**MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

August 6, 2020

**Remote meeting via Zoom**

1. **Call to Order**

Chair Kerry Ni called the meeting to order at 6:00 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.

Chair Ni advised that Harbor Media would be recording the meeting and that Greg Lane advised he would be live streaming the meeting.

Members Present: Kerry Ni, Carlos AF Da Silva, 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.

1. **Approval of Minutes**

On a motion by Libby Lewiecki and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on July 27, 2020.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jennifer Benham - aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos AF Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

3. **To hear an update on the 2020-2021 School Reopening Plan and act as appropriate.**

Chair Ni thanked everyone that had taken time to engage in the process to reopen the Hingham Schools and offered her confidence that everyone would make a decision that is rooted in the best interest of the students. Chair Ni reviewed the opportunities that had been provided for public input, including public comment at prior meetings, a family survey, and three public forums attended by over 1200 people. She explained the structure of tonight’s meeting: Dr. Austin would present the three plans for reopening and make a recommendation, the School Committee would have an opportunity to ask questions, there would be approximately 1 hour set aside for public comment and questions, the School Committee would deliberate, and if it appears that there is consensus the School Committee would vote. If needed, the Committee would make a determination to delay the vote until the 8/10/2020 meeting.

Dr. Austin explained that the School Committee would be asked to vote on a model of how to reopen the schools - fully remote, in-person, or a hybrid of both. He explained that the details of the plan (e.g. school start times, schedules) had not yet been determined. Dr. Austin reviewed a PowerPoint presentation that included the following:

* An overview of the Recovery Response Advisory Committee (RRAC) and what groups were involved in the process to advise the Superintendent.
* The key findings of the Feasibility Study: The study identified that building occupancy at 3 foot distancing would create substantial problems. Those problems included the costs of renovation, the need for an additional 65.6 Full Time Equivalent teachers, and management of time periods that required a greater distance of 6 feet (including lunches). The Feasibility Study concluded that the facilities and spaces were not designed to accommodate full capacity under the required restrictions. Dr. Austin reviewed a chart that provided the approximate enrollment for each of the Hingham Schools and the number of students that could fit in the school based on 3 foot and 6 foot spacing in the classrooms.
* The *Learn From Anywhere* Model: This model is intended to provide the same instruction to students regardless of whether students are remote or in-person.
* Remote Learning Modes of Instruction: These included synchronous learning, live instruction, asynchronous learning. Dr. Austin advised that the Learning Management System would be Seesaw for Pre-K and would be Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams for Grades K-12. He reviewed the technology that would be required for students and teachers.
* The three options (Remote Learning, In-Person, Hybrid) were presented.
  + The Remote Learning Model was outlined. Remote Learning will consist of both synchronous and asynchronous learning, with an emphasis on synchronous and live streaming. During non-live instructional time, students will be expected to complete asynchronous activities, lessons and assessments. A sample remote learning schedule was provided for the Elementary, Middle School, and High School. Dr. Austin advised that the Committee was not being asked to vote on a schedule; the schedules were being provided only as examples to provide insight into what a remote schedule may look like.
  + The Full In-Person Model was outlined. This model would have students attending school in-person, 5 days a week, with 3 foot physical distancing and the required health protocols in place. The model would require additional staffing of 65.6 full time equivalent positions – a breakdown at each level was provided. Additional classroom, therapy, and work spaces would also be needed.
  + The Hybrid Learning Model was outlined. In this model, students would be assigned to a cohort and would attend school remotely or in-person with their assigned cohort on an alternating schedule. The cohorts, to the extent possible, would be determined by geography. Cohorts were identified as Cohort A, Cohort B, Cohort A/B (for select students with disabilities, high-needs students, and English Language Learners), and Cohort R (students who choose to attend via remote learning only). A sample Hybrid Learning schedule was provided for the Elementary, Middle School, and High School levels. The sample schedules provided a possible option that showed Cohort A attending in-person on Monday and Tuesday; Cohort B attending in-person on Thursday and Friday; all students participating remotely on Wednesday to allow for a deep cleaning between the Cohorts. Dr. Austin explained that the intent at this time is to have the Cohort that is remote have the ability to remote into the live classroom.
* Dr. Austin outlined the recommendation to have a phased-in Hybrid Learning Approach. This model was designed to allow students and staff to safely and slowly return to schools, and to allow students an opportunity to fully understand the remote platform if the need arises to revert back to remote learning. The phases were outlined as follows:
  + Preopening Phase 1: 8/17/20 – 8/21/20 – Administration and staff return
  + Preopening Phase 2: 8/26/20 – 9/15/20 – Faculty & Support Staff Return (Professional Development)
  + Phase 1: Begins September 16 – Remote instruction for K-12; In-person instruction for specified high needs students in Cohort A/B, in-person activities (e.g. orientation) for individual/small groups from cohorts A and B.
  + Phase 2: Projected 9/28/20 (actual date based on health benchmarking data) - Hybrid instruction for Cohorts A and B alternating between in-person and remote instruction, remote instruction for Cohort R, and In-Person instruction for specified high needs students in cohort A/B.
  + Phase 3: Date is TBD based on resources - Two Cohorts in-person; full day, 3 foot distancing
  + Phase 4: Date is TBD based on state regulations – Full return to Pre-Covid; no restrictions
* Special Education Programming was outlined. Preschool students will be instructed in-person at East Integrated preschool. Community peers will be included when there is confidence that it can be done safely. Students in substantially separate programs (RISE, CLS) will attend school in-person for full school days. Schedules will be individualized and shared with families. Should the district need to decrease the number of students receiving in-person instruction, preschool students and those with complex and significant needs will be prioritized for in-person instruction. Dr. Austin outlined the DESE definition of students with complex and significant needs. Teams will continue to make individual determinations for the delivery of instruction, especially in unique circumstances where students are unable to access remote instruction.
* Conclusions: Based on current health metrics, funding, and feasibility the Superintendent does not recommend full Remote Learning or full In-Person Learning. It is essential to bring as many children back into the school setting as possible, provided we can adhere to the strictest of safety standards. For a safe and successful return to school, the Superintendent recommended the phased-in approach as described in the draft of the final reopening plan dated 8/5/2020. When safe to do so and based on health metrics, the schools will increase student in-person attendance and add additional hours. The focus on K-5 is essential and we should assess our capacity to increase in-person instruction to this group as soon as possible.

