

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Homer Building Gallery Room 19 Moore St. Belmont, MA
September 20, 2022

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: October 17, 2022
TIME: 3:42 PM

Present: Ms. Meghan Moriarty, Chair
Ms. Amy Checkoway, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Mr. Jeffrey Liberty (remote)
Mr. Jamal Saeh
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Anthony DiCologero, Director of Finance, Business and Operations

Absent: Mr. Michael Crowley

Also in attendance were Ms. Chon'tel Washington and Ms. Karla Koza.

Call to Order in Open Session

Chair Moriarty called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

On a motion offered by Meg Moriarty and seconded by Jamal Saeh, the School Committee voted to convene in Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy with regard to litigation of OML complaint given that a discussion in Open Session may have a detrimental impact on the School Committee's position. - all aye (5-0)

1. OPENING BUSINESS

1.1 Return to Open Session

The School Committee returned to Open Session at 6:31 pm.

1.2 Citizens' Concerns

Kara Sassone - Commented on the differences she has noticed from elementary school and middle school and concerns about recess and lines at/time for lunch in relation to social-emotional learning. She hopes that planning for the future and new 4-6 school takes into consideration these aspects of day and social-emotional needs.

1.3 Adjustments to the Agenda - none

1.4 Chair's Report

- SC will hold the October 18 meeting with Boston families at METCO Inc. headquarters
- Kate Bowen and Chair will move forward the policy services/revision process with MASC
- Subcommittees will begin organizing and determining their subcommittee chair and secretary

1.5 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Phelan offered a follow up to the Health Update from the last SC meeting. Other Middlesex League Superintendents report not following any specific metrics to determine mitigation

strategies. Mr. Phelan met with the BOH chair, SC chair and Health team. The following practices will be followed:

- School and Health departments encourage vaccination and boosters
- The District encourages all parents and staff to report all positive cases of COVID and will share with Health Department
- School Department will monitor reported cases and attendance rates in each school
- If a trend is detected, the school Nursing Department and Administration will consult with the Health Department to seek guidance and determine if any further measures need to be taken

Superintendent Phelan explained the Health Team would have flexibility in determining mitigating strategies within one class or one school if warranted. He also indicated that DESE stated school nurses do not have authority to mandate masking or other measures, and that this lies with the BOH. The District will check in with nurses and then with BOH for feedback and recommendations.

Superintendent Phelan next announced this year's 100th Thanksgiving football game between Belmont and Watertown will take place at Fenway Park.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- School Committee Joint with SB Minutes of August 3, 2022

On a motion offered by Kate Bowen and seconded by Jamal Saeh, it was voted (5-0) on a roll call vote to approve the School Committee minutes of August 3, 2022 as amended. Moriarty abstained.

4. MAJOR BUSINESS

4.1 Music Fee (vote)

Superintendent Phelan informed Chair Moriarty of a question regarding an instrumental music program fee which has been in place since 2008. After consultation with DESE and legal counsel, Superintendent Phelan recommends removing the fee this year. The financial impact of removing the fee was discussed. (*SC Document: Music Fee Memo*) If the fee is eliminated for FY23, the FY22 balance in the revolving account would cover all but \$18,017 of the budgeted program expenses. The remainder would come from the general funds budget. Going forward with FY24, the program cost would need to be charged to the general fund.

Director of Visual and Performing Arts Arto Asadoorian gave an overview of the communication process regarding the music program and financial aid. SC members were interested in more data on families that would have otherwise joined the program if there was no fee to begin with. It was determined the fees offset teacher salaries, and the fee per student has not changed.

Mr. Asadoorian shared a perspective that supporting the music programs at the elementary level builds a more robust program in CMS and BHS and gives students program options. Superintendent Phelan agrees with removing fees to allow all students the opportunity to participate for overall growth. There was support for removing the fees and desire to maintain the overall quality of the program, but several SC members were concerned with the overall budget picture for FY24. Chair Moriarty confirmed the department would be able to refund fees this year operationally and could communicate the change to families. Ms. Washington with contributions from Mr. Asadoorian discussed improvements with both access (fee reversal) and equity (Grade 5 program improvements).

