

MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

July 27, 2020

Remote meeting via Zoom

1. Call to Order

Chair Kerry Ni called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. She stated that the meeting was being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. Attendees were advised that the meeting and all communications during the meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. Any participant who wished to record the meeting was asked to notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.

Members Present: Kerry Ni, Carlos AF DaSilva, Libby Lewiecki, Liza O'Reilly, Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Jennifer Benham

Central Office Present: Paul Austin, James LaBillois, Suzanne Vinnes, John Ferris, Susan D'Amato

Visitors Present: No sign in as this was a remote meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Carlos Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,
It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on June 22, 2020.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jennifer Benham - abstain

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O'Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

On a motion by Carlos Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,
It was

Voted: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on July 8, 2020.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jennifer Benham - aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O'Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

3. Questions and Comments.

Chair Ni opened the meeting for comments or questions on topics that fall under the purview of the School Committee and are not on the agenda for tonight. June Gustafson, President of the Hingham Education

Association, requested to read a statement from the Hingham Education Association. The statement thanked the people working on the reopening plan for the Hingham Schools and acknowledged that no plan is ideal and not everyone will be happy with the final plan. The statement continued that in-person instruction will look and feel different from previous years due to required safety and social distancing protocols. The Association requested that the next two summer School Committee Meetings take place in-person in a Hingham classroom with social distancing guidelines in place, and be televised to allow the community to see what classroom life will look like upon return. Chair Ni thanked Ms. Gustafson for her thoughts and said the Committee would take it under consideration, keeping in mind the requirement for public participation. Michael Saitow, a parent, spoke in support of Ms. Gustafson's suggestion.

4. **Superintendent's Report**

4.1 Dr. Austin provided an update on the reopening of schools. He advised that the school administration is continuing to work on the plan and are still receiving state guidance. The goal is to have a draft plan to the community by this weekend. Dr. Austin reviewed a PowerPoint presentation which included the following key points:

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Requirements and Guidance:

- A preliminary plan is due to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on Friday, July 31. The plan will include plans for in-person, hybrid, and remote instruction.
- Dr. Austin advised that he had just received an update prior to the meeting that the Commissioner had decreased the number of required school days from 180 to 170, with a school start date no later than 9/16/2020.
- The final plan is due to DESE on 8/10. This plan will be subject to approval by the School Committee at a meeting on 8/6.
- Dr. Austin advised that the plan will continue to change based on local and regional health data.
- The district plan must include which model the district is "leaning" toward (in-person, hybrid, remote).
- Slides on Facilities Operation Planning identified facility spaces that needed to be addressed in the plan (e.g., student spaces, eating areas, medical areas, entry & exit points), modifications to facilities (e.g., handwashing, hallways, bathrooms), and Operation Protocols (e.g., cleaning and disinfecting, food preparation and distribution)
- DESE guidance on safety protocols that addressed how the schools would need to react to cases of COVID-19 in the schools (e.g., individual cases, multiple cases)
- Transportation guidelines from DESE were shared, including distancing requirements, ventilation, seat assignments, bus monitors. Dr. Austin shared that the average Hingham bus is a 77 person bus – which would allow for 25 passengers under the new guidelines.

HPS Reopening Plan – Family Survey

- Dr. Austin reviewed the results of the Family Survey. There were 3,433 responses, which was an 80% response rate. He provided additional data on the individual school and grade response rates.
- On the question of "how likely would you be to send your child to school"
 - With desks spaced 3 feet apart – 18.1% of respondents were "not likely" to send their child back to school, 23.2% undecided, and 58.7% "likely"
 - With desks spaced 6 feet apart – 6% of respondents were "not likely" to send their child back to school, 15.6% were undecided, 78.4% were "likely"
- The top factors that were preventing families from returning to school included 1) too many unknowns related to long term impacts of COVID-19; 2) concern about the ability of child's peers to follow required protocols (masks, distancing); 3) had a family member in high-risk group related to COVID-19; 4) concern about the ability of own child's ability to follow protocols (masks, distancing); and 5) child is in high-risk group related to COVID-19.

