



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES August 11, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	August 11, 2020
Location:	Via Webex
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Sarah Wolf, Chairperson Shannon Erdmann, Vice Chairperson Ken Warnock Ann Cameron Eric Bourke Theresa Whitman Matt Harrington
Absent:	
Guests:	John Willis, Principal Memorial, Jennifer Roberts, EES, Julie Riley, Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology, Allison Collins, Director of Special Education
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Wolf called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) Public Comment** –

Andre thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak and stated given the Governor's comments and the fact that Manchester and Essex are in the white zone he could not imagine a reason to not go back to school. He hopes the Committee takes his words into consideration when making their decision. Remote learning for his family was a disaster in spring. Beverly schools are opening for grades K-5 students 5 days a week. He does not want to cope with 2 days in and 3 days off and wonders what happened to one week in and one week out. Andre stated his children went to YMCA camp this summer with 100 children and 12 counselors and there were zero cases of infection. He strongly believes summer playground programs should have been run and after school programs should run this fall.

Caroline Weld – Ms. Weld, a parent and former School Committee member read a letter she had forwarded to the School Committee. She believes a decision needs to be made on how the District returns to school this fall. She stated it is in the interest of teachers, families and the administration to decide and spend the next month fine tuning the best educational experience for all involved. Ms. Weld also stated, as a parent I cannot imagine asking our teachers to manage students and teach under the guidelines that must be followed to protect student and faculty health.

Ms. Weld concluded in her opinion the remote model will allow for teachers to be in the buildings/classrooms in a safe manner. Teachers will have access to all the teaching tools and technology while allowing for children to meet in person, such as small group instructional groups, science classes with a lab component and student with special educational needs.

Sophia thanked the School Committee for their thoughtful consideration of the issues before them and trusts the Committee to make the best decision on behalf of the communities.

Teresa Holland forwarded an email to Superintendent Beaudoin and School Committee members recommending the District go full remote. Her reasons included:

- ✓ Costs to the District
- ✓ Ms. Holland believes teachers will be able to do a better job if they are teaching remote
- ✓ The argument that kids need to be in school to socialize does not consider that it will not be “socializing” as they are used to
- ✓ Starting full remote gives flexibility to bring in special education students and K-1
- ✓ For health reasons – why would we put our kids and staff at risk?

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Wolf indicated there were more than 150 participants on the call she welcomed all and thanked Studio 1623 for their recording of the meeting. The chat feature will be turned off to allow discussion among Committee members and presenters.

Ms. Wolf also thanked the Essex community volunteers who work on the demolition of Eagle's Nest playground in preparation for the new playground.

Ms. Wolf encouraged community members to work collaboratively, keep an open mind and understand that we do not know what the fall will bring, and we need to support one another.

3) Student Report –

Our student representative is taking the summer off. We look forward to Lukas rejoining us in September.

4) Consent Agenda

- Minutes – 8.4.2020

Minutes for August 4, 2020 will be reviewed at the School Committee meeting on August 17, 2020.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Ann Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdmann) – No Report
- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Theresa Whitman) – Report

Mr. Bourke stated the final mask policy recommendation will be presented at the next School Committee meeting.

- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – No Report

6) Continued Business

Superintendent Beaudoin presented the Planning Update report.

Planning Update

- Reminder School Starts for Students – September 16, 2020
- Conclusions to Date – Updates
- Implications of Hybrid on Elementary Program
 - Schedule/Safety
 - Special Education Planning Update
 - Next Steps & Timeline

Feasibility Study Conclusions to Date:

- The MERSD School Committee has established a six-foot social distancing.
- Cost of the in-person and/or hybrid models will require an investment of \$1.5M -- \$2M.
- In-person model will require significant investment in additional staffing.
- MERSD cannot accommodate full in-person learning and meet the social distancing and DESE health and safety guidelines.
- MERSD can achieve a K-12 hybrid in-person remote model that meets the six-foot social distancing guideline and DESE health and safety guidelines.

