

Minutes of the Hingham School Committee

Saturday, October 3, 2020 Planning Session

Remote meeting via Zoom

1. Call to Order

Chair Kerry Ni called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM. 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. She advised that the town was not recording the meeting and asked that any participant who wished to record the meeting to notify the chair. There were no participants that advised that they were recording the meeting.

Members Present: Kerry Ni, Carlos AF Da Silva, Libby Lewiecki, Liza O'Reilly, Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Jen Benham.

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

Present from Board of Selectman - Mary Power

Present from Advisory Committee - Andrew McElaney, Brenda Black, Davalene Cooper, Dave Anderson, Eryn Kelley, Evan Sheehan, George Danis, Julie Strehle, Kristin Dziergowski, Nancy MacDonald, Robert Curley, Victor Baltera

2. Discussion of Budget Priorities for FY22

Dr. Austin initiated a discussion on the district priorities. He advised that the number one priority this year was to ensure the safety of students and staff. John Ferris provided an update on COVID-19 related expenditures for Facilities (duct cleaning, air handlers), PPE (masks, Plexiglas, sanitizers), technology for students and staff (equipment, licenses), and additional labor (cleaning, bus monitors). He advised that the budget was impacted by the lack of revenue from the Full Day Kindergarten program and Kids in Action. Some savings may exist in energy spending as a result of not using the buildings on weekends.

Carlos Da Silva questioned the process for receiving reimbursements through the Plymouth County CARES Act program. Mary Power, Board of Selectman, advised that Hingham has been allocated \$3.3 million. To receive reimbursements, the town must submit paid invoices by December 30, 2020. Lost revenue (e.g. Full Day Kindergarten, KIA) is not reimbursable. Mr. Da Silva requested that the School Administration continue to work with town administrators to ensure that all possible expenses are submitted. Dr. Austin advised that Mr. Ferris is working closely with the town to monitor, itemize, and submit the expenses.

There was a discussion about staffing, including Special Education positions, Paraprofessionals, cleaning personnel, bus monitors, and Central Office positions. Chair Ni advised that the Central Office team has been very lean and that most districts have a Special Education Director and a Communications Director.

Dr. Austin advised that it is imperative that the district retain the ability to support teachers in the classroom. Paraprofessionals are needed to support Special Education and remote learning. Filling the Paraprofessional positions has been challenging. Liza O'Reilly added that many districts are running on alternative schedules, which makes it difficult for parents, who may need to stay home with children, to accept these positions. The same issue exists for filling Substitute positions.

Evan Sheehan added that we need to be clear with the community that we need to have the required staff to bring children back into the schools.

Dr. Austin and Dr. LaBillois addressed the challenges of hybrid teaching for the younger children, particularly K-2, and how to most effectively support teachers as they facilitate learning for both in-person and remote learners at the same time. There are discussions underway between administration and staff on ways to address this issue as the district looks to bring more students back for longer days and full weeks. There was a question about whether the number of students will increase as schools open for longer/additional days and whether families that have opted for full-remote learning, private school or homeschooling will return. Dr. LaBillois advised that he believes we had the capacity to absorb those students that opted for fully-remote learning, but there are some concerns about the ability to absorb those that would re-enroll from private or homeschool.

The issue of space at the Foster School was discussed. Foster has eight classrooms that are not in use because they have no access to outside air. The Administration has continued to look at opportunities to rent space. Chair Ni advised that it would be helpful to hear the costs for the potential rental property. Michelle Ayer advised that we are in a crisis situation and the major concern should be to ensure that children of Hingham get the education that they deserve and the reality is that it will cost money to do. Bob Curley asked if there was any desire to accelerate the Foster Building process. Mr. Ferris advised that the Eligibility period is coming to conclusion and we are moving to the Feasibility period, but it is still a 3-year solution.

Mary Power added that the Committee and Administration are good stewards of the town's finances and also know what is needed to educate children. She suggested that decisions should be made based on what the Committee and Administration believe is necessary for the education of the children of Hingham.

Dr. Austin outlined the challenges related to transportation. Current regulations allow for only 25 students on a bus that normally holds 77 students. By law, the district must

transport K-6 students. The district is currently transporting K-8 but that cannot be sustained when schools return to full in-person learning. Liza O'Reilly suggested the need to discuss with public safety officials the traffic challenges that may result from the need for families to transport their children. She questioned whether it may make sense to lease additional busses to avoid the traffic issue.