- The presentation provided survey data on respondents' preferences between two Hybrid Models – one that had students attending schools on alternating half weeks (2 days of each week in-person, remainder of the week remote) and a second that had students attending schools on alternating weeks. 62.4% of respondents preferred attending on alternating half weeks.
- 65.5% of respondents indicated that they would not need a district-issued device to participate in remote learning; 34.5% of respondents indicated that they would need a district-issued device to participate in remote learning.
- 59% of respondents indicated that they would provide transportation for their child or their child is a walker; 41% of respondents advised that they would have their child take the bus. The Policy Subcommittee will be reviewing the bus policy to see if a temporary adjustment needs to be made to the policy.

Instructional Model Considerations:

- Dr. Austin acknowledged that there are concerns about bringing students back to school in large numbers. The survey results show that the majority of parents prefer 6 foot spacing between desks. Even if we agree to return to school with a minimum of 3 foot distance, a majority of the classrooms could not accommodate all of our students.
- Given the current guidance and requirements, the district has determined that it is not feasible for Hingham Public Schools to offer a full “in-person” reopening of schools at this time. The district is considering a phased-in, hybrid model to begin the school year. Details are being worked out and there will be a draft plan by Friday, July 31.
- Dr. Austin introduced a “Learn from Anywhere” model that allows for the ability to pivot between learning models as local health data dictates. Dr. LaBillois explained that the “Learn from Anywhere” approach was designed to allow for cohorts/groups/grades to transition to and from remote learning as needed. This phased-in approach also allows the schools to assess academic skill gaps and social emotional needs.
- Remote Learning will be significantly enhanced as compared to what was offered in the spring. It will emphasize synchronous instruction, mandated attendance, and robust grading practices.
- Dr. Austin thanked everyone for their patience and acknowledged the desire for a fully developed plan. He advised that we need to find a balance between the safety of students and staff and the required education.
- Chair Ni thanked Dr. Austin and those that are working on the plan. She also acknowledged the community for their input. She acknowledged the frustration in not being allowed to plan for childcare until the plan is fully developed.
- Liza O'Reilly thanked the staff for pulling the information together into a cogent message. Ms. O'Reilly emphasized the importance of wearing a mask and asked that adults model the behaviors for their children. She stressed the importance of finding the style of mask that is comfortable for their children.
- Michelle Ayer expressed that she understands how hard this is on parents, children, educators, and administrators. She believes that it would be wrong to return to school too soon and put our children and teachers in harm's way. School will be different this year, and kids will need an environment where they feel safe and supported. Ms. Ayer asked that everyone be understanding, patient, and supportive because everyone wants what it is best for the children. Chair Ayer suggested that people write to their legislators to insist on funding for the schools to ensure that the return to school is as safe as possible.
- Carlos Da Silva thanked Dr. Austin and the team and asked that they consider the possibility of utilizing parents to assist in transporting other children. He acknowledged that everyone is working very hard to ensure a safe return.
- Nes Correnti acknowledged the hard work of the teams and reiterated that we need to return to school in a safe manner. She suggested that we work with the town (e.g. Rec center

or Kids in Action) to provide space that children could go to, when not in the schools, to receive help with remote learning from a tutor/para. This would help to alleviate pressure on parents.

