

## MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

December 7, 2020

### Remote meeting via Zoom

#### 1. Call to Order

Chair Kerry Ni called the meeting to order at 7:03 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 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 the Harbor Media was recording the session.

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

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

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

#### 2. Approval of Minutes

2.1 On a motion by Carlos A F Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on November 12, 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

2.2 On a motion by Carlos A F Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on November 16, 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

2.3 On a motion by Carlos A F Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on November 17, 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

2.4 On a motion by Carlos A F Da Silva and seconded by Michelle Ayer,

It was

**Voted**: To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on November 19, 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. **Questions and Comments**

Chair Ni provided time for questions or comments on topics that were not included on the School Committee agenda. A community member asked about the potential of returning to full days on the days that students are physically in the schools and the potential to create space in schools by moving administrative offices to the rooms without windows. Dr. Austin advised that he will be addressing the plans to increase in-person learning in the Superintendent’s Report.

4. **Superintendent’s Report**

Dr. Austin shared a PowerPoint presentation that provided an update on the COVID-19 Health Metrics for the town and school. Hingham is identified as “yellow” based on the state COVID-19 rating system. There were 10 positive COVID cases in the schools in the last week. In addition, there were more than 80 people (students and staff) in quarantine this past week. Dr. Austin

shared that Plymouth River School (PRS) has pivoted to remote learning due to having a “COVID-19 cluster” at that location. The pivot to remote learning was an attempt to contain that outbreak. There are 32 students at PRS in quarantine. Dr. Austin has requested the Rapid Response Testing Unit from the state to provide testing at PRS. Dr. Austin stated that his priorities are 1) the health and safety of student and staff, 2) providing quality education, and 3) to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community. Dr. Austin advised the community should be prepared for changes in the learning plan based on health metrics.

Dr. Austin shared an update on the potential leasing of the former St. Jerome’s School in Weymouth. The administration continues to work on the logistics to lease St. Jerome’s as a satellite site.

Dr. Austin advised that the administration is continuing to negotiate with the Hingham Education Association regarding potential increases to in-person learning. There are concerns about possible transmission of the virus if the physical distancing is decreased to 3 feet, and there are concerns about possible transmission of the virus as a result of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Dr. Austin requested that the community avoid unnecessary travel over the holidays, avoid spending holidays with people outside of their own household, and avoid inside gatherings with greater than 10 people. Dr. Austin review the COVID-19 testing requirements for families that travel during the holidays.

Dr. Austin shared an update on the district’s WI-FI problem that resulted in full remote learning. The issue has been addressed and steps have been taken to mitigate future disruptions.

Liza O’Reilly suggested that the Student Council have an assembly at the High School and Middle School to discuss the current health challenges and steps that can be taken to keep everyone safe. Student Representative Carly Kennedy advised that she has reached out to other Student Council representatives and they discussed the possibility of putting out a video.

Comments and questions from the community included:

- A request for clarification on the COVID-19 situation at Plymouth River School. Principal Melissa Smith advised that through the contract tracing process the school determined that the number of close contacts was fewer than had originally been anticipated. Dr. Austin also advised that capacity is an issue because of the need to quarantine staff.
- A comment that there are a number of experts that have provided data that indicates that schools are low risk. Dr. Austin confirmed that the school reopening decisions are being made based on science. The objective is to keep students in school as long as possible.
- A comment that reducing the physical distancing to less than 6 feet may increase the number of people in quarantine, resulting in less in-person instruction.
- A concern that not enough attention has been paid to the mental health of students and that sufficient specific information has not been provided regarding the return to school plan. Dr. Austin offered that both the Administration and teachers are very concerned about the mental health of students. He advised that he and the Hingham Education Association (HEA) are working together to enable a specific plan. Michelle Ayer added that the Committee is aware of the community’s concerns regarding mental health and that it is at the center of all decisions.

## 5. **Communications**

- 5.1 Student representative Carly Kennedy provided an update from the schools. Term 1 ended last week and Hingham High School will not be holding mid-terms this year. The fall sports

teams completed their season safely and successfully. Winter sports are expected to start on December 18, 2020. Two students, Helena Orth and Cassandra Dasco, broke a world record for continuous rowing for 50 hours straight and raised \$3,000 for Friends of the Homeless. Hingham High School held a virtual Spirit Week. The Student Council created a video for Thanksgiving to enforce a sense of community. The Chorus performed at the South Shore Conservatory Amphitheater, maintaining 12-foot physical distancing and wearing special masks for voice clarity.

