

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

MAY 24, 2022

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: June 16, 2022
TIME: 2:41 PM

Present: Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Chair
Ms Amy Checkoway, Secretary
Ms. Catherine Bowen, Member
Mr. Jeff Liberty, Member
Mr. Jamal Saeh, Member
John Phelan, Superintendent
Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction
Michael McAllister, Director of Human Capital
Chon'tel Washington, Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Absent: Mr. Michael Crowley, Member

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Call to Order

Chair Moriarty called the School Committee to order at 6:32 pm. She led a moment of silence for the tragic Texas school shooting earlier in the day and previewed the meeting agenda.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

Rich Hanna asked for any additional information about the high school bombing threat, including if anything new was learned about how to handle this in the future and any motives that the accused person had.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

1.4 Chair's Report

The Chair's report included:

- An update about the math working group;
- Acknowledgement of the strong recommendation for mask wearing given COVID data;

- Request for School Committee members to share their availability for an upcoming retreat; and
- Heads up about a busy Town Meeting (Segment B) approaching.

1.5 Superintendent's Report

The Superintendent's report included the following topics:

- NEASC accreditation update. The district has been granted an allowance to postpone this process by one year (until 2022-23) due to pandemic disruptions.
- State tiered focus monitoring (update provided by Assistant Superintendent Darias). This process is now conducted by DESE every three years. The 2021-22 school year was the district's year for standards in Group B, which includes special education and civil rights procedures and practices. This is a process that all districts go through. In May, the district uploaded a lot of information for DESE review. Findings included that all special education standards were fully implemented and 17 of the 18 civil rights procedures and practices were implemented, with one pertaining to discipline partially implemented. The partial implementation relates to having an education services plan if someone is expelled or suspended for more than 10 days, and the need to include this in the student handbook. Assistant Superintendent Darias commented that the district had a plan already, but needs to make sure it is submitted to DESE and that everyone is trained. Tomorrow, a link will be sent out to the school community to the detailed final report. The district has one year to complete a continuous improvement plan, but it will not take this long.
- Health team. The Superintendent reported that he is still meeting weekly with the health team and wanted to reinforce the recommendation for mask wearing, including for families attending school events, to help ensure no disruptions to end of year events. He also mentioned the latest vaccinate booster event tomorrow for ages 5 and up (May 25). He was encouraged that the wastewater levels have experienced six days of decline and hopes that the latest COVID uptick is behind us.
- Winn Brook start time. The Superintendent reported out the recommendation by the Winn Brook principal and the district to change the start time next school year from 8:50 to 8:40. The principal did a survey and found that 72% of staff were in favor or ambivalent of this change and 70% of families were in favor or ambivalent. He knows that 10 minutes may be a challenge for individuals and families in one direction or another. They have let the before and afterschool program know, and the principal has communicated this change to Winn Brook families. This is an update, not a votable item, and they have also worked this through the JLM process with the BEA.

- Bias incident/report form. An update about this form went out to the school community. This is work that is already happening, and the form is another tool in the toolbox. The district is trying to be more thoughtful about how incidents are tracked and monitored for consistency purposes. He is sure that some refinements will need to be made over time, and they will take it “week by week.” As always, this is work with principals and families. In most occasions, this is about supporting students who may have made a bad choice. The most issues they are seeing are at the middle school. This is one part of the DEI work, and the district accepts some of the feedback received and will use it.
- Bomb threat. The high school did have a bomb threat on 5/11. The call was received from the Belmont police at 6:44 am. The emergency response manual was used and school was evacuated. They continued to field support from the police department and brought in special dogs to search the building. This was an isolated threat to this building, and they wanted to make sure this was clear that the other five schools were okay. Two follow up communications were sent outlining what happened to families. Since this date, there has been an arrest, and this is an open investigation.
- Good news. The Arlington-Belmont crew team has qualified for nationals in June in Florida. The members of the team from BHS were named aloud.

Member Liberty asked two clarification questions:

- 1) Does the Superintendent know how many answered the Winn Brook parent survey. The Superintendent responded 257-259.
- 2) Is the incident report the only way to report something? The Superintendent responded that no, they always receive calls from families and this is a more formal way to report something.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- School Committee Minutes of April 8, 2022
- School Committee Minutes of April 26, 2022
- School Committee Minutes of May 10, 2022

The minutes were approved unanimously by the members present at each meeting, with additional minor edits to 5/10 and the understanding that the wording of the motion would be added to the 4/8 minutes.

4. MAJOR BUSINESS

4.1 Review of Capital Budget Committee TM Article (Vote)

The Chair of the Capital Budget Committee, Anne Marie Mahoney joined the School Committee and thanked the Committee for its partnership, especially over the past couple years, which she thinks has led to better collaboration and understanding. She hopes this will continue with new comprehensive capital committee. Ms. Mahoney detailed the school related items that will be put before Town Meeting for approval and then can answer questions about any projects. For the first time, the Capital Budget Committee has been able to fund all requested projects.