- Resident Skye Wiseman asked whether we are considering distancing between 3 and 6 feet, what are we doing to support Metco students from a connectivity standpoint, whether families will have the ability to flex between remote and in-person education, and suggested that topics that cannot be handled at this time by the schools/administration be passed to the community or the PTOs for support. Dr. Austin responded that we can consider spacing between 3 and 6 feet. Dr. LaBillois added that we will be starting at 6 feet and gradually move to 3 feet as health data allows. Dr. Austin advised that there will be a call with Metco families this week to ensure that their needs are addressed. Dr. Austin advised that families will have the ability to flex between remote and in-person but it will create some challenges that the schools will need to consider. He agreed that we need to partner with the community on the best way to support the students.
- Resident Shelley Liebsch asked about the objective to keep children in the same families on the same schedule, whether the district may achieve lower enrollments as a result of families choosing remote education, and whether before and after school care will be available through Kids in Action. Dr. Austin offered that we will try to keep families together to the extent possible, which can be challenging due to the complexity of scheduling at the Secondary level. Dr. Austin agreed that there will be some percentage of students that will opt for remote learning, which will help the planning process. Dr. Austin advised that we do not have a definitive answer on Kids in Action yet. Dr. LaBillois confirmed that we are trying to keep families together. He continued that once the plan is released we will be able to determine the number of students that will opt for remote learning.
- Resident S Kiernan questioned what percentage of the time learning would be synchronous; when a final decision would be made on the school start date, and expressed her concern about the difficulty for working parents related to childcare if children are not in school. Dr. Austin advised that he would be recommending a start date to the School Committee at a future meeting and anticipated it would be around 9/15. Dr. Austin appreciated the concerns for working parents and said we need to work with the town to identify solutions for working families. Dr. LaBillois indicated that we are not yet in a position to identify the specifics of the remote learning plan. The team is working on the process and reviewing best practices.
- Resident Suzanne Garland expressed her appreciation for those that are working on the reopening plan. Ms. Garland expressed the need to work together to find a solution and keep the focus on the kids to ensure they get the education that they deserve. She expressed that remote learning at home must include live teaching and questioned the threshold for switching from 6 ft. to 3 ft. distancing. Dr. Austin advised that we do not yet have the information on the threshold for the distancing. Dr. Austin agreed that we need to work collaboratively and there is also a need for flexibility, depending on available health data. Dr. LaBillois advised that the team is working very carefully on the design for remote learning and they will be ready to share the details soon. He acknowledged that the team understands that the remote learning at the end of the 2019-2020 school year was not ideal. Liza O'Reilly advised that Remote Learning Guidance was just issued from the Commissioner on Friday and that information can be accessed on the DESE website.
- Lisa Devine, a Paraprofessional at the Middle School, questioned whether a hybrid learning model will result in the elimination of jobs. Dr. Austin advised that, at this time, there is no plan to lay off people. If conditions change, he will communicate the change.
- Chair Ni acknowledged that there is not sufficient time to take additional questions on the topic of school reopening this meeting but there will be additional opportunities for the community to join meetings and that the community can also email the School Committee

members.

- 4.2 Dr. Austin provided an update on the Superintendent's Entry Report. He advised that the full report will be posted to the Hingham School website later this week. Dr. Austin read an Executive Summary of the Entry Report. The Report covered the listen, watch, and learn process that Dr. Austin followed to develop insight into the strengths and challenges of the school system. The report covers the strengths, challenges, and priorities for the district. The areas that Dr. Austin identified as focus areas for improvement are a) ensuring equity and access to academic, arts, and athletic programs for all students, b) attending to the social emotional needs of all students through appropriate interventions and supports, c) addressing the infrastructure needs of the district, and d) improving Special Education programs and collaboration. Dr. Austin added that we must ensure that all students are encouraged to pursue academic excellence, and that each student must have access to the most challenging courses. In addition, as we prepare for the fall 2020 reopening, the district needs to address the challenges that COVID-19 presents.

5. **Communications**

Dr. Austin advised that the district received, from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), additional guidance on remote learning, transportation, and safety protocols. He also advised that he received a communication, signed by 87 parents identified as "Concerned Hingham Parents", that requested that school be reopened in full capacity in the fall. Dr. Austin shared the key points of the letter, including the goal to return to an in-person educational environment to minimize further negative consequences. Dr. Austin added that he has also received an array of emails in support of or against a full return to the classroom. Chair Ni acknowledged that the Committee also received the communication from the 87 parents, as well as numerous emails from individual parents with a range of opinions on the topic of School reopening.

Michelle Ayer advised that she received a joint statement released from The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the School Superintendents Association of America, that summarized their position that in-person learning is the best learning for children when their social emotional needs and other needs can be met. It continued that local school leaders, public health leaders, and educators must be at the center of the decision regarding the reopening of schools. It also advised that the schools need the resources to reopen.