- Implementing the hybrid model at the high school level in manner consistent with DESE safety guidelines does not allow for full access to the current program of studies and requires the implementation of heterogeneous grouping and a modified curriculum at the secondary level to achieve the cohort structure. This may result in the need to provide an independent remote learning option that students can access while supervised by classroom teachers.
- In the hybrid model, providing the full high school program to students would require four classroom changes per day and the following cohort levels:
Student
 - Cohorts = Grades 9/10 @ 60
 - Cohort – Grades 11/12 up to 125
 - Teachers 60 students per day/120 students per week
- Implement the hybrid model at the middle school poses some challenges in terms of minimizing movement and maintaining a low number of student instruction for faculty and staff. Cocooning cohorts to one classroom/one teacher daily does not allow for the full academic program to be delivered. Moving teachers only exposes teachers to 60 students per day 120 students per week. Creating standalone cohorts (1 teacher – 12 students) would put teachers in the position of supervisor and not allow them to teach their typical course load. This may result in the need to provide an independent remote learning option that students can access while supervised by classroom teachers.
- Survey results show the community has a strong interest in the hybrid model however, at the high school level access to the full academic program is of equal or greater importance.
- Implementing the hybrid model at the elementary level allows for the full academic program and results in standalone cohorts of 1 teacher and 12 students.
- Hybrid Model requires community buy-in to maintaining cohort integrity and social distancing and mask wearing measures in and out of school.
- Hybrid Schedule emerging on the North Shore is 2 days in school and 3 days at home. Recommended: Monday – remote, Tuesday and Wednesday Green and Thursday and Friday White
- Hybrid Model is vulnerable to staffing shortages and rolling shutdowns.
 - Project up to 20% of staff will access leave options. Uncertain if there will be available staff to fill positions.
 - Reliant full staffing – schools can tolerate two absent classroom teachers before risking shutdown.
 - Quarantine rules may force widespread absenteeism staff and students.
- In Hybrid and/or Remote Models, childcare may present an issue for families and faculty. (25-30% of our families reported that they may not have adequate availability.)
- Remote program delivery does not negate in-person learning opportunities.
 - High needs students and students with disabilities would be prioritized for in-person learning.
 - Opportunities for in-person community building will be built into the schedule to take advantage of good weather to hold outdoor meetings.
- There are problems without current solutions:
 - Testing and tracing capacity

- Interconnectedness of the region
- Availability of staffing
- Consistency of State messaging and guidance

Ms. Cameron asked Superintendent Beaudoin if a teacher is out on approved Family Leave (which includes teachers at home to provide childcare) how does that Family Leave impact the budget. Superintendent Beaudoin replied family leave is 12 weeks and the teacher is on leave with full pay. In addition to the teacher's salary the replacement position is estimated at \$15K each. The current projected budget estimates replacement staff at \$300K.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated faculty and staff come from all over the region including Boston, New Hampshire, Haverhill, Revere and Lynn. The availability of staff is a heavy lift and the inconsistency of State messaging indicating not over 25 with over 400 people in a building puts individuals and families safety in question; one set of guidance does not meet all other standards there are outstanding questions.

7) Superintendent's Report –

- Fall 2020 Reopening Update & Planning Report

Elementary Reopening Plan 2020-2021

Principal Willis and Principal Roberts introduced the Elementary Reopening Plan and stated the current situation is not easy. This is the most challenging time any of us have been through as educators. The faculty and staff are here for the kids and working on coming up with the best solution for everyone.

Collaboration

- School-based Leadership Team
- Parents: Surveys, Conversations, Letters and Emails
- Fall 2020 Advisory Group
- Administrative Team
- MERSD School Committee
- META

What we want for our students

- Effective Learning Opportunities
 - Developmentally Appropriate Instruction
 - Engaging Lessons
 - Integration of Social Emotional Learning and Support
- Structured School Day
 - Balance of screen time and hands-on work
 - Students engaged with their class for a full school day
- Clear Expectations
 - Accountability – Attendance, Assessment, Feedback, Reporting

Our Task: 3 Models

- In-person learning model: For this learning model, students receive in-person instruction full time in school environments that have been appropriately modified to address health and safety requirements issued by DESE.
- Hybrid learning model: In a hybrid model, students alternate between in-person learning with safety requirements and remote learning.
- Remote learning model: In this learning model, remote learning is the default mode of instruction for all students, though some High Needs students may still be served in-person full time or through a hybrid model. Structured Learning Time requirements apply to remote learning.

The MERSD School Committee has established six-foot social distancing in the District. MERSD cannot accommodate full in-person learning and meet the social distancing and DESE health and safety guidelines.