The school-related projects include:

- Butler Masonry Façade Repair
- Butler KalWal Replacement
- Butler PA system
- Wellington heat pump
- Winn Brook fire/PA system
- Fiber (IT-related) Burbank/Wellington

The Capital Budget Committee has allocated most of the facility-related funding this year to school building improvements. There is still a significant amount of work in the future including replacing the Butler roof and more windows and the Chenery roof and HVAC system.

Member Bowen asked about the situation with the Wellington heat pump, and Ms. Mahoney explained that the Wellington heat pump was never well managed or taken care of as it should have been so it needed to be replaced even though it is newer (11 years old). Member Bowen asked about planning for the future and assumes capital funds will be considered in the context of CPA funds, especially since some features on school buildings are historic. Ms. Mahoney mentioned that the Butler slate roof could cost about \$1.6M if the same materials are used.

Member Liberty asked the Superintendent about the maintenance of the HVAC system and who is responsible for servicing it at Wellington, and if we have any other similar heating systems in other buildings. The Superintendent explained that 11 years ago this was new technology to navigate, and although he was not there at this time, the work was contracted out since the facilities director did not know how to deal with it. The facilities department is responsible for all the HVAC systems, and over time a HVAC service person was hired on staff, and then designed new high school to have complicated HVAC system that energy efficient. A consultant was hired to bridge the design work to the actual work. The HVAC service person is now responsible (David Gillis), and he now has someone underneath him to do more traditional servicing work.

The Superintendent and School Committee thanked Ms. Mahoney for all of her service to the Capital Budget Committee and town.

The School Committee unanimously (5-0) in support of favorable action on the school-related capital projects that will come before Town Meeting.

4.2 FY23 Hiring Update

Mr. McAllister and Ms. Washington co-presented this presentation focused on workforce diversification of the Belmont Public Schools, beginning with guiding principles. Ms. Washington discussed reordering the traditional order of priorities to recruit, then hire, then retain to the new order of retain, then recruit, then hire. If the district can retain and create a good environment for all, then it will be easier to recruit/hire diverse educators and staff. There are some structures in place to support educators of color, and there is more that can be done. They hope to come back in a year with a more exhaustive list.

The presentation included data on the differences between student and educator demographics. The current workforce is predominantly white, while the student body is much more diverse. With hiring work, representation alone will not solve problems with diversity; it is also important to improve mindsets of the current workforce and hire equity-minded individuals overall. This year, the district hired 20 new educators of colors across units including coaches and individuals receiving extracurricular stipends.

The presentation also included 17 steps that we can take now – four related to retention, five related to recruiting, and eight related to hiring. There are equity audit findings that are helpful in terms of next steps.

Mr. McAllister ended with three final thoughts that should restate each time we talk about this work: Dedicate Ourselves, Take Responsibility, and Have Courage.

Some clarification questions were asked by School Committee members about the content of the slides.

Member Liberty asked what success would look like in 3 years? 5 years? Mr. McAllister said they have not come up with a number and are trying to figure out what it should be. He proposes also understanding if students in different subgroups are feeling connected versus just looking at demographics of staff.

Mr. McAllister recognized the importance of exit interviews to understand retention issues moving forward.

4.3 DEI Equity Action Planning 2022

Ms. Washington presented an update about the equity action planning. She has also made this presentation to Town Meeting. The Equity Action Planning (EAP) Steering Committee was formed to help follow up on the equity audit and next steps with action planning. She first discussed her role generally and provided some background on the equity audit that was conducted by outside consultants. There is a webpage including the audit results dedicated to this work.

The charge for the EAP Steering Committee is to review the equity audit report and invite staff, students, families, and community members to come and help prioritize the information and figure out where to get started. They created a Google form that is very broad and informal to try to summarize some of the key findings and hear what the community has to say and did some follow-up virtual forums to get additional feedback. They want to take this information and put it into a DEI work plan, which is different from a strategic plan that will come a bit later and include equity goals in the broader plan. They want some concrete steps that came move forward with next year, which is next step. Ms. Washington shared a detailed list of all the meetings they have conducted including some meetings that are still to come with different stakeholders, including students.

Ms. Washington reviewed what has been gathered so far from the questionnaire and open sessions. Some of the things that have come up include getting more input from the broader community, how to engage immigrant families about race issues in the U.S., addressing some of the concerns about anti-racism work that may exist in the town, that we should consider raising some of these issues with students at a younger age, and elevating minoritized voices.

In terms of what is next for the work, we have a lot of information and now need to move forward and figure out action steps. The work plan is next.

Member Liberty encouraged Ms. Washington to connect with the Belmont Pan Asian Coalition and Chinese American Association.

