

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
OCTOBER 19, 2021

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: November 10, 2021
TIME: 2:55 PM

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Andrea Prestwich
Mr. Jamal Saeh
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

Absent: Ms. Kate Bowen

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

These meeting minutes may include statements by members of the public. Although the School Committee tries to reproduce these statements faithfully, the School Committee does not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed in these statements and cannot guarantee that the information contained in these statements is accurate.

Frederique Rigoulot- Inquired about MCAS data for children on IEPs and what the district does with those results.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

An additional item "SC resignation and appointment process" was added to the agenda after item 3.3- Q&A with Boston Families.

1.4 Chair's Report

Chairperson Checkoway welcomed the Boston families and announced the dates and times of community tours of the new High School. The SC is prioritizing goal setting (short term and long term goals) to align with strategic plan of the district, which will focus on teaching and learning, and district resources (both human and financial).

1.5 Superintendent's Report – came after agenda item 3.1 and 3.2 to allow guests to come on earlier.

Superintendent Phelan gave an overview of COVID19 testing priorities and progress, which included recent help from the National Guard. Mr. Phelan also referenced 2021-2022 strategic work and priorities for the district, which ranged from the daily support of school operations for students and staff, to the negotiation process with five union groups and more community-impacted items such as the community path, and neighborhood traffic concerns. Mr. Phelan will follow up with the Belmont Board of Health and Nursing Director Rumley to answer SC member questions with regard to numbers of close contact absences and quarantine.

Options for how lunch will be served safely during the Winter will be communicated by November 1. Tents are in place until November 16. The District is working on the details for operationalizing the Extracurricular Vaccine Policy for the December 1 start date.

The BPS spotlight featured Arto Asadoorian, Director of Visual and Performing Arts who spoke on the reviving and rebuilding of VPA programs. Mr. Asadoorian is proud of the way teachers taught via remote and hybrid last year, and asked for patience as they revive all programs. Band, chorus and theatre classes are back. He acknowledged VPA programs benefit from broad community support for not only funding, but for operational assistance as well.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2.1 No unfinished business

3. MAJOR BUSINESS

3.1 Belmont Against Racism Donation

Superintendent Phelan introduced Belmont Against Racism (BAR) board members, Kathryn Bonfiglio, Angela Middleton and Kim Haley-Jackson. Ms. Bonfiglio thanked the district for their initiatives with the Director of DEI. Kim Haley-Jackson spoke on the affinity group Black and Brown in Belmont, which seeks to provide support of Belmont and Boston families who identify as Black and Brown. Ms. Middleton encouraged the Boston families to become involved in BAR and Black and Brown in Belmont.

Ms. Bonfiglio presented the School Committee with a donation for \$22,000 to the METCO Support Fund, which was established 20 years ago to primarily support transportation at the High School level, but has expanded to all schools and supports programming, offers scholarships, funds METCO leadership conferences and teacher professional development. Chair Checkoway thanked the group for their efforts and donation.

On a motion offered by Jamal Saeh, and seconded by Mike Crowley, the SC voted unanimously (5-0) to accept the donation for the METCO Support Fund.

3.2 METCO Update

Superintendent Phelan introduced METCO Director Rosa Inniss, who presented an update for the 2021-2022 school year. Ms. Inniss reported the total number of students participating in the METCO program this year is 90, with the following breakdown: 40 elementary, 25 middle and 25 high school. This number is one student less than last year and approximately 10 students less than pre-pandemic levels. A lower application pool and funding are factors to the lower enrollment numbers. Ms. Inniss also provided participation by city demographics. Key priorities of the program include social and emotional well-being, academic support, staffing infrastructure and anti-racism work. Tutoring services and standard transportation services (high school bus, M7 passes, BHS taxi service) will continue, and new professional aides at the elementary levels will be hired. The district will focus on increasing college planning supports and expanding affinity groups at all levels.

After some questions from School Committee members, Ms. Inniss gave the group an overview of the METCO Inc. application/allotment process. Superintendent Phelan thanked the SC for prioritizing METCO professional aides in the budget as the METCO Director indicated more classroom aides would help the program.

3.3 Q & A with Boston Families

Chair Checkoway took questions and comments from Boston families.

Angela Middleton- Asked for an update on the staffing plan to increase staff of color.

3.4 School Committee Resignation and Appointment Process

School Committee member Andrea Prestwich informed the Belmont Town Clerk of her resignation from the Belmont School Committee effective October 20, 2021. Chair Checkoway gave an overview of Ms. Prestwich's tenure as the longest standing member on the current SC (since 2016). Ms. Prestwich advocated for later High School start times throughout her tenure, was the only member to volunteer to become interim chair, and served as chair during a very challenging time.