Principal Roberts introduced the Hybrid Model:

- The Hybrid Model meets local and state health and safety guidelines.
- The academic program can be delivered in the hybrid model with some modifications to the delivery of instruction.
- Hybrid Model requires lessons to be designed for remote learning and accommodate in person cohorts.
- Teachers will plan and deliver remote instruction for student to access from home or from school simultaneously.
- Curriculum and Assessment in the Hybrid Model
 - Curriculum, Assessment and Grading will follow a typical structure (with modifications).
 - Remote learning will include balance of hands-on, tactile activities and technology.
 - Specialists Classes (Art, Music, PE, Library, Technology and Foreign Language) both in-person and at-home cohorts) will participate in specialist classes remotely to limit exposure.
 - General Education Intervention
 - Response Intervention, Enrichment, etc. may not be able to take place in the same format as in the past.
- Special Education – Dr. Collings will address in the next presentation.
- Hybrid Model Technology Considerations
 - Combination of on-line and hands-on learning experiences.
 - Combination of teacher directed synchronous and asynchronous direct instruction, peer collaboration, assignments and feedback
 - Time on and off of screens throughout the day with breaks for lunch, recess and movement.
 - All students will be assigned an iPad (K-2) or Chromebook (3-5) to use at home and in school.

- Students will be provided with tangible materials to use at home when remote including workbooks, manipulative kits and art materials.
- School Day Schedule
 - Students will be engaged with their teacher/class throughout the 8:30 a.m. to 2:55 p.m. school day
 - A full school day does not equal a full day of screen time.
- All students will be assigned to either the White or Green cohort (50% in each)
 - Cohort assignments will mirror MERMHS cohort assignments so that immediate families and households will be on the same schedule.
 - Cohorts will be 7 -12 students per class depending on grade.

Hybrid Safety Protocol Implications

Maintaining Cohort Integrity Requires Adherence to local and DESE Safety Guidelines

- Students will need to stay at desks and 6' apart at all times
- Masks must be worn by all throughout the day – breaks impact instructional time
- Students will all need to face the same direction – face-to-face interaction will be limited
- Students will remain in their own classroom for the entire day – with scheduled breaks
- Community gatherings (whole class, grade and school) cannot occur
- Small group instruction and intervention will be substantially limited
Material will need to be transported to and from school each week/day
- Teaching and reinforcing safety protocols will impinge on instructional and break time
- Movement breaks will be challenging within the classroom
- Restroom logistics
- Bus safety protocols present many challenges – financial, logistical and social

Hybrid Model Benefits

- Small cohorts of 7-12 students per classroom
- Students will experience a modified in-person school day twice per week
- Staff and students will be able to develop in-person relationships Although limited and socially distanced, students will be able to interact in-person with staff and peers twice per week
- In-person counseling and check-ins can take place
- Health/nursing services can take place
- Materials can be sent home each week with the students

Hybrid Model Challenges

- Limited Peer-to-Peer Interaction – Cooperative learning and collaboration will be limited
Sharing materials, manipulatives and sensory tools cannot happen
- Peer and teacher interaction will be limited by the 6' social distance guideline
- Desks in rows – limited in-person options for peer-to-peer collaboration and flexible workspaces
- Students will remain in classroom for most of the day

- Monitoring masks, sanitizing and handwashing will impinge on instructional time
- Movement, Gross Motor Activities will be limited
- Behavior management and engagement will be a challenge
- No Communal gathering spaces
- Masks will hinder communication and may impact instructions (reading and phonics)
- Materials will have to be transported to/from school each day

Staffing and Finances

○ Hybrid

Hiring

- Long-term Substitutes (Leave of Absences)
- 4 full-time paraprofessionals at each building
- 3 bus
- monitors at each building
- Additional daily substitutes needed

Materials:

- Additional materials will need to be purchased (i.e. science materials)

○ Remote

Hiring –

- No additional staff needed

Materials:

- Additional materials will need to be purchased (i.e. science materials)

School Committee Discussion:

Ms. Cameron asked about delivering instruction in the classroom and remotely. She wondered how the teacher would remain visible on the camera to both classroom and remote students. Ms. Cameron asked if it was possible for the students at home to do independent work or if each classroom could have a teacher assistant to manage the classroom while the teacher worked with remote students. Principal Roberts stated teacher assistants were only placed in Kindergarten and Special Education classes there are no general teacher assistants.

Ms. Cameron asked to look at the Challenges and Benefits slides for the Hybrid Model indicating she was not enamored with the Hybrid Model. She asked how effective instruction in remote manner would be given the challenges of manipulatives. Principal Roberts stated the District is working to train the trainers and professional development programs for teachers will allow teachers to work in small cohorts in classroom and remote. Teachers have been engaged in learning over the summer and the Hybrid Model will look different from spring.

