

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
CHENERY COMMUNITY ROOM
FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Present: Ms. Susan Burgess-Cox, Chair
Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Tara Donner
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to order

Susan Burgess-Cox called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

1.2 Pledge of Allegiance

Susan Burgess-Cox led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.3 Citizen's Concerns

Mr. and Mrs. Ozawa spoke about their concerns regarding the Identity Project course for eighth graders. They expressed particular concerns as parents around issues of adoption and inclusion with all types of families. They expressed their gratitude toward Principal Michael McAllister for working with the school administration to determine the best way to move forward with the course.

1.4 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.5 Chair's Report

Susan Burgess-Cox announced several upcoming music events in the district as well as a presentation for parents on managing anxiety in students. She noted March 3rd is a no school day for students and teachers due to the primary election.

1.6 Student Representative Report

There was no student representative in attendance.

1.7 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan announced teacher Ryan Schmidt has returned from his Coast Guard deployment, which began last year.

The 6th Annual Boston Friends Group Family Bowling Event will take place on March 1st at 6:00 p.m. Superintendent Phelan thanked Belmont Against Racism members for their financial contribution to this fun get together.

The METCO Art Show will take place on March 19th.

Parent Conferences will take place on March 4th, 11th, and 19th.

Superintendent Phelan also provided updates on some athletic events.

Superintendent Phelan provided an update on the Identity Project which the School Committee had an introduction to at a recent meeting. There have been some concerns, raised by grade 8 parents around the content of sensitive subjects. School administrators, upon hearing from Principal McAllister and several parents, have decided to pause some sessions going forward to allow time to review the feedback received. Chenery Principal Michael McAllister will send a letter to parents letting them know of the decision to pause the program. Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias and Chenery Principal Michael McAllister will be meeting with the course facilitator tomorrow.

Parents have had concerns regarding the cancellation of the accelerated math program at Chenery Middle School. Superintendent Phelan, Assistant Superintendent Darias, along with Chenery Principal Michael McAllister and Math Director Patty Soliozy have met with parents on two occasions to discuss the issue. There is ongoing discussion about options to move forward and the pros and cons of each option.

Superintendent Phelan and Chenery Principal Michael McAllister are scheduling a Minuteman planning meeting for families of eighth graders who are interested in attending a CVTE program for high school. Belmont's Minuteman status has gone from member to non-member. The anticipated enrollment growth at Minuteman has come to fruition sooner than expected. Minuteman Superintendent Bouquillon notified Superintendent Phelan there would not be space at Minuteman for non-member students for the 2020-21 school year. Superintendent Phelan has hired a liaison to reach out to neighboring districts about receiving Belmont students into their CVTE programs. Cambridge and Medford have both expressed interest in welcoming Belmont students next year. The district is planning to share more information at a parent information meeting.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 Project Based Learning at BHS – Exhibit A

Liz Baker, Director of Science and Deb McDevitt, Director of Social Studies participated in a Project Based Learning Professional Development course. They were looking to develop a course to teach together and combine classes to experiment with interdisciplinary learning. There are 55 students participating in the unit together. Students will create a project related to ethical eating. Dustin O'Brien,

Director of Food Service will attend a class as an expert speaker. He will provide a presentation on the constraints he has in creating a school lunch program. The students will then present Dustin with a lunch menu based on ethical eating. The goal of the course is to help students evaluate food choices and learn what impact those choices have on personal and global health as well as the earth. This also ties into the science standards.

Students will bring in a recipe that has meaning to them. They will then generate questions from the recipe, such as how ethical it is. The students will self-select what categories they want to become experts on. The students will present the final menu item at the end of the course

3.2 District Configuration Plan Update

Superintendent Phelan invited Assistant Superintendent Janice Darias to explain the work that has taken place regarding the reconfiguration of the district in preparation for the new high school. In 2020-21 school year grades 9-12 will move into the high school wing and the 2023-24 school year grades 7-8 will move into the middle school wing.