- 5.2 Superintendent's communications – There was no discussion under this topic.
- 5.3 Other Communications – There was no discussion under this topic.

## 6. **Unfinished Business**

- 6.1 Dr. Austin reviewed the FY'22 Budget Guiding Principles. He advised that the FY'22 budget will presume a continuation of enrollment from the March 2020 enrollment counts, a continuation of all FTEs approved in the FY'21 budget, that salaries will be stepped up according to terms specified in the Collective Bargaining agreements, and in cases in which Collective Bargaining Agreements have not yet been completed as the budget process begins, an allowance will be provided for two years. He also reviewed the goals of the budget. Chair Ni asked if the administration was incorporating social/emotional supports into the budget. Dr. Austin confirmed that this was included in the goals.
- 6.2 Dr. Austin provided an update on the FY'21 Operating Budget. He advised that the administration is following austerity measures. He anticipates that fuel bills will be higher than expected due to the need to open windows because of COVID-19.
- 6.3 Dr. Austin and John Ferris provided an update on a requested expenditure for the installation of safety netting on the left side boundary of the Hingham High School varsity softball field. Dr. Austin asked the Committee to move forward on an expenditure of up to \$20,000 based on verbal quotes that were received. Mr. Ferris advised that the money would come from the Hingham High School Fields Project Account, which currently has a balance of approximately \$57,000.

There was a question from the community as to whether this expenditure would come from the FY'22 budget. Chair Ni advised that the funds will come from an account that is set aside for Athletic Field enhancements.

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

It was

**Voted:** To authorize the Superintendent to spend up to \$20,000 from the Hingham High School Fields Project account for the installation of safety netting on the left side boundary of the Hingham High School varsity softball field.

Michelle Ayer – aye  
Jen Benham – aye  
Nes Correnti – aye  
Carlos AF Da Silva – aye  
Libby Lewiecki – aye  
Liza O'Reilly – aye  
Kerry Ni – aye

7. New Business

- 7.1 The Committee received the Superintendent’s Goals for 2020-2021. Dr. Austin advised that the goals were included in the School Committee’s packet and that most of the goals were identified as a result of Dr. Austin’s Entry Report that was reviewed in July 2020. Dr. Austin reviewed each of the goals with the Committee.

Liza O’Reilly asked if the first goal could be revised to clarify that it was specifically focused on the instructional core. Dr. Austin agreed with that clarification. Chair Ni questioned whether the administration would complete enough of the strategic planning process in order to know what to advocate for in the budget cycle. Dr. Austin confirmed that the administration will.

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

It was

**Voted:** To accept the Superintendent’s Proposed Goals for the 2020-2021 School Year.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham – aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos AF Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

- 7.2 Dr. Austin reviewed the Proposed School Committee Special Reports Calendar for 2020-2021. This calendar outlined reports that would be reviewed at upcoming School Committee meetings, including the 2020 College Board Testing and Placement Reports, the Secondary Program of Studies, Budget Hearings, the Mathematics Program Review, School Council Reports, and the Superintendent’s Evaluation. Liza O’Reilly advised that 4/26/20 date for the Mathematics Review may conflict with the first night of Town Meeting, so it may need to be rescheduled.

- 7.3 Dr. Austin advised that he has reviewed the Home School application for student MQ (Grade K) that was presented in the School Committee packet and that he recommended approval.

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

It was

**Voted:** To approve the Home School application for student MQ (Grade K) for FY2021 as recommended by the Superintendent

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham – aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos AF Da Silva – aye

Libby Lewiecki – aye

Liza O’Reilly – aye

Kerry Ni – aye

7.4 The Committee received notification of the appointments of Marianne Gates, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and Recording Secretary to the School Committee, effective 11/17/20, and Benjamin Miele, Administrative Assistant to Student Services, effective 11/17/20.

7.5 The Committee received notification of the resignations for the 2020-2021 school year of Paraprofessional Emily Francis, effective 11/19/20.

7.6 Dr. Austin reviewed a potential option for providing COVID-19 testing to the Hingham Public Schools Staff. Dr. Austin met with a medical logistics company, CIC Medical, which would provide testing through BROAD laboratory. Dr. Austin has reviewed the testing process with the COVID Response team. Dr. Austin recommended a phased-in implementation beginning with elementary staff and advised that he will establish a COVID Testing Taskforce to help determine the testing strategy. Chair Ni commented that testing would allow us to get a good handle on the spread of the disease. Liza O’Reilly confirmed that the BROAD Institute is a good resource and a world-renowned organization. Jen Benham asked if the district would need to commit to a minimum number of tests. Dr. Austin advised there is flexibility and the number is dependent on the number of tests that he orders.