Chair Ni offered to take questions from the School Committee.

* Michelle Ayer asked how the decisions would be made to move forward from the current phase to subsequent phases. Dr. Austin suggested that the RRAC be involved in those decisions.
* Nes Correnti read a statement that acknowledged the team effort to identify a comprehensive plan that was in the best interests of students. She stressed that it is important that we all be on the same page to achieve a common goal of getting students back to school safely. Ms. Correnti acknowledged the hard work done by the teachers in the spring. She added that science should be our guiding principle.
* Liza O’Reilly asked if the Administration considered the vendors for Remote Learning programs that were being recommended by DESE. Dr. LaBillois responded that the vendors were discussed in the subcommittee and a decision was made to keep the Hingham students that were fully remote in the Hingham curriculum in order to provide an easier transition if/when we move back to full in-person curriculum. Ms. O’Reilly also asked about the policy to identify the Cohorts in the Middle and High School. Dr. Austin advised that we are still working through the details of the process. Principal Swanson advised that there is a likelihood that we can keep people within the same household within the same cohort. Ms. O’Reilly questioned if we are thinking of bringing all Middle School and High School grades into the schools in the first 8 days to support the transition. Principal Rick Swanson advised that a Grade 9 orientation would be a priority but he would like to give all students an opportunity to meet with the teachers in-person. Principal Derek Smith agreed that he would like to follow a similar program for Grade 6 for the Middle School, and all other students as the opportunity allows. Ms. O’Reilly asked if we were budgeting for extra-curricular activities. Mr. John Ferris advised that the budget is intact with funding budgeted for athletics and co-curricular activities and we will need to plan as other expenses are identified. Ms. O’Reilly also made a suggestion that we encourage families to self-quarantine to ensure that everyone is as healthy as possible when they return to school. Dr. Austin agreed that this is a community-wide effort to ensure that everyone is staying healthy.
* Carlos DaSilva thanked Dr. Austin for further investigating the possibility of using Wednesdays for in-person instruction rather than a full day of deep cleaning. He acknowledged the efforts of the team to do what it is in the best interest of the students. Mr. DaSilva asked if the administration would have an open mind if students in Cohort R chose to not return to the school building when we move forward to Phase 3 or 4. Dr. Austin advised that does not intend to force people into the school building and we will work to support families to the extent possible. He asked that families be flexible as we work through the process.
* Jen Benham asked Mr. Ferris about the policy for transportation and when we would have more definitive information. Mr. Ferris believes that the Cohort Model will provide us the capacity to transport all of Elementary School children, and possibly the Middle School students, but we will not have busses for the High School. He advised that the start times may have to change to accommodate transportation. Ms. Benham asked if the budget allowed for the bus monitors. Mr. Ferris advised that he would like monitors for the first few weeks while students establish a routine, at which point we could make a determination if monitors were still required.
* Kerry Ni asked about the dates for the Phases and whether they were absolute or movable. Dr. Austin advised that all dates are approximate and could change depending on the situation. Chair Ni also asked if the subcommittees had discussed how to support families with two working parents, particularly essential workers. Dr. Austin advised that he had reached out to the Town to see how we can collaborate to support working families. Although there is no solution at the current time, it is a problem that needs to be addressed. Michelle Ayer agreed that the Committee and Administration recognize that this is an important issue and work is being done on it.

