

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

MARCH 23, 2022

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: June 16, 2022

TIME: 2:38 PM

Present: Ms. Amy Checkoway, Chair
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Mr. Mike Crowley
Mr. Ralph Jones
Mr. Jamal Saeh
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations
Mr. Duncan Beecroft, Student Advisor

1.1 OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Committee Chair Amy Checkoway called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns - none

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda - none

1.4 Chair's Report

Due to the length of agenda items, the Chair did not offer a formal report, but took the opportunity to thank member Ralph Jones for his leadership and expertise while filling the vacated SC seat. Member Moriarty spoke on behalf of SC members and offered thanks for Mr. Jones' long time commitment to the Town of Belmont and School Department, and shared some examples and personal antidotes.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan indicated a Superintendent's Newsletter will be going out at the end of the week and he gave some highlights, which included summer program announcements and recent activities at each school.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- School Committee Minutes of March 7, 2022
- School Committee Minutes of March 8, 2022

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was VOTED unanimously, on a roll call vote (6-0-0) to accept the School Committee minutes of March 7, 2022, March 8, 2022, as amended.

4. MAJOR BUSINESS

4.1 School Choice

Each year, School Committees consider whether their district should be in the School Choice program during the upcoming school year, which allows parents to send their children to schools in communities other than the city or town in which they live. A vote must be taken prior to June 1 and reported to DESE. Over the past few years Belmont has not participated in the program due to high enrollment. Member Jones conveyed his mistake from the past of recommending the School Choice program, as it did not work well for Belmont. Superintendent Phelan recommended the Committee vote to decline participation in the School Choice program for the 2022-2023 school year.

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Kate Bowen, it was VOTED unanimously on a roll call vote (6-0-0) in accordance with MGL Chapter 76, Section 128, to decline participation in School Choice for the 2022- 2023 school year.

4.2 Transportation Policy Update (vote)

The Policy Subcommittee proposed updates to the Student Transportation Services policy #7006, which would make an addition to the title and incorporate supporting physically active forms of transportation to and from school in the hopes to decrease vehicular congestion and idling. The updated policy incorporated language reviewed by MASC and MADOT. This was the second reading.

On a motion by Meg Moriarty and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to accept Policy 7006 Student Transportation Services with the new language.

4.3 DEI Update

Superintendent Phelan introduced Directory of DEI Chon'tel Washington who presented: equity audit next steps, community partner group, equity-planning steering committee and the new DEI website.

- Equity Audit, Next Steps –Post audit timeline was presented. District strategic planning will occur April-May.
- DEI Community Partners Group-Ms. Washington met with BAR, HRC, PTO/PTA, school DEI committees and other community groups in an effort to streamline the communication process between all groups.
- Equity Action Planning Steering Committee – This new committee will gather feedback from Belmont stakeholders regarding equity audit findings during the district equity-planning phase. Members will be DEI Director, two BPS teachers, vice-chair of BHRC, community member Susan Burges-Cox. The group may evolve to include a student voice and others.
- DEI Website – The new site is active and will include a mission statement, resources, and place to find information on the district 3 year plan.

Some School Committee members asked questions as to the timeline and process of the strategic plan and steering committee make up. Meg Moriarty recommended the SC participate in DEI/anti-racist training.

4.4 Challenger Math Update

Chair Checkoway and Superintendent Phelan acknowledged recent community messages to the School Committee and administration regarding math. Assistant Superintendent Darias presented an update on the Challenger Geometry Program and acknowledged the work of Challenger Geometry teacher

Oliver Ward and Director of Mathematics Jon Golden. The presentation included middle and high school math pathways, a review of Challenger Geometry program year 1, areas for growth for 2022-2023 and increasing access to advanced learning in math, K-12.

Ms. Darias touched upon the two math pathways in grades 7 and 8 that were in place for the last 10 years. The first path matched traditional grades and standards. The second path compacted three years of math into two years and required students to take a test to follow this path. The Challenger program was created to do the same compacting, allowing for Algebra 2 in 9th grade.

Registration was reported at 223 students (150 Grade 8, 73 Grade 9) with 10% deciding to withdraw from the program. Student supports include extra time in the weekly online sessions, regular communication to students and families regarding student progress, and supplemental problem sets to students seeking extra practice. Mr. Ward used students' feedback and updated the class.