Chair Ni summarized the discussion, advising that the priority was to get students and staff back to school safely and the three primary challenges were related to space, staffing, and transportation. Evan Sheehan advised that it may be helpful to put together a presentation that outlines the key challenges and how they may result in additional costs. Libby Lewiecki questioned the status of the FAQ document that was being worked on for the return to school. Liza O'Reilly and Michelle Ayer are working on updating the document.

Chair Ni moved the discussion forward to address strategic priorities. She suggested designing a strategic plan for the district and having the community involved in developing that plan.

Dr. Austin identified priorities as follows:

- a. Get back to the business of educating students.
- b. Implement Strategic Planning: Dr. Austin advised that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a strategic planning process called *Planning for Success*. He also advised that Dr. LaBillois has experience in this area. The Strategic plan would help to determine budget priorities.
- c. Conduct an Equity Audit: This would help to focus on equity work over the next five years.
- d. Conduct a Space Audit: This would involve reviewing the current space in the district and ensuring that all spaces are used in the most beneficial manner.

Dr. Vinnes added that the Special Education had, prior to COVID-19, been working at full capacity, and as a result of COVID-19 they are working at a deficit. The Special Education goals are also tied to the space concerns. Mr. Ferris added that there is a need to look at all space and determine if there is a need to restructure how we use the space in the buildings.

Dr. LaBillois addressed the topic of Strategic Planning and said it was important to determine where HPS wants to be as an organization and what steps need to be taken to move the district forward.

Chair Ni agreed that getting the community involved would be beneficial because the plan will have associated costs. Liza O'Reilly agreed that there was a need to involve the community in the process. Ms. O'Reilly is also on the Master Plan Committee and believes that the plan recommended by the Master Plan Committee may help to

support the School's strategic plan. The Master Plan Committee includes facilities planning, school programming, and emergency preparedness. Ms. O'Reilly agreed that using the DESE process would be beneficial and agreed with making the Equity Audit a priority.

Mr. Da Silva suggested that the administration consider any rental facilities as not just a short-term COVID-19 fix but potentially look for the long term solutions to space needs.

Ms. Ayer raised a concern about the current bandwidth of the Central Office to take on strategic planning right now, and questioned whether it would be beneficial to outsource the preliminary work to a consulting firm. Dr. Austin advised that he would discuss that further with his Central Office Staff. Bob Curley suggested that the School department may be able to take advantage of a local school of education that could help to provide research capabilities.

Chair Ni confirmed that it appeared that there was consensus to move forward with strategic planning, potentially utilizing a consulting firm or academic partnership. She also confirmed that an Equity Audit and Space Audit would be beneficial priorities.

Dr. LaBillois addressed the idea of the Equity Audit, advising that work had been completed with the faculty prior to the COVID-19 closure, and that he and Nes Correnti have begun a discussion on how to replicate that conversation with the community. Nes Correnti acknowledged that implicit bias is not just a school issue, but is a town and societal issue.

3. School Committee Sub-Committee Goals

Chair Ni advised that this item was on the agenda as a reminder for the School Committee subcommittees to begin to discuss their goals with a target to discuss those at a full School Committee meeting in a month.

4. Review of FY22 Budget process, procedures, and assumptions

Dr. Austin advised that school enrollment is down due to COVID-19 and he will share details at the 10/5/2020 School Committee meeting. He is not yet aware of how that will impact the state funding process. He anticipated that the many of the home school students will return to the Hingham Public Schools.

Mr. Ferris advised that there was not a lot of visibility into the 2022 budget at this time. He suggested that we simplify our assumptions and focus on the status quo, with some adjustments to reflect modest inflation, and step up to new contract rates.

Mary Power said that the town has had similar budget conversations and that the town may need to look differently at the traditional budget process and timeline. She suggested that the 1st Quarter results will be informative.

Liza O'Reilly suggested that we identify gaps and consider shifting funding to needed areas. COVID-19 has highlighted issues with Special Education and forced us to more immediately address technology issues.

Libby Lewiecki added that we should not lose sight of the need for a Fine Arts Director.

5. On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Carlos Da Silva,
It was
Voted to Adjourn at 10:15 AM.

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