

MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE EMERGENCY MEETING

Sunday, March 15, 2020, 9:00 a.m.
School Department Conference Room
220 Central Street
Hingham, MA 02043

School Committee members in attendance: Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Liza O'Reilly

School Committee members participating by phone: Carlos DaSilva, Libby Lewiecki, Kerry Ni, Ed Schreier

Administrators in attendance: Paul Austin, John Ferris

Others present: June Gustafson, Bonnie McArthur, Pat Judge

1. The meeting was called to order by Michelle Ayer at 9:10AM. It was noted that Governor Baker's emergency waiver of portions of the Open Meeting Law allowed four members of the Committee to participate remotely via phone. It was also noted that due to public health concerns related to COVID-19, the police department only allowed School Committee members, two administrators and one representative from each union into the building. Consequently, the concerns of members of the HEA were represented by HEA President June Gustafson, the concerns of the Paraeducators were represented by Bonnie McArthur and the Food Service employees were represented by Pat Judge. Additionally, at the request of the Police Department, the meeting would be as brief as possible.
2. The Committee discussed personnel and payroll in response to COVID-19. Dr. Austin presented his recommendation to the Committee. He noted that he had announced that all Hingham Public Schools would be closed for two weeks, but that could potentially be extended. The Committee must decide whether to pay HPS employees during the time that school is closed. This would include salaried employees including teachers, administrative staff who work year-round, and directors, as well as hourly employees: paraprofessionals, transportation staff, custodial staff, food service, and Kids in Action. Also included are long term substitutes and contracted employees. Dr. Austin noted the importance of ensuring that all of our HPS community is taken care of during this unprecedented situation. Additionally, he stated that we need to ensure that employees are available to work once school is reopened, and if they lack economic security they may have to find other employment. He recommended that all hourly and salaried employees be paid during the duration of the school closure. For hourly employees, the administration would calculate their average hourly pay per week and pay that amount for the duration of the closure. He also recommended that the closure not impact sick pay and personal days. June Gustafson inquired whether this recommendation would apply to tutors and drivers ed instructors. Dr. Austin responded that tutors would be paid as hourly employees. Dr. Austin and Mr. Ferris noted that driver's education instructors would not be paid because their hours would be made up once school reopens. Dr. Austin noted that he has been working with June Gustafson and the HEA to draft a plan for teachers to keep students and the community engaged. This school closure is not a vacation so teachers and paras will be working during this period and will be accountable. Michelle Ayer noted that people will be working, but will be working in new and different ways. Dr. Austin further noted that some essential personnel will still need to work in the buildings; food service employees will be preparing meals for families in need and custodians will be needed to maintain the buildings. The administration will develop plans to do this as safely and as equitably as possible. John Ferris noted that the school resources would be used to ensure that our entire community is served during this time.

On a motion by Liza O'Reilly and seconded by Nes Correnti,

It was

Voted: To accept the Superintendent's recommendation to pay all Hingham Public Schools employees until such time as the school closure ends.

3. Members of the Committee expressed appreciation for all of the work done by administration and staff during these unprecedented times.
4. The Committee discussed communication with the community during the school closure. The Administration is developing a plan of action to ensure that HPS is doing everything in its power to keep the community connected and students learning. Dr. Austin noted that the state guidance expressly prohibits online instruction, but enrichment is possible. Dr. Austin will work with the HEA to outline and communicate expectations to teachers and paras. Michelle Ayer noted that it is important for Committee members to present a cohesive message on social media, as there is a great deal of incorrect information out there. Dr. Austin noted that Sue Sarni at the Hingham Department of Public Health is doing a tremendous job keeping him informed, and as of this morning, there are no positive cases of COVID-19 in Plymouth County. The need for clear and cohesive facts was emphasized. It was inquired whether students would be able to enter the buildings to retrieve their belongings. The administration will develop a plan to ensure that they can do that safely. Dr. Austin stated that the leadership team would have a comprehensive communication plan developed by the end of the day on Monday.
5. On a motion by Liza O'Reilly and seconded by Nes Correnti,

It was

Voted: To adjourn at 9:45AM.

Respectfully Submitted By:
Kerry Ni

Documents Included:
Agenda