A. Visioning Committee Update: Twenty teachers and administrators at all levels began their visioning work in May 2019. They discussed what their vision of teaching and learning would be in the new building. They also attended workshops on developing the profile of the graduate. The group will be looking at the model of each of the schools. They will discuss what will change once the new school is built, what transitions students will make, and what can be done to help with those transitions. One of the PLTs is working on this topic. The district will offer opportunities to all Belmont staff on this work. Assistant Superintendent Darias expressed gratitude for the funding to bring facilitators to provide a two-day workshop to Belmont faculty.

B. Technology Committee Update: Steve Mazzola, Director of Technology provided an update on plans for technology devices for students. Superintendent Phelan authorized a number of working groups last year to assess the systems and protocol devices need to have for the new school and district configuration work over the next few years. The work is divided into network operations and classroom technology.

The classroom technology part of the work has received teacher input. Twelve teachers from Chenery and Belmont High School have met with Director Mazzola to discuss what they believe they need for the new school. A focus of interest is on projection in the classrooms and student/staff devices. The group discussed how the classroom projection works now as well as the positives and negatives of the current system. Director Mazzola arranged for vendors to temporarily provide a projection unit and three flat panels for two weeks. Teachers were invited to try out each device over the course of the two weeks. The group reconvened and discussed feedback and thoughts on each type of device. The teachers felt the flat panel technology to be superior to the regular projection type. Flat panels are still more expensive but the price is coming down and they will last longer than projection type systems.

Director Mazzola updated the School Committee on the plans regarding student devices. Faculty participants put together a rubric on how to score devices, which helped narrow the discussion. Last October, Director Mazzola began meeting with each department head at the high school and each faculty member at Chenery. He then took the work of the group and asked their opinions. The information was used to create a survey, which came out last month. The survey asked staff to rank devices. Based on feedback from the working group, focus groups and the survey, it was determined people like the touch screen chrome book best. The technology staff was asked to do a technical review

of all the options to be sure they were able to provide technical support for whichever option was chosen.

The next steps will be to look at staff devices. The Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee will be presented with the options the staff prefers.

Director Mazzola spoke about the rollout plans for the new student devices. Each student will have a district-owned device. Some concerns were raised by School Committee members about the cost of providing each student with a chrome book instead of offering the option of students bringing their own device. Director Mazzola explained one of the main benefits of having a district-owned device is the ability of the technology department to install software that restricts certain websites. It would also be more difficult keeping devices updated for standardized testing if students were using their own.

3.3 Financial Task Force II Report-out

The Financial Task Force II took time at their last meeting to determine how best to update the community and describe the history of financial work that has taken place in Belmont since 2000. Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Superintendent Phelan and Budget Director Glen Castro will determine how to gather information and frame it for the community. This history of the last twenty years in Belmont will explain why the town has certain needs. The School Committee and Select Board will be presented with this information what it is complete.

4. **SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)**

4.1 Finance Subcommittee

There was no report from the Finance Subcommittee.

4.2 Policy and Procedure Subcommittee

There was no report from the Policy and Procedure Subcommittee.

4.3 Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

There was no report from the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee.

4.4 Capital Budget Committee

The Capital Budget Committee will meet on March 5th.

4.5 Warrant Committee

The Warrant Committee will meet on March 4th.

4.6 Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee

The Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee will meet on February 27th to begin talking about the FF & E process.

4.7 Community Path Committee

There was no report from the Community Path Committee.

4.8 Financial Task Force II

The Financial Task Force II report was presented under major business.

4.9 High School Traffic Working Group

At their last meeting, the High School Traffic Working Group discussed concerns around congestion near the high school campus. The Police Department will reach out to Belmont High School Principal Isaac Taylor to discuss ways to help parents comply with the new routing.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Consent Agenda

5.2 Personnel Items - None

5.3 Business Items – None

5.4 Approval of Minutes

February 4, 2020

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Tara Donner, it was **VOTED** unanimously to approve the minutes of February 4, 2020.

6. FUTURE BUSINESS

7. ENCLOSURES

Strategic Plan

School Committee Goals

Important Dates for School Committee

8. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Amy Checkoway it was **VOTED** unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by 
Andrea Prestwich, Secretary