Chair Ni opened the meeting up for questions and comments from the community. There were 10 members of the community who spoke to ask questions, identify concerns, or make suggestions. Topics included the identification of a cohort for families that want a hybrid homeschool program, transportation/traffic, student testing, special education, arts programs, accepting credits from external on-line schools, the timing and collaboration on future decisions, electives at the high school, use of targeted small learning groups for remote learning, effective modes of communication, opportunities for parents to volunteer, determining cohorts at the Middle School based on math levels, the schedule of in-person/remote days for the hybrid plan, and the use of Wednesday as an in-person instruction day.

The School Committee began deliberation upon completion of the community input.

* Michelle Ayer offered that this was a difficult decision that had no easy answer. She offered that while full remote instruction satisfies the questions of physical health, it has consequences for the developmental health and growth of students. Full in-person learning is not possible for the foreseeable future. The Hybrid options seems to be the most thoughtful, cautious option, although it still leaves a number of questions unanswered. Ms. Ayer expressed that we need to trust that teachers will be able to make this work and to appreciate what the teachers are doing and have patience. She felt that the shortened day, with Cohorts, would allow us to see how children adapt to this new environment. She asked that we come together as a community to support the adopted plan. She concluded by saying that she feels the hybrid approach is the proper approach.
* Liza O’Reilly agreed that the recommended plan satisfies the DESE guidelines, reflects the input of the survey, operates within our resources, and reflects the goals of the district. The plan prioritized the needs of Special Education and METCO. The plan focuses on the whole child education, with afternoon remote learning for specialist classes. Ms. O’Reilly indicated that she supports the hybrid plan. She advised that the Administration and School Committee need to be willing to adapt the plan as health metrics dictate. Ms. O’Reilly offered that there are a multitude of plans that have been offered by different cities and countries and we must identify the plan that works the best for Hingham.
* Jen Benham added that returning to school in the current climate is not an easy decision. With considerate planning and willful diligence, Hingham will ensure that students receive the best education that the schools can provide. She felt that the Hybrid Model supports effective learning and the well-being and health of students and staff.
* Carlos Da Silva agreed that this is not an easy decision and wanted parents to know that we have heard them loud and clear. Mr. Da Silva said this is a matter of safety for students and staff. Mr. Da Silva advised that he respects the recommendation of the Superintendent and is in support of the Hybrid model.
* Nes Correnti advised that she reflects on the principles on which she ran for office - representing the needs of all students, equity and inclusion, social and emotional well-being, school safety, and transparency. She discussed that requiring 6 feet of distance is important. Ms. Correnti indicated that she is also in support of the Hybrid model. She requested that the administration review the use of Wednesdays as a day for in-person learning. She agreed that a shortened day is appropriate to start.
* Libby Lewiecki advised she is also in favor of remote learning with a phased in approach of a Hybrid plan. She offered that teachers are essential workers and we should be treating them as such, and providing the resources they need. We should trust them to know how to educate our children in the middle of a pandemic.
* Kerry Ni offered that she is also in favor of the Hybrid model, with the addition of a phase 2.5 to move toward full days, and with consideration of Wednesdays for in-person learning. Chair Ni advised that it is vital that everyone work together to get the children where they need to be. Chair Ni advised that there were positive elements that have come from this situation, including moving toward robust technology, focusing on our more vulnerable learners, and working toward more personalized learning.

On a motion by Carlos Da Silva and seconded by Nes Correnti,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the Reopening Plan recommended by the Superintendent, which contains plans for in-person, hybrid, and remote learning models with the understanding that the Superintendent will be authorized to make all operational decisions about the implementation of these models, to negotiate with the unions along with the School Committee regarding the implementation of these models, and to make the decision to transition between models as needed throughout the school year, consistent with the plan and with notice to the Committee as soon as practicable, with the understanding that this plan is subject to change based on updated health data and DESE guidance.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jennifer Benham - aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos AF Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

**4.0 Adjourn.**

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

It was

**Voted**: To Adjourn at 8:21PM.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham – aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos AF Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

Respectfully Submitted By:

Libby Lewiecki

Documents Included:

