

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
NOVEMBER 17, 2020

Present: Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair
Ms. Kate 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

The School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

David Palmer: Spoke on behalf of Belmont math parents requesting better math curriculum. Stated concerns about the accelerated math program being cut this year.

Mariola: Requested information on what progress has been made to address cohort inequity. School Committee. Supt. Phelan acknowledged that he had been delayed in following up with her, and that the presentation this evening would touch on the issue, as well additional information was coming in from the elementary grades.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

Major Business item 3.1 and 3.2 were switched.

1.4 Chair's Report

School Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich noted the survey has gone out to ask parents about testing. If there is, enough interest it will be possible to get the program started. The goal is 85% participation for efficacy.

School Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich shared some questions that were submitted on the School Committee Google Form, which can be found [here](#). (Chair_Report_2020_Nov_17). Chair Prestwich relayed that the DESE guidelines on color-coded operational modes had changed and would be on the agenda next week, districts are experiencing shortages in staffing due to quarantine issues and other conditions, the Wellington PTO co-presidents shared that they provide \$90k in library materials annually and would like those costs to be in the main budget, the planned opening date for hybrid BHS has not changed, we are meeting expectations for instructional hours and always looking for opportunities for improvement.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan met recently with Christa Bauge, outgoing President of the Foundation for Belmont Education (FBE) and Melissa Davis, incoming President of the FBE. He thanked the FBE for all the work they have been doing to support the schools even during these challenging pandemic times.

Superintendent Phelan expressed appreciation for the weekly meetings with PTA/PTO Presidents who have provided helpful feedback from their colleagues and the parents/guardians.

There has been discussion on the Superintendents List Serve related to concerns on travel during the Thanksgiving holiday. Beth Rumley, BPS Director of Nursing sent an advisory to all parents/guardians and staff that included guidance from the Governor and DESE. The Belmont Public Schools continues to follow that guidance regarding mask wearing, hand washing and social distancing. Although it may be difficult to break with normal traditions this year, it is important to use the guidance from the CDE to limit the transmission of COVID in order to keep schools open.

2. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

There was no unfinished business.

3. **MAJOR BUSINESS**

3.1 Elementary and Middle School Advisory Group Timeline

Danielle Betancourt, Butler Principal shared Butler staff has been reflecting upon the hybrid experience so far. The district will be sending out a survey to all elementary staff and families to collect feedback. They will form an Elementary Hybrid Advisory Committee to study the hybrid model in order to refine and build on it. The Committee will include parents/guardians from all elementary schools, and a range of educators and students. The goal is to have broad representation from all schools. Principal Betancourt will send out more information on how to volunteer.

Karla Koza, Chenery Middle School Principal acknowledged the amazing educators at Chenery who are working beyond hours they normally do. There has been a lot of feedback from families with concerns about the lack of instructional time in the current hybrid model. The middle school is overcrowded and understaffed. The building was built for 1100 students and the current enrollment is 1420. The core teacher caseload averages 120 students, comparable districts have 90. Classes have had to be relocated due to poor airflow. These are a few of the complicating factors educators and administrators are dealing with.

The gaps during the in-home day is a concern for parents. The DARE position was lost due to cuts. As a short-term adjustment, two full time media specialists are being hired. There is a need for some support around Google Suite and other 21-century skills, which these educators can provide. Encore asynchronous fifth block has begun. Classes are 45 minutes per class per week.

Principal Koza shared a typical Chenery schedule [here](#). ("CMS_Hybrid_Schedule_11-17-20.pdf") Principal Koza explained the hope is to move the hybrid model to its maximum effectiveness. Data work will include gathering schedules from surrounding districts and surveying parents. An advisory committee will be formed to review the survey information along with cross sections of schedules. They will then provide a recommendation to the Superintendent on any revisions that should take place. The new hybrid schedule should begin at the beginning of the next semester.

School Committee members took questions and comments from parents regarding the frustration with students having too much free time during remote days and issues around drop off.

3.2 High School Model Discussion

Isaac Taylor, Principal of Belmont High School presented details from the Belmont High School Hybrid Task Force, which began their work several weeks ago.

The Task Force included the following members:

Isaac Taylor (Principal), Chair
Sandi McKinley (Parent)
Nancy Healey (Parent)
Ben Delorio (Educator)
Risa Carp (Educator)
Cole Lemack-Bremen (Student, Gr. 10)
Hamza Masoud (Student, Gr. 11)

The hybrid task force reviewed several models from surrounding districts. Some key priorities of the task force included maximizing synchronous instructional time, at or above the current remote model, maintaining access to courses and teachers for all students and consistency of class periods for all cohorts. The task force proposed two models to the Superintendent and School Committee based on the criteria they were looking for. The hybrid task force will continue to meet after a model is chosen. They will continue to discuss successes and challenges with the chosen model and will recommend changes as needed.

Principal Taylor presented the two chosen models. The School Committee discussed the differences and asked questions. Principal Taylor explained that in hybrid student are in-person in the morning, with their peers and their teachers, then all together in the afternoon remotely. For the past 20 years, BSH has been working toward more 21st century skills, many of the techniques and strategies are going to be constrained with the in-person piece of the plan. The schedule is more concise by having a repeat in the afternoon with model 2.

School Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich asked School Committee members to state which model the preferred. The consensus was Model 2 was the best option.

On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Michael Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously to accept the recommendation on the Belmont High School Model 2 subject to collective bargaining.

Superintendent Phelan thanked the members of the Hybrid Task Force for their work. School Committee members suggested inviting members of the community at large to take part in advisory groups going forward.

4. **FUTURE BUSINESS**

November 23, 2020
Joint Meeting of School Committee/Select Board/Warrant Committee
7:30 p.m. – Remote

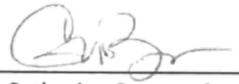
November 24, 2020

Finance Subcommittee Meeting
8:00 a.m. – Remote

November 24, 2020
School Committee Meeting
6:30 p.m.

5. **ADJOURN**

***On a motion offered by Tara Donner and seconded by Catherine Bowen, it was VOTED
unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 p.m.***

Respectfully Submitted by 
Catherine Bowen, Secretary