

**Minutes of the Hingham School Committee
July 14, 2021**

Hingham School Department, 220 Central Street

- 1. Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Kerry Ni.

The meeting was held in person; remote participation was not available.

Members Present: Kerry Ni, Michelle Ayer, Nes Correnti, Liza O'Reilly, Jennifer Benham, and Tim Dempsey

Central Office Present: Superintendent Dr. Paul Austin

Visitors Present: Lisa Austin, June Gustafson, Stephanie Gertz, Hingham Journal

- 2. To publicly accept the resignation of Superintendent Paul Austin**

On June 25, 2021 Dr. Austin informed the Committee that because of personal and family reasons, effective July 30, 2021, he is resigning his position as superintendent of the Hingham Public Schools to move back to his home state of Maine.

Chair Kerry Ni delivered a message on behalf of the School Committee:

As the body responsible for hiring the superintendent, we would like to take this opportunity to publicly accept your resignation and to thank you for your exemplary service to Hingham Public Schools. During your time in Hingham, you led our school district through a once in a lifetime global pandemic with grace, compassion and determination. We are both proud and grateful for your steady leadership. You maintained the health and safety of more than 5,000 children, staff and families in our district while ensuring that Hingham students receive the best education possible under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. We also want to acknowledge your significant contributions to our district during your tenure including a nearly 9% increase in the FY 21-22 school budget, the successful negotiation of successor contracts with multiple bargaining units, the acceptance of Foster School into the MSBA Building Program and the acceptance of Plymouth River School into the MSBA Accelerated Repair Program. Additionally, you helped forge an even stronger relationship between the Hingham School Department and our municipal government which will benefit students and all Hingham citizens in the years to come. In short, while we are disappointed that you are leaving Hingham so soon, we are also incredibly grateful for everything you did to set up our Hingham Public Schools to grow and improve moving forward. We are happy for you and your family, and as you all move to this next chapter, we wish you the very best.

Each Committee member shared messages and well wishes to Dr. Austin.

Kerry Ni read a statement for Carlos DaSilva who was not able to be present as he was with his mother in Brazil:

I regret not being able to attend this meeting as I am in Brazil spending time with my mother. Dr. Austin has been a great asset to Hingham Public Schools during this very challenging year and I am proud that we hired him. Although I am saddened to see him leave, I am happy that he will be close to his entire family. I wish Dr. Austin and Lisa all the best! You will be missed Dr. Austin! Regards

Comments from Jennifer Benham:

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for being at the helm of our schools these last 2 years and while your time was short here you will certainly be missed. I know this has not been easy and I personally want to thank you for being courageous enough to enter a new state a new community and take a chance on

Hingham. Your dedication, leadership and good heart has been evident especially during these last 18 months. Thank you for your positivity, energy and compassion for school district. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with you.

Comments from Liza O'Reilly:

Thank you to Paul, Tony Keady and Beth Wilcox

Paul - I am very sorry that you are returning to Maine and I am sorry that your time in Hingham and Massachusetts was not what you were hoping for when you took the leap of faith to enter the search process two and a half years ago. We were looking for a student-focused leader and you delivered on that mission. Unfortunately, no one had anticipated a once in a 100-year pandemic which magnified the challenges we knew were in our district and that you had begun the hard work to address. You and Lisa will be terribly missed and it has been a real pleasure to work with you and become friends. I hope we can visit in the Pine Tree State sometime soon.

Tony - we worked together for 12 years beginning when my child began in the first Kindergarten class entering the brand new East School and now that class will be Seniors in the High School. You joined the district several years before at South School. Thank you for all your years as a Principal in Hingham, managing the special projects of opening a new school, COVID testing, creating maker spaces and more. I wish you all the best as your education administration career advances in Duxbury.

Beth - Thank you for leading Foster School through the transition of leadership. It was a pleasure working with your School Council as you evolved the goals and programs while helping us plan and envision what a new Foster will look like. You were presented with a great career advancement opportunity and Duxbury is lucky to have you.

Dear Students of Hingham Public Schools:

This past year, you have actually lived history and this pandemic education experience will be with you for the rest of your life. I have faith that you have all learned resilience, fortitude and that silver linings can be found in adversity. Many wonderful teachers and staff supported you and they have shared wonderful highlights from the year despite it being the greatest challenge of their career. I know you have thanked them, as do I, for all their efforts. My sincere apologies to you for losing the student-focused Superintendent. You knew Dr. Austin as more than the person who called snow days. He visited you in your classrooms; you sang Happy Birthday to him; he attended home and away sports events, plays, and concerts; and made the much appreciated decision to cancel mid-terms and final exams. I am sorry that a contributing factor to his departure was the misbehavior of certain adults in our Hingham Public Schools community.

We teach you and expect you to act with integrity, honesty and make positive change. We ask you and expect you to abide by certain behaviors and follow the "Rules of the Road." You learn tools and how to use them to create a positive learning environment including: a Key is the please & thank you tool to treat others with kindness and appreciation; Glue is the apology & forgiveness tool to admit your mistakes and work to forgive others; Pencil is the using our words tool to use the "right" words in the "right" way and many others. We have these "Rules and Tools" to help us all work together toward the common mission and goal of the Hingham Public Schools to educate Hingham's students to be productive, responsible members of a democratic and ever-changing global society. Unfortunately, there are a few parents and staff members who chose to ignore these "Rules and Tools." They chose to express their thoughts as loud and long as possible to disrupt the paths to progress when we were all navigating an ever-changing, unknown world. I appreciate anyone with an opinion and want to hear input on a given issue. I get it that one needs to "throw a few bombs" to get attention for an issue. I have done it myself. However, there comes a time when the bombs stop, you listen and do the hard work together to achieve the common goal. I also get it that we all want to be supported and respected. And, the support and respect must be returned and shared. "Treat others as thou would be treated thyself." That's how together we can achieve what is best for everyone and deliver it equitably. Several times during the past year, I heard from you students - why aren't the adults behaving and doing what they tell us to do? You are right, the adults need to reflect on the past year with humility. We can all do better for you by living and learning by the same "Rules and Tools." Also, Students please take note of the fine example of Dr. Austin who is living his personal priorities. His family comes first for him and that

