tricia Puglisi, HS Principal

Principal Puglisi stated during these unrepresented times it was challenging planning activities for Seniors. There had been heartbreaking conversations and disagreements over the past weekend during meetings with both parents and students. All of the Cape Ann communities are struggling with these highly emotional times and the loss of graduation events anticipated by students over four years.

Principal Puglisi met with senior class officers and reviewed the results of the senior class survey.

- 73 % of the seniors were in favor of a parade of cars. Parade routes will be worked out with the Towns.
- Virtual baccalaureate ceremony 46% of seniors were in favor and 51% of seniors preferred to hold the event in person.
- The overall preference for authenticity is to hold events at the end of July with social distancing including a cookout, baccalaureate, and graduation ceremonies.
- In June, the field and stage will be set up for seniors and their families to have pictures taken. Picture taking will be staggered over several days.
- The class would like to do something to commemorate their graduation and will remain open and flexible as opening up progresses.

Ms. Erdmann stated it has been a truly bewildering time and she would like Principal Puglisi to thank the class officers, District community and the communities of Essex and Manchester for their support of the senior class.

7) Continued Business

- Budget Updates
 - FY20 Budget – Shutdown Management
 - FY21 Budget – Timeline/Shutdown Implications

Superintendent Beaudoin presented summary information.

FY21 Level Services Budget approved in February in collaboration with both Essex and Manchester.

Impact of Covid-19 crisis – leaves the District in the position to need to go back to the drawing board and try to figure out how to fund the proposed budget.

Towns are looking at their budgets in light of the crisis. Manchester has come to the District and asked for the District to cut \$150K out of our budget to assist them. To cut to the \$150K for Manchester the District due to assessment formulas would need to cut \$235K from the proposed budget.

Other Covid-19 implications to consider not only is the District going to have a local shortfall the State is anticipating cuts to Chapter 70, transportation, and circuit breaker. The District also does not know what will happen to Federal grants Title 1 etc. MA taxpayers' group has called for the delay of funding the Student Opportunity Act. The act would have provided the District with additional funds for transportation and full funding of circuit breaker.

District is now unclear regarding the amount of support from the State. Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas have been on calls and heard predictions of 10% to 16% in cuts. DESE is recommending budgeting for a 10% reduction with the hope that everything will come through.

The District reduction could be \$360K from the State including Federal a total reduction of \$420K.

It is unknown where and when additional funds will be available. CARES Act dollars 80% of Title One would be in addition to Title One. Operational savings from FY20 that will be used to help District get through next year. At some point the District will need a recovery plan.

Options to consider reduction FY21 \$600K to \$700K plus the Town request of \$235K. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she does not have a recommendation at this time we are not far enough along in the process.

The District is currently assuming we are back to school in fall, in the buildings, teaching children. That too is an unknown. Superintendent Beaudoin stated tonight we focus on a budget for normal in person return to school in the fall.

Ms. Weld stated the District and School Committee have been a team players with the Towns and at this time she does not think the District is in a position to make reductions in the budget. Anticipating unknown reductions in state and federal aid it is not a time for us to consider reduction requests from the Towns. She added she understands Manchester's reserves are healthy.

Mr. Boling, Manchester BOS Chairman, stated Manchester is using reserves for infrastructure work and reserves are anticipated at 10%. The Town's proposed Plan B budget has been reworked to show a 0% increase in property taxes with a \$150K cut to the Town's operating budget and a \$488K cut in capital expenses and \$150K reduction asked from the District. The Town anticipates a 0% increase in property taxes and 6% reduction in local receipts. What the next two years brings is an unknown. The Town is looking closely at union contracts to help reduce expenses we have no confidence the economy is going to take off soon.

Ms. Erdmann asked if the \$150K cut in operating expenses included no new hires for the Town. Mr. Boling confirmed that was correct. Ms. Cameron asked if the Town had built the \$150K cut from the school budget into the Town's Plan B. Mr. Boling stated that was correct. Ms. Wolf asked if the cut to the schools was to allow Manchester to have a 0% tax increase, Mr. Boling stated that was correct.

Mr. Warnock stated education is absolutely critical especially in these times and it needs to be kept on track. He defers to Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas regarding where the District can cut the budget and points out they are very conservative and aware of where the District budget can be cut and where there is potential for savings. It is too early to cut the budget, Mr. Warnock recommends keeping the budget where it is.

Mr. Creighton, Chairman Manchester Finance Committee stated the Town and School reserves were at about the same level. He asked if the District planned to use reserves to make up for loss in state aid. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed the District would use reserves as a substitution for State aid. Which means the District will be digging a deeper hole to climb out of.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated staffing is part of the discussion it is an unknown but the District knows following the closing of the schools in March and returning in fall there will be a need for in person remediation and help for students to recover from the Covid-19 crisis.