Ms. Cameron asked if Principal Roberts thought it would be possible to develop a Remote Model and for students to see teachers physically and could she make it work. Principal Roberts stated we can do anything we are charged to do. Her implementation team was waiting for direction from the School Committee.

Ms. Cameron also expressed concern around additional resources for Social Emotional Learning and if the District may need additional resources given the stress on students engaged in either model.

Ms. Whitman asked about lags in learning from spring and how would the educational lags be managed. Principal Willis stated a lot of assessments are done in person but there are electronic tools and the staff can complete assessments through technology; this was accomplished in the spring using two different models in small groups through Zoom.

Principal Willis stated there will be regression given the students have been through “two summers”. It is important not to ring the alarm because kids are developing at different rates. There will be academic gaps but there is a continuum for development and teachers will meet students where they are.

Ms. Whitman asked if the Principals could speak to outdoor learning. Principal Roberts indicated there had been discussion about using pop up tents to get students outside and classes frequently were held outside in the fall and spring. The most challenging aspect of outdoor learning is technology and how far teachers can move and remain online. Principal Willis stated teachers have always leveraged opportunities in outdoor spaces but there are obstacles like allergies, bees and wind.

Ms. Whitman asked depending on what the decision is made this evening would the Principals consider releasing the Cohort Grouping information to allow for parents to plan for childcare and make connections with other families and classmates.

Ms. Erdmann went back to Ms. Whitman’s question and asked which model was best to meet the kid’s needs. Principal Willis had anticipated the question and stated the best educational opportunity was full in-person like took place in the fall of 2019. Given that is not possible. He believes the Hybrid Model will work for older students but for K students it will be difficult, and some in-person instruction would help. He conceded it is a difficult question.

Principal Roberts stated she did not want either. There is much in the Hybrid Model that poses problems. Principal Roberts believes in the fully remote model teachers will be able to do a better job for all our children by delivering better quality instructions and focusing on social emotional learning.

Mr. Warnock stated we are discussing a starting point for school year 2020-2021 with remote learning. We understand the Hybrid Model is not what we want. Mr. Warnock believes the District needs to develop ways to move toward in school learning. He suggests starting remote and move to the Hybrid Model and set expectations for delivering instruction and do it well.

He asked if the two elementary schools were collaborating. Principal Roberts stated the schools are aligned. Staff at both schools are working collaboratively and training together. Principal Willis stated Memorial School teachers want to work with counterparts at EES. They are working diligently to set up for Hybrid Model. He stated we are prepared for the Hybrid Model and will work with any model that comes our way.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated Administration and Faculty are overwhelmed with ideation and we need to determine our primary goal. Is it purity of program or the communities need for childcare with kids back in school; either goal is achievable at the elementary level and does not negate in person activity? Should the District focus on getting back in or focus on program?

Mr. Warnock stated it is important to pick the starting point and recognize it is not static. Our intention is not to say one option is better. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the Hybrid Model focus will be complying with and developing routines and expectations around meeting public safety guidelines and less on academic needs. It is important to focus on where we are placing out priorities. The District understands many families want to come back in a Hybrid Model.

Mr. Harrington asked about the budget for Hybrid Model versus fully Remote. If the District is moving to toward Hybrid and that is achieved at midyear would the costs be half of what is proposed and is the District planning to allocate funds now. Superintendent Beaudoin stated if the District started Hybrid in January the costs might be 50%. PPE and technology costs have been incurred and reimbursement grants may be available. There is no funding for staff replacement which is the most significant expense.

Mr. Harrington also asked about Community Partnerships and how far conversations had progressed and what the costs would be for parents. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the Y program is not at capacity and offers vouchers and subsidies to families who qualify and meets all qualifications for emergency childcare. There may be an opportunity for the District to underwrite some expenses that would need to be reviewed. The District has not spoken with Manchester Parks & Recreation program regarding childcare.

Mr. Bourke stated he is part of a two-parent working family and had supported the Hybrid Model in past meetings. However, having listened to Principal Willis and Principal Roberts he believes the strength of the District is program and the program is best achieved in the Remote Model.

Ms. Wolf thanked the Elementary School principals, teachers and staff for the amazing work they have done to prepare for the new year.

Special Education Planning Update – Fall Guidance from DESE

Dr. Collins presented the status report of special education stating the full report on roll out will be dependent on the School Committee's decision.