Stated successes of the program included removing a test requirement that allowed more students to participate with 90% of those students on track to successfully complete both Geometry and their Algebra class. According to Ms Darias, the program met with overall positive feedback. Areas for growth noted were: the ability to replicate typical honors geometry class using online platform (Edgenuity), scheduling around Edgenuity, need to identify better support for 9th graders taking Algebra2 as a first math course at BHS, student assessment needs to change to better align with Honors Geometry.

Next, Assistant Superintendent Darias reviewed changes for the Challenger Geometry program for the 2022-23 school year, which include possibly replacing Edgenuity with BPS online content to better align with current Honors Geometry curriculum, and adjusting summer work to target skills needed for success. Ms. Darias noted an Information session for parents/guardians and registration for 2022-2023 in May.

In a response to community feedback to improve access to advanced learning in math K-12, the district will pilot a no placement test option for the 2022-2023 SY, where a student and their parent can attest to knowing all the standards of a particular math course in order to take the next math course in the pathway. Information will be sent to families by March 30 and forms will be due by April 15 for course registration 2022-2023. The administration will also will establish a math working group by May 2022, that will meet through November 2022, and will bring short-term and long-term recommendations to the School Committee, Curriculum Subcommittee in December 2022.

The working group will be made up of:

- building based and math administrators
- math educators
- parents/community members
 - 2 from the math parents group
 - 2 who represent special education
 - 2 who represent diversity

Program and budget strategies were outlined for the 2022-2023 school year, which touched upon a bridge for Grade 7/8 students to access the Challenger Program and the necessity of funding elementary math specialists in FY23 and FY24.

Chair Checkoway opened the discussion to School Committee members for questions and comments.

Amy Checkoway –Confirmed differences between high school course levels H1, H2, and CP is a combination of the “amount” of standards taught and the pace at which they are taught. Chair

Checkoway sees these pathways as an opportunity to support and challenge students K-12 and the working group as an opportunity to gather additional data on students not meeting benchmarks and for the community to partner with SD/SC.

Jamal Saeh – Asked if the district needs 3 levels of each course CP, H1 and H2. Mr. Saeh, wants to make sure long-term vision is supported to ensure those who are struggling in math are not left behind. His concern is budget pressures and suggests placing funding where it would better support students across the board. Mr. Saeh also suggested the SC help with community engagement to bring back data to the working group for their review/incorporation.

In answering Member Saeh’s additional question regarding Challenger program demographics, Assistant Superintendent Darias reported the program does not represent district-wide student demographics. The upcoming summer work to support Grade 7 math skills and improve other skills that are lacking will help, but there is not enough staff to support all students. The district focused on math specialists for Grades 3 and 4 because there was an urgent need at those levels. Superintendent Phelan followed up with the number of students currently not meeting math benchmarks (105 students in grade 5, 120 in grade 6). The Superintendent hopes to create a team of math specialists similar to ELE specialists (N=10) and to match the overall success of the ELE program.

Ralph Jones - Communicated the need to make sure the performance of Black students meets benchmarks and suggested looking into Mims program. Mr. Jones questioned why previously students could move forward easily and now it is more difficult. Superintendent offered that teachers want students to be successful and sometimes they are in disagreement with parents, as well as having limited resources.

Meg Moriarty - Asked parents for patience due to challenging couple of years with COVID, racial justice initiatives, and negotiations. Ms. Moriarty is pleased the district is taking another look at math pathways with existing best practices to move forward and suggested the working group could include a math specific expert. Moriarty suggests tying math visioning and leadership to goals, if and when the SC is asking the administration to take that on within the next year, although it has not risen to that level yet.

When Member Moriarty asked if the administration sees the interface of the math working group with the Curriculum & Instruction Subcommittee instead of full SC, Superintendent Phelan confirmed initial work would ultimately go through the subcommittee and would then go through a budget and equity lens review. Mr. Phelan anticipates giving more specifics by the next meeting.

