

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
March 30, 2021

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 Return to Open Session

Committee Chair Andrea Prestwich called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

Charlie Conroy – Asked how expensive COVID related expenses will be next year and if stimulus funds received will be used for anything besides COVID expenses. Also inquired if cuts would be made to staff and extracurricular programs. ~The district is required to cover summer programming and mental health items. Those two items alone will surpass existing federal money. There are other needs in a COVID “parking lot”.

Shea Brams – Requested status update on the MOU between Belmont Light Department and School Department. – Belmont Light received roof info and MOU is being reviewed with the School Committee.

Francesca Kitch – Concerned about FY22 budget and the override not passing. Extra-curricular classes are important to the student experience.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda - none

1.4 Chair's Report - none due to off-cycle meeting

1.5 Superintendent's Report

The presentation slides to follow will include updates on elementary and middle schools in-person learning progress.

2. MAJOR BUSINESS

2.1 Return to In Person Learning Update – High School

Superintendent Phelan offered an update to Grades K-4 and middle school (5-8) in-person learning implementation and progress. Teacher and student assignments elementary (K-4) were communicated to staff and families. All remote teachers are current licensed Belmont staff. Operationally, schedules, lunches, and additional hiring are being finalized. School will be in session fully in-person on Tuesday, April 6, which is Town voting day and three of the elementary schools are polling places.

Superintendent Phelan next reported on the Middle School family survey, which resulted in 85% of families opting for in-person learning. Remote only families will have grades 6-8 set up for live-streaming and it is anticipated that grade 5 will be run as a remote academy. The full in-person start date for grade 5 has not been determined, while grades 6-8 are slated for April 26. A team from DESE visited the Chenery Middle School this week to review challenges that are unique to operationalizing their return to in-person learning. For example, Assistant Superintendent Darias explained school lunch will be held in the cafeteria, outdoor tent spaces and in the large gym, forcing physical education classes to be held outdoors and in the small gym.

Committee members expressed interest in increasing METCO in-person participation when informed of their 66% in-person rate. The administration will address the concerns with the Belmont METCO Director. Also expressed was the desire to have remote only students stay connected with their district schools and be taught by capable educators.

Superintendent Phelan introduced Belmont High School Principal Isaac Taylor to share the plan for High School in-person learning. As a step towards a full in-person return, on April 12, Hybrid Cohorts will be collapsed and all students will be in-person 4 mornings (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday). There will be no changes to the class schedule and dismissal will be at 11:55 am, with lunch occurring at home. Afternoons will be remote learning.

Safety protocols have been established at Belmont High School in addition to using the usual mitigating factors. Students utilize a QR code scan to sign in and out of class and when transitioning to other locations. This system is used to identify close contacts.

The high school administration is looking at creating a different schedule for full in-person learning, as offering lunch safely to students will be a challenge given structural constraints. The number of students at lunch each day is different based on the current schedule and there are limited large spaces due to the field house being used for testing (MCAS and AP). Principals will continue to plan for full in-person, but are also waiting DESE guidance to not implement a plan and have the guidance necessitate a change.

Student Advisory member Fick voiced support to move forward and not wait for DESE guidance. The administration explained that the survey closes March 31, giving a short time to purchase needed furniture, and shift teachers to accommodate classes based on how many students will come back in this next phase.

A motion was offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Amy Checkoway: The School Committee encourages the School Administration in conjunction with the work of RTIPLWG to prioritize high school students back to full in-person learning as quickly as possible in April. The Committee unanimously voted to support the motion.

Chair Prestwich welcomed comments from the public.

S Grace – Asked if it would be possible to have students back now since some hybrid students are not actually coming in person. –The School does not have the needed furniture and wants a smooth transition into the next phase, hopefully using the same mod schedule.

YZhou – Asked if current remote teachers will be in-person for next phase? And how quickly is the move if a family chooses remote then asks to switch to 'in-person'. –Teachers are being asked for their students' plans now. It will be assessed if children switching in can be accommodated.

Superintendent Phelan relayed the district's pleasure in getting students in school and ending the year better than it began.

3. ADJOURNED

On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Tara Donner, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:



Catherine Bowen, Secretary