On a motion offered by Meg Moriarty and seconded by Jeff Liberty it was voted (4-0-1) on a roll call vote to discontinue the practice of charging fees for Grade 4 strings and Grade 5 band and orchestra during school day and refund fees paid this year for SY 2022-2023. Saeh abstained.

Member Liberty discovered that the Chat function was on and asked if the entries should be read as public comment. Chair Moriarty indicated the Public Comment period (agenda item 1.2) was time for questions. It was decided the comments would be captured and emailed to the SC for followup.

4.2 Custodial Fees (vote)

In follow-up to the discussion and feedback during the September 13 School Committee meeting, Finance Director DiCologero reaffirmed the same amounts for recommended custodial fee changes for external details (*SC Document: Custodial Fee Memo*):

- Time-and-a-half hourly overtime rate (Monday-Saturday): Increase from \$45.00 to \$50.00
- Double-time overtime rate (Sundays and holidays): Increase from \$60.00 to \$70.00

Mr. DiCologero stated the AFSCME contract rates recently increased. The presented amounts are the lowest possible increases to cover costs and minimize impact on external renters.

On a motion offered by Meg Moriarty and seconded by Jamal Saeh it was voted unanimously (5-0-0) on a roll call vote to approve that effective September 21, 2022, the rates for custodial details for the use of school spaces by external groups be increased to:

- **Time-and-a-half hourly overtime rate (Monday-Saturday): Increase from \$45.00 to \$50.00**
- **Double-time overtime rate (Sundays and holidays): Increase from \$60.00 to \$70.00**

4.3 FY23 Budget Adjustment EL (vote)

As a follow up to the September 13 presentation to the SC, Assistant Superintendent Darias summarized the updated documents provided by English Language Director, Lindsey Rinder. (*SC Documents: ELE Program Intake Notes and Weighted EL Service Ratios*). The first document includes the number of students in the program. The second document reviews weighted EL services taking into account the proficiency level of each student.

As of September 16, the EL Program, had a student count of 415, prompting the request for additional 2.0 FTEs. Ms. Darias noted many other districts are seeing an increase in EL needs. EL Director Rinder indicated the district is now (as of September 20) at 432, a 22% increase in program size from last year. Other districts have similar increases. 22-25%

Chair Moriarty opened the meeting to SC for questions and comments.

Member Liberty the data that was known [EL growth], should have been shared publicly, such that it could have been considered as part of the FY23 budget process earlier.

In response to Liberty's inquiry, Ms. Rinder reported the district is close to needing a third position.

Chair Moriarty inquired if contractual services could be used to fill gaps. Ms. Rinder responded she has not heard of that in this field.

On a motion offered by Amy Checkoway and seconded by Kate Bowen, it was voted (5-0-0) on a roll call vote to approve the addition of 2.0 FTE to support EL services in response to increased enrollment for the current SY.

4.4 2022-2023 District Priorities Presentation

Chair Moriarty indicated the District Priorities are being presented for a second time, incorporating SC feedback from the August 30 retreat. Superintendent Phelan indicated over the past five years the district has been working on the reconfiguration of the Belmont Public Schools. With this shift in the district, the administration began the process of establishing a new Vision for Teaching and Learning to align with the NEASC mandate to create a "Portrait of Graduate" for students. Recent work refocused on district priorities to form a work plan. The Superintendent outlined three areas of focus for district priorities for the 2022-2023 school year. (*SD Document: District Priorities 2022-2023 Slides*). An additional document (*SD Document: District Priorities 2022-2023*) outlined the three priorities with detailed action steps, target dates of completion and output, as part of the planning and reporting out process to the School Committee and the public.

Budget - Develop student needs driven budget for FY24 focusing on staffing, Special Education (OOD tuitions, transportation and contract services), revolving fees, texts/materials/supplies, technology software and hardware, professional development and collaboration with Town partners related to FY24 budget calendar. A level service budget is the focus. Enrollment will be part of the discussion, especially for EL and SPED populations. Three points of interest are general fund allocation, federally funded positions, and additional increases for the transition to seven schools.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - Ensure all students have the access and opportunity to experience and achieve excellence. The district will hire more equity minded educators, utilize district and school based equity teams, and design/implement ongoing professional development. Intentional PD focus will be on the leadership this year. There will also be an Increased student voice.