Ben Louchheim, a history teacher and resident, added that High School students can spread the virus, and encouraged that the union representatives, the School Committee, and administration adopt strong language around non-compliance of wearing masks.

6. **Unfinished Business**

- 6.1 The Committee had a first read of Section E of the Hingham Public Schools Policy Manual. Chair Ni advised that the Policy Committee met with the Massachusetts Association of School Committee (MASC) field director in order to review the MASC sample policies alongside the Hingham policies to ensure that they reflect best practice and follow legal requirements. Section E covers the Business Operations of the School Departments (Facilities, Buildings & Grounds). Chair Ni advise that these policies would likely have to be revisited due to COVID-19.

- 6.2 The Committee had a first read of Section F of the Hingham Public Schools Policy Manual. This section covers Facilities Development Goals, Retirement of Facilities, Naming New Facilities, and Memorials. Chair Ni advised the Committee to let her know if there were any questions.

- 6.3 The Committee reviewed the proposed School Committee meeting dates for 2020 – 2021. The suggestion was made to add the School Committee Retreat for Saturday, October 3 from 8:00 – 11:00 AM. The September meeting dates were changed to Wednesday, 9/9/2020 and Monday, 9/21/2020.

On a motion by Carlos Da Silva and seconded by Liza O’Reilly,

It was

Voted: To approve the School Committee meeting dates for 2020 – 2021.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham – aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

7. **New Business**

- 7.1 The Committee received the subcommittee and liaison assignments for 2020 - 2021. Chair Ni advised that the community that the assignments would be listed on the HPS Website.
- 7.2 The Committee received the School Committee Operating Protocols. This will be voted on in the August 10 meeting. Liza O’Reilly suggested that a revision be made under “Our Behavior” to change “to adhere to Policy 3.4” to “to adhere to Policy Section B”.
- 7.3 The Committee received notification of the appointment of Lauren Webber – Adjustment Counselor, East Elementary School.

8. **Other items as may not reasonably be known 48 hours in advance of the meeting.**

Chair Ni stated that the Community Outreach Subcommittee wishes to schedule an additional forum with the Superintendent regarding the Reopening. Libby Lewiecki added that there is a Coffee with the Superintendent already scheduled for 8/13/2020 at 9AM. Dr. Austin will schedule two sessions (one in the AM, one in the PM) for an additional forum prior to the 8/6 School Committee vote. The definitive date and time of the forum is to be determined.

9. On a motion Liza O’Reilly and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

Voted: To Adjourn to Executive Session at 9:01PM, not to return to Open Session, for the purposes of:

- a. approval of Minutes of the Executive Session held on June 22, 2020
- b. approving of minutes of the Executive Session held on July 8, 2020
- c. discussing strategy related to collective bargaining negotiations for 2020-2023 contracts
- d. discussing strategy related to collective bargaining negotiations with HEA Unit A for Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for reopening of school for the 2020-2021 school year,

the public discussion of which may be detrimental to the Committee’s bargaining position.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham – aye
Nes Correnti – aye
Carlos Da Silva – aye
Libby Lewiecki – aye
Liza O’Reilly – aye
Kerry Ni – aye

Respectfully Submitted By:
Libby Lewiecki

Documents Included:

 7-27-20 Agenda.pdf 

 Item 2.1 Minutes of 6-22-20 School Committee Meeting.pdf 

 Item 2.2 Minutes of 7-8-20 School Committee Meeting.pdf 

 Item 4.1 SC Reopening Presentation 7-27-20 rev.pdf 

 Item 6.1 Policy Manual Section E.pdf 

 Item 6.2 Policy Manual Section F.pdf 

 Item 6.3 FY’21 Final School Calendar (3).pdf 

 Item 6.3 SC Meeting Calendar 20 -21 Draft.pdf 

 Item 7.1 Subcommittee Assign 20-21.pdf 

 Item 7.2 SC Operating Protocols 20-21 Draft.pdf 