drove his decision to make a change in his life. I highly respect him for that. What are your personal priorities and are you living up to them? You have my commitment that we will find you an interim superintendent and a permanent superintendent to continue the best parts of your education, continue building on the additional education and special education supports that are coming for you, make progress on the future, and help transition through the change. We will focus on our common goal - you! Enjoy the rest of your summer. I hope the sun comes out! See you in September.

Comments from Nes Correnti:

I just want to thank you. I want to thank you for coming. I want to thank Lisa for your time. I apologize from the bottom of my heart that you had to go through what you did. When I first came onto the Committee, I didn't go through the superintendent process. I got to meet you when we were both coming on, I was new to the Committee and you new to the superintendent role. We had a nice chat. I could see right from that first meeting we sat together, the Committee made the right decision. You were the right person for this job and I'm really sad that we are going to lose you, truly happy for your family but we were going to be starting to do some good work and I am sad that we're taking a step back. You were the right person for the right time. I have been told that about the Chair of the School Committee, there always seems to be the right person at the right time. I've had two great Chairs ahead. I know that's the case, you were the right Superintendent for the right time, so I thank you. I appreciate Liza's message to the students and to the town. I hope that we can move forward in a positive way. I hope we can put aside our differences and that we can look for the facts and not spread falsehoods. Again, thank you.

Comments from Michelle Ayer:

If you've ever wondered why I voted for you to be our Superintendent—I guess now is a good time for me to tell you. It came down to one word...one word that I heard over and over and over again—from the faculty, the staff, the HEA president, parents, students, town officials, central office staff...one word...GENUINE. Paul Austin is genuine...he is who he is. And who he is, is a father, a son, a husband, a grandfather, and an experienced Superintendent with a doctorate in education who admires teachers and who believes in the abilities of students...ALL students. We hired Dr. Austin because he was genuine and kind and cared—cared deeply—about students. Even his most ardent detractors to this day continually comment on Dr. Austin's level of empathy and kindness. The world is full of leaders who are narcissists, greedy, petty, ...the world is sorely lacking leaders who are kind. Who are caring. Who are genuine. We need this kind of leadership. We will miss this kind of leader. The past 17 months have been extraordinarily challenging—there was nothing that anyone could have done to prepare for the challenges that COVID-19 rained upon us. Nothing. But we had a leader who kept us afloat in incredibly perilous waters. Who ensured that every student had a connection with a HPS teacher every.single.day. A leader who kept us safe. It was not perfect. It was far from ideal. It was, frankly, hell...for all of us. Dr Austin made some people angry. Dr. Austin pushed hard on his staff. Dr. Austin expected more from everyone —parents, teachers, principals, department heads, bus drivers, cafeteria workers—he expected more than had EVER been asked of any of these people before because he was focused on the needs of STUDENTS. That focus not only kept us afloat on the perilous waters, it fueled his accomplishments to set this district up for the future...a 9% budget increase; 2 MSBA projects; 6 bargaining unit successor contracts;...ONE of these would have been a MASSIVE accomplishment in a NORMAL year...let alone all 3 during a global pandemic. He set us up for a phenomenal future. But now Dr. Austin is leaving. I don't blame him. I'll be honest—I'm pretty mad about it...but I don't blame him. I am grateful. I am grateful for his thick skin. I am grateful for his dedication. I am grateful that he spent the past 17 months putting the needs of a community he barely knew above his own needs. That takes a very special person, folks. That takes a GENUINE person. Dr. Austin will be missed. His leadership will leave a void. But you know what we're going to do? We're going to forge ahead. We are going to make sure that all of the work Dr. Austin did to set us up

for the future was not in vain. We are going to focus on students. We are going to embrace all of the good that Dr. Austin brought to this district and we are going to be a better district because of it. To paraphrase Alexander Hamilton...when you're gone, the story of who you are is told by those you left behind. So let's be sure we remember Dr. Austin's story as one of kindness; one of empathy and that we all strive to be as genuine as he is.

Dr. Austin thanked the Committee for their support. He is grateful for his time here in Hingham and proud of the work we have accomplished.

3. To discuss next steps in the search for an Interim Superintendent

Chair Kerry Ni noted the job was posted and acceptance for application closed on July 13, 2021. HPS received resumes of several qualified candidates. The screening committee will meet on Friday, July 16 to review resumes and determine who to interview. Interviews will be scheduled during the week of July 10 and will be open public meetings. The Committee will meet on July 26 to deliberate and possibly vote on a candidate.

4. Items not reasonably known within 48 hours of the meeting:

Michelle Ayer wanted to note that teacher Christine O'Connor was named 2021 Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year. Dr. Austin noted that he sent out a press release to announce that Ms. O'Connor was one of 8,000 entries. Congratulations Chrissy O'Connor!

Chair Kerry Ni noted she sent a message to schedule a joint meeting with the Select Board and the Advisory Committee on August 10.

5. Adjourn

On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti
It was **Voted:** To Adjourn at 6:27 PM

Michelle Ayer – aye
Jennifer Benham - aye
Nes Correnti – aye
Tim Dempsey - aye
Kerry Ni – aye
Liza O'Reilly – aye

Respectfully Submitted By:
Nes Correnti