Questions and comments from the community included:

- A question on the rationale for weekly testing based on research that shows a low transmission rate among children. Dr. Austin responded that the testing supports his effort to move to greater in-person learning.
- A question on the rationale for setting up a testing process that is separate from the testing process established by the Town. Dr. Austin advised that the school process is a specific contract and would be free of charge for school staff.
- A question about the timing of the implementation. Dr. Austin indicated that he hoped to possibly complete one round of testing prior to the winter break. If not completed prior to winter break, he hoped to start the testing process as soon after winter break as possible.
- A question on whether the testing is for staff or students. Dr. Austin confirmed that, at the current time, the testing is for staff. The community member also requested an update on the transaction to lease the former St. Jerome’s School.

## 8. **Subcommittee and Project Reports**

Michelle Ayer provided the following updates:

- There was a Coffee with the Superintendent and METCO families.
- There was a METCO leadership retreat over Zoom. A speaker discussed how to better integrate the Boston and Hingham families. A 20 minute movie provided the history of METCO.
- The Special Education Subcommittee met the prior week. Dr. Vinnes provided a staffing update.

- The PTOs will be sending holiday cards to the METCO families.
- There was a METCO Roundtable with METCO alumni, family members, faculty and members of the Hingham Unity Council. The Roundtable was sponsored by HPS METCO director Carols Perez and the Hingham Unity Council.
- On 12/16/20, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) will vote on moving the Foster School into the Feasibility Phase of the project.

Nes Correnti provided the following updates:

- The East School Council met the prior week to discuss the feedback process for the year.
- The Hingham Education Foundation met to review grants.
- The Equity and Inclusion Taskforce held two meetings.
- There were three Finance warrants that were included in the School Committee packets.

Carlos Da Silva provided the following updates:

- The Capital & Facilities Subcommittee will meet on 12/8/20 to begin to review the Capital Budget.

Libby Lewiecki provided the following updates:

- Ms. Lewiecki complimented the HHS production of the Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon.
- The South School Council met last week.
- The Community Outreach Subcommittee met to review the HPS website content and have documented recommended changes.

Liza O'Reilly provided the following updates:

- The School Council Meeting for the Middle School met on 11/30/2020.
- The consultant for the Master Plan Committee will present the recommendations from the Master Plan Committee on 12/9/20. The Committee will present a final draft recommendation to the Planning Board in January 2021.

Kerry Ni provided the following updates:

- Chair Ni complimented the Drama Club on the production of the Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon.
- The Policy Subcommittee met to review Section G (Personnel Policies). The subcommittee will meet again on 12/16/20.
- Chair Ni attended the Hingham High School PTO meeting.

9. Other items as may not reasonably be known 48 hours in advance of the meeting. There was no discussion for this item.
10. On a motion by Liza O'Reilly and seconded by Libby Lewiecki,

It was

**Voted:** To adjourn to Executive Session at 8:46 PM, not to return to Open session, for the purposes of:

1. Approving minutes of the Executive Session held on November 16, 2020
2. Discussing strategy related to collective bargaining negotiations with HEA Unit A, C, D, and

the Administrators Association.

the public discussion of which may be detrimental to the committee's bargaining position.

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:

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 Agenda_2020_1207-revised.pdf 
 Annotated Agenda_2020_1207.pdf 
 Item 2.1 11-12-20 Minutes_Coffee with Superintendent.pdf 
 Item 2.2 11-16-2020 Minutes.pdf 
 Item 2.3 11-17-2020 Minutes - Joint Meeting with Selectmen and AdCom.pdf 
 Item 2.4 11-19-20 Minutes.pdf 
 Item 4 Superintendent Updates_2020_1207 School Committee Meeting.pdf 
 Item 6.1 FY'22 Budget Guiding Principles.pdf 
 Item 7.1 Proposed Austin Superintendent Goals for 2020-2021 (1) (1).pdf 
 Item 7.2 Special SC Reports 20-21.pdf 
 Item 7.3 Homeschool Application for MQ.pdf 
 Item 7.6 COVID Testing.pdf 
 Item 8.0 Warrants (3).pdf 