Reconfiguration Transition - Successful completion of Phase 2 of BPS reconfiguration from a six to a seven school district. Successful opening of the 7/8 building for BMHS, Vision for Teaching and Learning & Portrait of A Graduate, and Curriculum Mapping system (Atlas).

Chair Moriarty took comments and questions from the School Committee members.

Member Saeh asked for clarification on the term "Moderate Level Service" budget. Superintendent Phelan indicated clarification will come from WC, but generally he doesn't think the desire is to take away from what the district has, but also do not want to add on what we have. The difficulty will be with additional needs due to new 7-8 school.

Member Saeh also asked at what point will the district come to SC with reconfiguration updates to make sure transition is progressing. Director Koza pointed to the target dates of completion on the District Priorities document. Ms. Koza will be attending SC meetings regularly, likely monthly. Superintendent Phelan explained the district will concentrate on the 7-8 school this year because operationally, the building must open in fall 2023. The work will then shift to review the new upper elementary school (Grades 4-6) schedule and needs.

Member Checkoway encouraged periodic reconfiguration check-ins with the SC and cautioned all to consider and include 4-6 school budgetary needs in advance.

Member Liberty made several comments. 1. Recommended tracking and identifying students that are vulnerable as a priority. 2. Asked the administration and SC if community/family engagement with transition work is a priority. Member Saeh replied he agrees in principle, but there are too many questions to know the answer at this point. Director Koza informed the group she is in the process of scheduling parent coffees, creating a new transition website, constructing Google forms for family questions, and organizing PTO/PTA connections. Mr. Phelan suggested the fall will be for communicating and the spring will focus more on community engagement and planning for the 4-6 school.

3. Asked how equity team's goals link to school council goals. Superintendent Phelan indicated that each principal will hold school advisory council meetings per law and goals are embedded in the school goals to support staff and impact student learning.

Member Checkoway encouraged the district to clearly communicate the process and timeline with families.

Chair Moriarty and Superintendent Phelan mentioned the possibility of adding meetings to stay on track with configuration and budget work through full SC meetings and meetings with finance liaisons.

Ms. Washington clarified Mr. Liberty's third comment about prioritizing vulnerable student populations is happening. The first step is to strengthen leadership and develop critical consciousness. Much of the work with MTSS will help identify all populations. Superintendent Phelan explained the work with MTSS will better keep track of the vulnerable students and student outcomes. The district is in the process of formalizing the tracking district-wide. Assistant Superintendent Darias indicated the work has been and is being conducted on a daily basis.

Member Saeh supports co ownership of faculty and student outcomes, and to make it quantitative. Ms. Washington cautioned that going directly to student outcomes (increase # of vulnerable students in AP classes) without structural change is not ideal.

Technical Difficulties with the Zoom link occurred at 9:04 pm.

The SC was able to continue the meeting in-person. Member Liberty was no longer present as a result.

It was discussed that the SC would return to the conversation about Saeh's request for metrics about student outcomes as well as revisit SC goals and integration into the content calendar at a future meeting.

5. SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES
- 5.1 Belmont Media Center Appointment

On a motion offered by Chair Moriarty, it was voted to designate Danielle Lemack as the Belmont Media Center SC designee. Member Saeh seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously (4-0), Liberty no longer present due to technical difficulties.

Member Bowen requested that a resolution to support the Fair Share Amendment be considered at an upcoming SC meeting.

Member Moriarty said that the SC would also consider MASC resolutions at an upcoming meeting.

Rink update from Chair Moriarty: there was a forum last Wednesday at which there was feedback on the fields, even though this will not be included in the debt exclusion vote this November. There will be another forum in October focused on solar and sustainability. There has been a lot of fundraising.

6. ADJOURN

On a motion offered by Chair Moriarty and seconded by Member Saeh, it was voted (4-0-0) on a roll call vote to adjourn School Committee meeting at 9:12 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