Ms. Prestwich explained due to her new role on the National Science Foundation, she felt the need to step down from the School Committee, as she will not be able to give the group the attention it deserves. Chair Checkoway notified the Select Board chair of the resignation and requested a joint meeting for the new member appointment process.

3.5 Enrollment Report

Annually, Assistant Superintendent Darias provides a report on enrollment and class sizes after the official DESE enrollment figure is established. The official enrollment number of October 1, 2021, is 4285 students. This number represents 93 fewer students than last year. Student enrollment trends for (K-12) increased by 639 from 2012-2019, and the trend for 2019-2021 was the opposite, decreasing by 348 with the majority decrease occurring at the elementary and middle school levels. The High School showed a net increase in enrollment.

Ms. Darias reported on middle school class sizes by grade compared to guidelines and high school class averages and ranges by department. All elementary classes meet class size guidelines for the first time in a decade.

School Committee members asked questions and commented on the enrollment and class size overview. Although the district always has movement during the year, It is unknown how much of the decline in enrollment is due to visiting professors or doctors from overseas not coming due to COVID. Student withdrawal tracking shows more than half moved out of town and others went to private school.

The hope is families will come back due to the new High School, smaller class sizes and easing of COVID restrictions.

Current enrollment is not to the level of original projections, but COVID has interrupted the natural process. The McKibben enrollment report was based on grades K-12 and did not include Prekindergarten or LABBB. The district is not sure the report is applicable now and has to think differently about projections. Superintendent Phelan indicated the priority should be to staff to where students are and support that programming.

3.6 Finance Subcommittee FY23, 24, 25 Planning Update

The Town of Belmont and the School Department are using one-time federal funds to support their operating budgets. Superintendent Phelan gave a historical context of a multi-year position plan and compared it to the current district status in the areas of enrollment, achievement, social emotional needs and one time federal funding. The administration will look at present needs of the district plan and future COVID needs to serve the students well and move the district forward with programming/vision of teaching and learning. Mr. Phelan indicated one-time free cash and federal funds would be depleted by FY25. The administration will be proactive to encourage the community to watch Warrant Committee, Select Board and School Committee meetings to start the budget conversation knowing families want to support other

considerations of the Town such as the library, ice rink, new school building staffing and town/school services.

Chair Checkoway took questions and comments from the public.

Bill Anderson – Asked about current enrollment compared to the last two years. He indicated the district is well below the forecasted numbers that were used for the new MHS.

Chair Checkoway stepped away at 9:17pm and returned 9:29 pm.

3.7 Staffing Update

Director of Human Capital, Michael McAllister gave a brief presentation on district staffing. He reported on a different experience this year than in the past where hiring is more challenging. Mr. McAllister shared a list of current openings throughout the district from a fiscal coordinator to lunch aides. He is receiving fewer applications and is experiencing “ghosting” where candidates apply, interview and receive offer but do not complete paperwork to be on boarded. Hiring barriers include increasing competition from private businesses, concerns about working among younger unvaccinated students, and an increased workload. New approaches the department has employed are increasing the number of platforms for advertising, increasing networking/outreach efforts to parents, collaborating with MASPA members to share challenges, and coordinating with the National Guard.

3.8 ESSER 2021-2022 Update – postponed to a future date

4. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

- 4.1 Finance Subcommittee
- 4.2 Policy Subcommittee
- 4.3 Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee
- 4.4 Equity Subcommittee
- 4.5 Capital Budget Committee
- 4.6 Warrant Committee
- 4.7 Belmont High School Building Committee –meeting Oct 20 for design space west of Harris Field
- 4.8 Community Path
- 4.9 Financial Task Force II
- 4.10 Rink Working Group
- 4.11 EDCO
- 4.12 Long-Term Capital
- 4.13 Structural Change Impact Committee

5. OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 Consent Agenda – Technology Surplus Items

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Jamal Saeh, the School Committee VOTED unanimously (5-0-0) on a roll call vote to declare the technology materials and equipment listed in the packet as surplus.

- 5.2 Personnel Items
- 5.3 Business Items
- 5.4 Approval of Minutes
 - School Committee Minutes of September 21, 2021

- School Committee Minutes of October 5, 2021

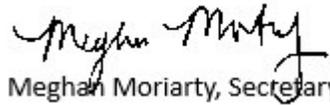
On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Andrea Prestwich, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (5-0-0) to accept the SC minutes of September 21, 2021 with indicated edits.

On a motion offered by Andrea Prestwich and seconded by Mike Crowley, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (5-0-0) to accept the SC minutes of October 5, 2021.

6. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Andrea Prestwich and seconded by Amy Checkoway, it was VOTED unanimously (5-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:


Meghan Moriarty, Secretary