

MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

March 23, 2020

1. **Call to Order** The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Michelle Ayer. Chair Ayer opened the meeting and announced the School Committee was meeting in a virtual setting, fully remote via teleconferencing, practicing social distancing and in accordance with the Governor's suspension of certain open meeting laws. The meeting was recorded to the cloud and an audio recording will be available on the website. She asked that each person mute their device when listening and identify themselves before speaking. She named the committee members for the listening participants and said that members will use their first names to identify themselves before they speak. Public questions are welcome. Citizens with questions should feel free to also reach out to Michelle Ayer, Chair, at mayer@hinghamschools.org if you have additional questions or comments.

Chair Ayer stated that the Committee is grateful for the compassion and empathy of the people of Hingham during the past few trying weeks. The Committee recognizes that families of the Hingham Public Schools are struggling now and that the situation is frustrating because this is not how people imagined this school year would go. The Committee is grateful that the faculty is doing amazing work managing the crisis and preparing ways to get instructions to their students. The level of anxiety and uncertainty is unprecedented in modern times and everyone is working to adapt to a world that is changing daily. The Committee would like to assure people that Hingham Public Schools is doing its best to do what is right and that the way we behave and treat each other is what will define us when this emergency is over. She remarked that there is no playbook for how to handle this unprecedented health crisis but wanted parents to know that whatever you are doing at home with their children is absolutely the right thing to be doing; there is no such thing as too much screen time or ice cream and there is no such thing as too little math or history. Families are doing what you can and it is more than enough. HPS teachers and staff want to get back to school as much as parents and children want school to resume. She asked that all remember that children are resilient and they will be OK when all of this is over, and we will be too.

Members Present: Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Carlos Da Silva, Libby Lewiecki Kerry Ni, Liza O'Reilly and Ed Schreier.

Central Office Present: Paul Austin, Jamie LaBillois, Suzanne Vinnest John Ferris.

Visitors Present: June Gustafson, Mary Andrews, Jen Benham, Sara Abbott and others who were not identified.

2. Approval of Minutes

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

It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on March 9, 2020. Libby Lewiecki abstained.

It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on March 9, 2020.

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

It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on March 15, 2020.

3. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Austin reported that the Hingham Public Schools are closed due to the coronavirus and expressed appreciation for the Leadership Team's hard work. He informed the Committee that HPS is preparing for the potential closure of schools beyond April 7, 2020. HPS has taken appropriate steps to stay engaged with students within the guidelines of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which requires that districts engage students, but has paused requirements for direct instruction. While families grapple with the challenges, the district is working very hard to engage all 4200 students and will continue to do the right thing. The information from state and federal agencies has come fast and furiously and the guidance changes minute to minute. The District will continue to improve and refine our approach in the coming weeks in a thoughtful and measured way and will get through this together. Dr. Austin agrees 100% with Chair Ayer that our students will be OK and will be back to school. In the meantime, the district will do everything possible to ensure that students receive a meaningful education.

After the Superintendent's Report, Ed Schreier asked to reopen the vote on the minutes for March 9, 2020, since he was muted on the telephone call. Chair Ayer agreed as this was the first remote meeting for the committee. Ed Schreier recommended an adjustment to the minutes, item 6.3, to reflect his current understanding of the Bare Cove agreement of 1971. The committee discussed that the sentence was not discussed during the meeting. The chair reopened the vote.

On a motion by Kerry Ni and seconded by Ed Schreier,

It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on March 9, 2020, eliminating the fifth sentence in Item 6.3, by roll call vote:

Nes Correnti – aye
Libby Lewiecki – aye
Liza O'Reilly – aye
Ed Schreier – aye
Kerry Ni – aye
Carlos Da Silva – aye
Michelle Ayer - aye

Dr. Austin resumed his Superintendent's Report and spoke about the continuation of education during the school closing. He stated that the DESE Commissioner of Education, Jeffrey Riley, has explicitly instructed MA districts to discontinue education at this time. The Commissioner is working with the MA Superintendents and they are expecting additional guidance in the next week. HPS provides weekly enrichment activities so the parents have support in providing meaningful activities for the children. These are suggested activities, and teachers will not require students to turn anything in and will not formally assess students. DESE has given this guidance to assure equity and is working with the Superintendents to make curriculum related decisions and to determine the best way to move forward. Dr. Austin recognizes that this is a stressful time for students and parents and asked parents for their patience as he anticipates state guidance this week.

Chair Ayer asked for any questions/comments. The Chair recognized Sara Abbott, a parent. She stated that there has been a lot of online discussion regarding remote learning. She expressed appreciation for the remote work of the teachers and the learning opportunities provided. Parents are reporting that other districts are putting learning online and wondering why Hingham is not. Dr. Austin replied that there is no quick answer. There is a lot of discrepancy between districts. The Superintendents are working together across the region and are concerned about equity because many families are limited by access to devices and broadband. While the MA DESE is working on that issue, Hingham wants to be consistent with other districts across the state. Dr. LaBillois then addressed the question, stating that there is a discrepancy between what people are hearing and what is actually happening. He has reached out to other districts and they are also doing online enrichment. He recognized that other districts are reaching out to

families and that HPS will be doing that very soon, as well as issuing guidelines for teachers. The district is being very thoughtful about the volume of students and teachers and will give them very structured guidelines. Presently, the only districts that are allowed to engage in remote learning are DESE Innovation Pilot schools this year. Dr. LaBillois has been in contact with all the towns rumored to be engaging in online teaching and learning and has been informed that they are also following DESE guidelines. Dr. Austin mentioned that some families have communicated that some families are anxious about online learning, so the district must be careful moving forward.

