

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
AUGUST 11, 2020**

Present: Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair
Ms. Catherine Bowen, Secretary
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Tara Donner
Ms. Evelyn Gomez
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

Andrea Prestwich called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

There were no citizens' concerns.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.4 Chair's Report

In the interest of time, the Chair did not present a report.

Chair Prestwich acknowledged the many emails the School Committee received after the August 6th School Committee meeting. She stated she has not been able to respond to all the emails individually at present, but they have all been read.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan acknowledged the vote the School Committee would take at this meeting would have an impact on the lives of all families, students and staff in Belmont. He thanked the community for their input on the return-to-learning options and thanked the School Committee for their support.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 School Committee Vote on Return to Learning Options

Superintendent Phelan and Assistant Superintendent Darias presented the results of the survey that was sent to families after the August 6 School Committee meeting.

Document: "School Committee.8.11.20.pdf"

The survey asked families questions regarding their opinions on sending their students back to school in the fall. There were 3,161 responses from all of the schools. Responses represented approximately 28% high school students, 31% middle school students, 41% elementary students.

The following questions were asked on the survey:

Question 1: My student attends...

Total responses were: 3,161. HS: 882, MS: 979, Burbank: 291, Butler: 251, Wellington: 251, Winn Brook: 370

Question 2: which of these hybrid versions works best for your student and family?

- In-person for a week: 749
- In-person for two weeks: 239
- In-person for a day: 461
- In-person for two days: 733
- In-person in the morning: 742

Question 3: If we are able to open school with a hybrid model, would your student attend?

- Yes: 1,977
- No: 469
- Maybe: 706

Total Responses: 3,152

Question 4: If no or maybe, reasons for this...

- My student is medically compromised: 77 (6.3%)
- Someone in the household is medically compromised: 301 (24.90%)
- I am nervous about sending my student to school: 876 (72.46%)
- Other: 357 (29.53%)

Total Respondents: 1,209

Question 5: If eligible, will your student ride the bus?

- Yes: 252
- No: 984
- Maybe: 220
- My student is not eligible: 1,654

Total Responses: 3,110

Question 6: Given the totality of the circumstance, which model do you prefer for this student?

- Full in-person model: 750
 - Hybrid model: 1,388
 - Remote Learning model: 1,014
- Total Responses: 3,152*

Data disaggregated by school, comparing opinions across school levels showed relatively even splits for total school responses preferences between full in-person, hybrid, and remote learning models, with ~8% more favorable to hybrid. HS responses least preferred in-person and 50% preferred hybrid. Highest preference for the majority of elementary schools was for hybrid, and similar preference was found at the middle school level.

Superintendent Phelan presented Belmont Public School's "Return to Learning Plan" for fall 2020.

Document: "Belmont_Public_Schools_Fall_2020_Re-Opening_Plan-DRAFT_1_0.pdf"

The school administration has been working with the Belmont Education Association on what part time in person work will look like. An assessment on the airflow in each of the school buildings has been taking place. An outside contractor will complete the airflow assessment. Additional work by an outside contractor may need to be done to improve airflow.

Superintendent Phelan explained the district has been working with a local group on the possibility of implementing testing for students. The cost would be \$270,000 for one round of testing. In addition to the cost, implementing the program may be a challenge. The current priority is to have the airflow testing completed and determine ways to support outdoor spaces for learning during a hybrid model.

A Metrics Task Force is proposed to look at the most reliable metrics for a phased approach for students to return to school in person. This task force would have representatives from the School Department, Health Dept., local experts (doctors, environmental specialists, epidemiologists, etc.). Their task will be to create a rubric or dashboard that will include all the key considerations for any return to school decisions such as medical/public health factors, student wellbeing, academic, and logistical considerations. Members discussed that DESE released guidance on case numbers late that day, and expressed support for reviewing this guidance comprehensively in a subsequent meeting, given that not all members had reviewed it.

The priorities of the school district are health and safety, social emotional well-being, and academic engagement and return-to-learning. A four phased plan was presented with phase 1 being remote learning for all students except high needs and complex profile students, per DESE guidelines. The net phase for in-person learning would consider vulnerable students such as: grades K and/or 1, economically disadvantaged/SEL/academic students in need. The transition into each phase after will be based on a successful assessment of conditions for health and safety.

The School Committee offered their comments on a plan to start remotely. Some members had concerns and discussed the possibility of asking the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for another week of two before voting on a plan. Members expressed support for developing and providing a high quality remote model. The initial time period in remote learning could be used to tackle some of the issues the district is facing, such as the air quality assessment and improvements and COVID testing. Superintendent Phelan explained DESE had provided a two-day extension but the School Committee needed to vote on a return model as soon as possible. This would also provide parents and

families the information they need to plan and the district would be able to continue to work needed to be done to plan a future hybrid return.

In response to a question from a School Committee member regarding self-reporting and monitoring of student health, Superintendent Phelan explained the parents would be the first assessment of when their child is sick. The second is the bus driver: Children will be monitored in school for signs they are following health guidelines such as hand washing. Mary Beth Rumley, Director of Nursing has created a protocol on what to do if a student does is diagnosed with COVID-19.

School Committee members continued their discussion on possible ways to begin school in a hybrid model instead of remotely, including the phases and student populations, and options for curricular teaching models. One suggestion was asking students with a talent for technology to create a health app that could be used to monitor the health of students. Superintendent Phelan explained some of the hybrid models may need to be impact bargained with the union.

School Committee members agreed to vote on a remote plan with the understanding they would receive more detailed information on the remote model. Members discussed the overall lower numbers of administrative staff and educators relative to peer districts.

On a motion offered by Catherine Bowen and seconded by Tara Donner, the School Committee agreed to VOTED on a roll call vote to accept the phased approach framework presented by the School Department with Phase I K-12 learning in person for our high needs and complex profile students per DESE guidelines being the initial phase at this time. Subsequent votes to determine the remote model, the hybrid model, and the metrics and plan for movement between phases.

The vote passed unanimously.

5.4 Approval of Minutes

July 2, 2020 Finance Subcommittee

July 9, 2020 SC Joint Meeting with FTFII & Capital Budget Committee

July 16, 2020 Finance Subcommittee

July 16, 2020 School Committee

The School Committee agreed to vote on the minutes at a future meeting.

6. **ADJOURN**

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by



Catherine Bowen, Secretary