Superintendent Phelan thanked Ms. Washington for all of her work this year and acknowledged that it is a significant amount of work including getting to know the community. There is more to come, this year over the summer and leading into next year. Ms. Washington thanked the EAP Steering Committee members, and said it was a great experience working together. They will continue to meet until the summer.

Member Checkoway asked about the Steering Committee and if its role will conclude this summer, and what Ms. Washington imagines will happen next in terms of process. Ms. Washington is very sensitive to the group's time so it will end in the summer. She does not know yet if it will pick up in the fall, and they will take the information that they are gathering and she

will continue to fold the information into the plan with central office staff and other folks who might be available over the summer.

Community member Peg Callanan made a couple comments: she found the audit report very interesting, and in terms of understanding all the different surveys, she found it difficult to make sense of everything, and she has been in touch with the district and how responsive people have been. She was not aware in time about the virtual meeting and is not familiar with the questionnaire, and will get in touch with Ms. Washington about how to access this. She loves the idea of hearing more from SEPAC and METCO parents. She has shared her concerns with the School Committee, and she has some serious concerns with some of the special education recommendations, which she thinks will be hard to implement without changes to the law. She is excited about the work plan and thought that a strategic plan would be in place by the end of the school year, and does think it needs more time. She looks forward to continuing to follow this work.

Ms. Washington clarified that will not implement recommendations without input from everyone, including the experts from the special services department.

4.4 FY23 Budget Re-Vote

The School Committee voted on the draft 2 FY23 budget on May 3, and in this motion, there was a provision that if there were additional Chapter 70 funds that this would be included in the district budget, and since the budget was voted, this has been approved to include. The budget that was included in the Town Meeting packet includes the revised Chapter 70 amount, and tonight the School Committee is being asked to vote on the revised amount (which includes \$133,470 in Chapter 70 in the general fund district budget). The new general fund number is \$66,982,926. There are funds through grants and revolving accounts of over \$10 million, and this amount has not changed. The all in budget is \$77,098,295.

Chair Moriarty put forward the following motion: “Moved, that the School Committee approve the FY23 school budget of \$66,982,926 for the general fund sources and a total of \$77,098,295 for all grants and other sources. Member Checkoway seconded the motion, and the School Committee approved this motion unanimously (5-0).”

4.5 Superintendent’s Evaluation Presentation

Chair Moriarty reviewed for the School Committee the process publicly which is the same as last year. After the meeting, she will send back an individual feedback form with the Superintendent’s goals reflected, and School Committee members should return the feedback form to her by June 5. She will compile the feedback into a summary assessment and present this and the final ratings at our meeting on June 14. She does not plan at the meeting to say who

provided which rating, although individual feedback forms will be made available to the Superintendent.

Superintendent Phelan noted that he has sent a packet to the School Committee which includes the goals, his report out on the goals which was a 12-page document with a list of artifacts and active links. This will be posted on the web as well. There is also a copy of the model evaluation rubric for Superintendents and the artifacts themselves. He appreciates the Chair providing the School Committee time to provide feedback and encourages members to call him with any questions. He reviewed each of his three goals and the progress made this year. He also included details about some of the additional work that he has helped to lead this school year not related to his goals.

Member Checkoway noted that the School Committee had a workshop with MASC in October about superintendent evaluation with a focus on best practices, and the minutes are posted online with all the details. One best practice that she noted is to focus on the indicators referenced in the Superintendent's evaluation in our feedback and keep them in the forefront.

Member Liberty asked a couple process questions about the multi-year financial goal and why the three-year budget idea persisted even though the goals were approved in December when it may have been known that this was not going to happen. Superintendent Phelan and Member Checkoway clarified that the understanding of this goal and what made sense was still evolving at this time so it was not completely understood. Member Liberty also asked about the additional information that was provided outside of the scope of the goals, and if the School Committee is supposed to consider this or not. Superintendent Phelan said that he expects this will be considered as well. Member Liberty asked about if the links that are coming will include information about the efficacy of programs and so forth. Superintendent Phelan said that the links will show that the work was complete and do not include data. Assistant Superintendent Darias noted that the live links have already been sent.

5. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES (as needed)

Member Checkoway reported that hopefully the last EDCO Board meeting is on June 9. She will provide an update at an upcoming meeting about how everything panned out and what it means for Belmont from a financial perspective. It is good news in terms of not needing to make any additional financial contributions and hopefully everything is on track with the organization's dissolution.

Chair Moriarty noted that the finance subcommittee meeting that had been scheduled for tomorrow was canceled because of schedules and will be rescheduled for next week.

Member Liberty updated that the Equity Subcommittee met last week during which we got an update about ongoing DEI community work happening in the community. Today the Curriculum

& Instruction Subcommittee got an update and preview on the curriculum review work on science, which is very exciting.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Consent Agenda - None

6.2 Personnel Items - None

6.3 Business Items - None

7. ADJOURN

Chair Moriarty adjourned the School Committee meeting at 9:29 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Checkoway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".