Mike Crowley – Felt BPS has an obligation to meet students where they are with benchmarks, but is concerned about holding kids back from advanced math. Mr. Crowley supported the use of federal funds to hire math specialists, but is questioning how the district will sustain it. Crowley suggested a SC member be part of the working group and volunteered.

Kate Bowen – Asked if there were other ways in which kids are not able to participate in math pathways or if there were problems with Edgenuity? As to the role of SC with family engagement, Bowen felt the SC has already received a lot feedback last two years and suggests gathering that feedback. Ms. Bowen supports the elementary focus of math specialists.

Assistant Superintendent Darias – Spoke to the curriculum review cycle, which was interrupted by COVID. The Math Curriculum is next to be reviewed at the district level. The proposed math working group could look at a short-term fix and the full math curriculum review will focus on long-term goals.

Chair Checkoway took comments and questions from community members.

Russell Mann- Voiced his thanks to the School Committee and Administration for being responsive to feedback from parents. The changes being suggested are positive and Mr. Mann feels it key to create more pathways for math. He is supportive of math specialists and will encourage others to be as well.

Jason Ketola- Is pleased the district reintroduced math advancement and is supportive of math specialists.

David Palmer – Thanked SC and Administration for listening to feedback and working together to meet student needs. Mr. Palmer asked for working group specifics upfront.

Sunyoung Hong- Agreed with changes for access to advanced math learning and community engagement. Ms. Hong asked for registration specifics. Superintendent Phelan confirmed the advanced math learning is for the High School only.

Emily Peterson- Thanked the administration and SC for listening to parent advocacy and looked forward to the plan as an elementary parent.

Susan Burgess-Cox – As a parent of students falling behind in math, Ms Burgess-Cox, offered a perspective from another voice (the wider math audience). She is pleased the group will look at long-term programming and not just for those who want to accelerate.

Natalya Palacios – Thanked SD for offering flexibility in math pathways. Her family decided to leave district due to lack of math flexibility and is encouraged by the change.

4.5 Dyslexia Presentation

Janice Darias introduced the presenters for Dyslexia Screening, Elementary ELA and Social Studies Curriculum Specialist Jaynene Dellitt-Young, Principals Heidi Paisner-Roffman and Anita Mecklenburg, and Director of Student Services Ken Kramer. The presentation focused on dyslexia guidelines that were published by DESE in April 2021 and incorporates instructional resources, the aligning of state and BPS guidelines and assessments, elementary screening timelines, and next steps. The BPS dyslexia group has been meeting the past year to work on supports for struggling readers, and to make sure BPS practices align with the guidelines.

Specialist Dellitt-Young reviewed the core instructional resources for early literacy (K-2) and the five elements of reading learning (Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension). When looking at Indicators of dyslexia, the district uses specific programs, small group materials, books and technology. Tier 2 and Tier 3 resources for literacy K-4: use Orton-Gillingham multisensory approach, Wilson reading system, 95 percent group, read naturally and for Vocabulary, Leveled Literacy Intervention. Many interventions are happening even before formally evaluating students.

Belmont assessments align with MA Dyslexia Guidelines. The district follows a tight assessment calendar starting with screening in fall and two other sweeps during the year. Planned instructional cycles occur 5-6 times in year and are flexible, based on student progress. Overall data collection for assessments include curriculum-based measures, diagnostic assessments, classroom assessments and reading in text. Ms. Dellitt-Young next reported out on the Kindergarten – Grade 2 screening timeline for MA Dyslexia Guidelines, using specific skills. A comparison of MCAS scores from 2017 to present for

grades 3 and 4 showed growth in screening process with grade 3 progressing in the “meeting or exceeding expectations” category from 69% to 81% and grade 4 improving from 76% to 83%.

Next Principals Paisner-Roffman and Mecklenburg covered the framework under which all the work occurs. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are a blend of academic and social emotional supports that learners need to thrive. Key components of MTSS are regular assessment, team planning, child centered practice, flexible grouping and proactive measures, with three tiers of support:

1. Core instruction-80% of students will have their needs met through core instruction, differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning.
2. Small group support-Provided by classroom teachers, academic specialist or instructional aides in addition to tier one. Support is targeted and then progress is monitored.
3. More intensive and individualized support given to approximately 5% of students, that are highly specialized interventions.