- Students must receive all services in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction or a combination of both
- Instruction and services delivery model (versus resources and supports)
- While abiding by the current necessary health and safety requirements
- Strong emphases on providing in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible
DESE guidance prioritizes: Preschool and High Needs students
- High Needs
Services provided outside of the general education classroom
By special education teachers and related service providers

Special education services constitute more than 75% of the student's school day
Students who primarily use aided and augmentative communication

Plan for MERSD

- Dependent of decisions made for all students in terms of hybrid or remote scheduling model
- Deliver all IEP services regardless of model
- Remote learning plans will be developed, and parent input sought, most likely after liaisons return to school
- Planning will consider data from spring on student progress with remote learning
- Envisions a continuum from high needs students in specialized programs, to students who need extra problem solving to access remote, to students who are in full inclusion programs and can access remote given school day structure and their typical IEP supports
- Any discussion of in person services will include consideration of public health guidance to avoid mixing cohorts of teachers and students and to minimize the number of contacts for each student and staff member.

Ms. Cameron asked about the budget for special education and if costs are reflected in the budget estimate. Ms. Cameron specifically mentioned SEL. Dr Collins stated SEL was part of Dr. Riley's curriculum. The budget for special education includes projected needs for PPE. The most significant cost will be implications for special education are the possibility of teachers on leave. Superintendent stated staffing costs are the most significant cost there may be transportation costs but that is not a big piece of the budget.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated Hybrid Model is primarily Remote and the program can be delivered through Remote. It is important to define a set of objectives and to continually revisit and evaluate the District's choice. If remote and considering a move to Hybris the District will need to:

- Evaluate monthly
- Suggested Indicators
 - Availability of consistent Stated guidelines and metrics to manage open/close
 - Increased testing, contact tracing
 - State federal financial support
 - Ability to provide reliable staffing

Options for Families:

Hybrid 2 Days in person 3 Days at home Remote Learning –

Remote Only: Temporary or Full-Time, Student assigned to cohort, In-person attendance may depend on medical need permanent or temporary, Student must meet all attendance and assignment requirements of both in-person and home days, Reentry to in-person at quarter or Trimesters change over

Independent Remote: DESE Remote Learning Academy, Year-long commitment, Receives MERSD Credit but operates independently of Hybrid/Remote Learning sponsored program, Students will receive faculty advisor.

Home School – Independent from MERSD, Withdraw from MERSD and file an independent homeschooling plan.

Ms. Cameron moved that the MERSD adopt a remote K-12 learning model, prioritizing and making available opportunities for high and special needs students and others as recommended and approved by the Superintendent. The School Committee will review data and assess the possibility of the hybrid and return-to-school models at the first School Committee meeting of each subsequent month. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with a roll call vote.

Ms. Cameron stated she believes this is educationally and fiscally the best model. Last evening, she attended the BOS meeting in Essex and departments are being asked to review and plan to cut their budgets. The District is already dipping into reserves. The disruption to educational delivery and investment needed for the Hybrid Model are significant. Ms. Cameron believes educators can do better and teachers have said they want to do better in the Remote Model.

Ms. Erdmann stated she understands the day to day changes a possible shut down may cause. However, she struggles with meeting the needs of the younger students who need more in-person contact. She recommends starting remote for all and phase in grades K-2 who need the personal attention and may be phase in 3-5 and see how it goes. She understands the Committee does not need to make the decision tonight but would like to discuss in the future.

Ms. Whitman would like to discuss phasing in as part of a broader picture and would prefer to not include that option in tonight's vote. Mr. Warnock was concerned about leading with costs. He believes the focus needs to be on educational delivery. Mr. Bourke agrees with Ms. Erdmann and Ms. Whitman.

Mr. Harrington would like to see the Committee decide this evening and is in favor of starting the school year remotely. Ms. Wolf reiterated the Committee need to be flexible. Ms. Cameron stated it is important to have the School Committee's priorities and expectations around remote clearly defined.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated there is no way to underestimate the need for adult child interactions and the importance of Social Emotional Learning it is the interpersonal interactions that result in a positive educational outcome and should be considered a School Committee priority.

Ms. Whitman and Mr. Warnock expressed concern for teachers who as Ms. Whitman stated are putting their trust in the Committee. Mr. Warnock does not want to see the District lose faculty and staff.

In upcoming meetings Ms. Cameron would like to discuss childcare, remote learning (what will it look like and what are best practices) and how teachers manage their classrooms communicate with parents and the Administration. She stated the School Committee has made a difficult decision and some people are going to be unhappy. MERSD is an excellent District and it is the School Committee's goal that we fulfill the promise we have built up over the past 20 years.

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

8) School Committee Comment –

9) Adjourn

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