4. Communications

4.1 Communications Received by the Superintendent: Michelle Ayer complimented the administration on the communications that are going home to families every day and reminded people to check the website to see all communications.

4.2 Student Communications: Emma Quilty spoke about how students are handling the closure. She noted that it started like another vacation but as the coronavirus started to get worse and a family in our own town was affected, parents started to social distance and self-quarantine. When kids realized that school would be closed for weeks, online learning became the topic of conversation. Teachers have been wonderful and have all reached out with online enrichment and fun activities to reinforce the materials. Students who participate in spring sports are getting emotional with their seasons at stake but are thinking of ways to celebrate their seasons when the virus dies down. Although no one wants to be stuck home with their families, Seniors are more worried than other students. After last year's fire, they thought they would have a great year. Prom, graduation and tailgating being cancelled is difficult to imagine, as all worked very hard for these special moments. Students hope those events can be safely held in the future. Many students have looked for ways to help the community and have volunteered their time to help senior citizens, babysitting, gathering supplies, taking animals for walks or supplying medical staff. Most students would rather be taking a test right now than be thinking of never having a class again. Students really appreciate all the help from teachers and staff during the past week and throughout this anxiety-filled time. It is obvious to students that they are a top priority. Michelle Ayer thanked Emma and told her it was very gracious of her and the other students. She acknowledged that this is a really hard time and that it is sad that they are missing major milestones. She noted that if senior activities are interrupted, the School Committee/Department should throw the Senior Class a very big five-year reunion party! Dr. Austin thanked Emma for her comments and stated he cannot even imagine what students are feeling and he is very saddened by it. He emphasized the importance of social distancing and asked for our students' help ensuring that everyone understands the severity of the situation and the best way forward is social distancing and that the better we do, the quicker we will be back. Chair Ayer stated that she is very impressed with all the young people that are complying with this and noted that it says a lot about this generation that they are working to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. June MK Gustafson, HEA Unit A Chair, spoke. She got choked up by Emma's words and she knows that all of our teachers are missing their students as well.

4.3 Other Communications: None.

5. Unfinished Business

5.1 Dr. Austin gave the Committee an update on the Advisory Committee and Board of Selectmen votes on the operating and capital budget for FY'21. Chair Ayer noted that there was no action on the agenda because it would be difficult to have a budget discussion remotely. Dr. Austin stated the final number voted by the Advisory Committee was \$56,730,985 and the Board of Selectmen was \$56,607,157. John Ferris commented that he believed the Board of Selectmen had a subsequent vote on March 9, 2020 of \$56,709,462. Michelle Ayer stated that they had a subsequent vote to approve \$56,730,985, in line with the Advisory Committee recommendation. Additionally, the School Department received more capital outlay money than expected; the amount recommended by both

the Advisory Committee and the Board of Selectmen was \$1,349,866. Carlos Da Silva asked whether the additional Foster School feasibility request was reflected in the capital budget. John Ferris said no; the \$350,000 is in an article that will be voted at Town Meeting. Carlos Da Silva asked whether the Committee should vote on a budget number tonight, and Michelle Ayer stated that it's not on the agenda. Liza O'Reilly suggested that the Committee wait since it does not need to be voted until before Town Meeting.

- 5.2 The Committee discussed proposed new Policy 3.11 School Calendar (IC/ICA). Kerry Ni noted that this is a second read. Current HPS policy requires the Committee to vote for the next school year's calendar on May 1, which is late. The proposed change would allow the Committee to approve the following year's school calendar by March 1st.

On a motion by Kerry Ni and seconded by Libby Lewiecki,

It was

Voted: To adopt the revisions to Policy 3.11 School Calendar (IC/ICA) as presented by roll call vote.

Nes Correnti – aye
Libby Lewiecki – aye
Liza O'Reilly – aye
Ed Schreier – aye
Kerry Ni – aye
Carlos Da Silva – aye
Michelle Ayer - aye

6. New Business

- 6.1 John Ferris gave the Committee received an update on state deadlines and requirements for state and federal grants, such as Title I and IDEA, noting that there has been some talk of extending grant deadlines. Personnel charges to grants may continue, even though buildings are closed. It will be important to spend them down by the end of the year, or appropriately roll them over to the next year. Dr. Austin noted that people are concerned about the Student Opportunity Act plan due to the DESE on April 1, 2020. The administration anticipates the passage of pending legislation at this time, which would extend that deadline, and could potentially postpone or cancel MCAS.

- 7. 48 Hour Items:** John Ferris advised the Committee that he is working on a protocol for signing documents. He thinks there will be a hub at Hingham High School for this purpose and he is working out all the details,

8. Subcommittee reports:

Kerry Ni noted that the Policy Subcommittee will meet with Jim Hardy of MASC at 10AM tomorrow to review Section A of the new Policy manual.

9. Adjournment

On a motion by Libby Lewiecki and seconded by Liza O'Reilly,

It was

Voted: To adjourn at 8:04PM

M. Ayer – aye
N. Correnti – aye
C. DaSilva – aye
L. Lewiecki - aye
K. Ni – aye
L. O'Reilly – aye
E. Schreier – aye

Respectfully Submitted by:
Kerry Ni

Documents Included:

3-23-20 Agenda.pdf 

Item 2.1 3-9-20 Minutes.pdf 

Item 2.2 3-15-20 SC Minutes.pdf 

Item 5.1 REVISED Budget Votes Marc... 

Item 5.2 Policy 3.11 School Calendar... 