Paisner-Roffman and Mecklenburg explained the relationship to Dyslexia, where students receive evidence based intervention as soon as they demonstrate a need for it. If students do not respond to less intensive intervention, they receive more intensive support. Any special education referral is data-based. Specific examples of were given from the student perspective for Tiers 1, 2 and 3 supports.

The presentation shifted to dyslexia and special education. Ken Kramer reported students who have dyslexia can and should make effective progress with general education supports. For those students who may need special education services to make effective progress, timely and appropriate SpEd evaluation and eligibility determination is key. Kramer shared that dyslexia is categorized by DESE as a Specific Learning Disability and reviewed three key areas of focus:

1. Referral – child find, early intervention services or parents/guardians/staff
2. Evaluation – uses full range of data sources, individualized evaluation and seeks to evaluate why disability is occurring
3. IEP Development – rely on assessment data, team review and discuss considerations for accommodations and modifications

Assistant Superintendent Darias summarized district diagnostic and screening assessments, which meet state guidelines. The district is always learning and growing and has as such purchased universal screening tool for reading and math, grades K-8 that will be piloted spring 2022.

Chair Checkoway allowed for questions and comments from the School Committee.

Member Moriarty asked about the communication process with parents. Ms. Dellitt-Young indicated teachers are always in direct communication with parents. Tier 2 interventions happen within core instruction, but Tier 3 will include reading specialists in direct contact with parents.

Mike Crowley asked how many students there are in the district with dyslexia. It was approximated at 15-16% of students serviced between tier 2-3. Mr. Crowley also inquired how many teachers/specialists have certification for dyslexia. 40% are Wilson certified, 50% are Special Education licensed, 100% Orton-Gillingham trained.

Amy Checkoway asked what could be improved for dyslexic students. Ms. Darias voiced the district is always working to improve core instruction, working through disruptions of teacher leaves and resignations. Mr. Kramer felt more data review/training time would be beneficial.

Chair Checkoway took questions and comments from community members.

Amy DeDeo- Ms. DeDeo asked at what point is a failing reader evaluated for an IEP.

Heather Rubeski – Indicated she was not aware the district group has been working on dyslexia the past year and noticed parents were not listed as a partner for the group which she suggests would be an improvement. Ms. Rubeski mentioned dyslexia effects all subjects not just reading, and would like more training for and resources for staff.

Erika Wolf – Voiced it is difficult as a parent of dyslexic child to hear parents wanting children to be in advanced math. Ms. Wolf would like programs to be viewed through an equity lens.

Peg Callahan- Encouraged DEI task force to have public meetings and to post minutes. Issues around trust around equity audit. Ms. Callahan recommend the DEI group include a parent from each education level, a SC member and a student for a broader lens.

4.6 Isolation Time for Unvaccinated Individuals - discuss/vote

At the January 11, 2022 SC meeting, a motion was passed to follow DESE isolation guidance and adopt the following additional mitigation: all unvaccinated students shall be required to complete a 10-day isolation to return to school. With increases in vaccination rates and a decrease in COVID positivity rates, the SC discussed whether the additional mitigation is necessary.

On a motion offered by Mike Crowley and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was voted unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote that BPS will follow DESE guidance with respect to isolation time.

4.7 Policy Discussion – Dedication of Buildings and Facilities

At a recent Policy subcommittee meeting, policy 7003 Dedication of Buildings and Facilities was discussed to add language that is more inclusive of the entire Belmont community (Boston families and staff who do not live in Belmont) and to specify a fundraising and naming process that is fair, clear, efficient and transparent. The added language will be in line with MASC suggestions and other districts. This is the first reading. There were no comments or suggested changes to the language that was presented.

5. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES - as needed

Upcoming Executive Session - Thursday March 24, 2022

Upcoming Finance Subcommittee and Executive Session - Tuesday March 29, 2022

6. OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Consent Agenda

- CMS Music Department Surplus Items

On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to accept the items listed as surplus.

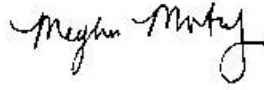
6.2 Personnel Items - None

6.3 Business Items - None

7. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Ralph Jones, it was VOTED unanimously (6-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Meghan M. Jones".