Ms. Cameron asked what the timing for the State budget was. Mr. Urbas stated it is an unknown. He believes it is important to be prepared for options to be presented at the Town meetings in June.

Ms. Wolf stated children and families need strong schools and the District has been making cuts for years. Ms. Weld agreed. Ms. Cameron stated the District passed a budget, we are not sure what is ahead of us, but we do not need to decide now. We have meetings ahead of the Town meetings and there is time. Ms. Cameron asked when the deadline was for deciding.

Ms. Erdmann stated if we agree to cuts now the District loses flexibility to deal with the anticipated state and federal cuts.

Mr. Urbas stated we do not know what is going to happen, but we do need to do scenario planning. He will develop models for the School Committee's consideration. In February there was a two-year plan in place to use interest income for long term capital needs. He will review all options for FY21 and consider FY22 and FY23.

Ms. Erdmann indicated the Committee had two-weeks to develop a plan and at this time she was not in favor of the requested \$235K cut. She regrets that is her decision. The Committee was polled to Mr. Bourke agreed the District is not in a position to make the requested cut. Ms. Cameron stated she was not opposed to working with the Towns but would like to wait and see what happens with state and federal funding.

Mr. Warnock supports the level services budget proposed. Ms. Weld stated the District is not in a position to help the Towns. Ms. Wolf stated the best was for the District to help the Towns was to provide an excellent public-school system for our children.

- Essex Elementary Playground Replacement Design Update

Ms. Erdmann stated at the beginning of the discussion that Eagles Nest will not be a community build due to the pandemic.

Mr. Warnock asked Mr. Urbas to clarify the source of funding for the EES new playground. Mr. Urbas stated the reserve fund included money in stabilization to assure money is set aside for capital projects. The purpose of stabilization funds is to support one time use projects not operating expenses. In the past the fund has been used to replace a boiler, repair a roof, and upgrades to the EES building.

Mr. Foster, EES Playground Committee, stated he supported the \$300K purchase and was concerned decreasing that amount would result in the loss of climbing and balancing play equipment. Mr. Foster introduced the possible inclusion of \$35K from the EES PTO playground fund be applied to the new build.

Mr. Waldron stated the Committee would need to finalize their decision to meet the fall timeline.

Mr. Urbas indicated there were additional costs to make the site ready. Additional work included raising Eagles Nest estimated at \$7K and preparing the site estimated at \$25K. Mr. Urbas thought it would be possible to get by without the Value Engineering add at a cost of \$50K.

There was discussion about eliminating the Park Core element of the playground to support Value Engineering but the overall savings would be less than anticipated and once the poured in place surface has been installed it is not recommended to add to the original poured in place surface.

The use of the EES playground fund was discussed. The current policy regarding funds for one specific school and not the other will need to be reviewed prior to accepting a gift for the EES playground. It was pointed out the EES PTO has not approved the use of the funds for the purchase of equipment. The PTO had planned to use the fund for ancillary items like seating, landscaping, and fencing.

Ms. Weld asked if it was reasonable for the Committee to fund a project when the Committee did not know if the students will be able to play on it in the fall of 2020. Ms. Erdmann stated this is not a perfect world and is concerned about the optics of building a playground at this time the Committee needs to have this conversation.

Mr. Warnock stated he had a hard time reconciling a cut for EES playground when the new Memorial School playgrounds remained in the construction budget. Ms. Wolf stated if we put the brakes on this project now it may be years before the District is in a position to build the playground.

Mr. Weld believes it is wise to put the playground on hold and feels uncomfortable approving the project. Mr. Warnock asked if the Committee would consider putting the Memorial School playgrounds on hold. Ms. Cameron pointed out if the Committee waits to fund the project the project will cost more money.

Ms. Erdmann suggested ordering the equipment and waiting until spring for installation. She is concerned about the optics. Mr. Waldron pointed out there would be storage fees and additional construction costs in the spring if the equipment is purchased and stored.

Ms. Cameron believes it will be a huge mistake for the School Committee to not replace the structure at EES. She stated Essex supported the Memorial School project and it will be a major political mistake if the District does not replace the playground for \$300K.

Superintendent Beaudoin advised the Committee against looking at components of the budget in isolation because there are too many unknowns. The District may be looking at staffing reductions in the summer. She recommends looking at the budget across the board and to be cautious in the use of reserves.

Mr. Warnock stated he appreciated the need to prioritize and not picking on one thing. Superintendent Beaudoin stated in the immediate future we may be deciding on program over capital.

Motions were considered, discussed, but not seconded. Mr. Urbas summarized the School Committee's current position. The Committee has said no to value engineering, the Committee approved the purchase order for the main structure and will discuss the possible delay in construction of the project at the next meeting.

8) School Committee Comment –

Ms. Wolf expressed her thanks to the Playground Committee. She stated she is uncomfortable spending money, but students need a playground it is part of the curriculum and she understands it is a hard decision.

9) Adjourn –

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