

MINUTES OF THE HINGHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

October 4, 2021

Remote via Zoom Webinar

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Kerry Ni.

Chair Kerry Ni read the following statement: This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021 temporarily amending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please 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: Chair Kerry Ni, Vice-Chair Michelle Ayer, Secretary Nes Correnti, Liza O'Reilly Carlos DaSilva, Jen Benham, and Tim Dempsey

All members participating remotely

Central Office Present: Interim Superintendent Dr. Gary Maestas, Director of Human Resources Susan D'Amato, Director of Business and Support Services John Ferris, and Executive Director of Student Services Dr. Suzanne Vinnos.

All Central Office participating remotely

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

Harbor Media indicated that they would be recording the meeting, as well as Jenna Manto from the Hingham Journal.

Approval of Minutes:

- On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti
It was **voted:** To approve the minutes of the Joint Session School Committee with the Select Board and Advisory Committee held on September 14, 2021.

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham- aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos A.F. DaSilva - aye

Tim Dempsey – aye

Liza O'Reilly - aye

Kerry Ni – aye

- Michelle Ayer made a motion to approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on September 20, 2021 which was seconded by Nes Correnti.
Committee members Liza O'Reilly and Carlos DaSilva discussed suggested edits to the minutes.
- On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti
It was **voted:** To approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on September 20, 2021 as amended by Liza O'Reilly and Carlos DaSilva

Michelle Ayer – aye
Jen Benham- aye
Nes Correnti – aye
Carlos A.F. DaSilva - aye
Tim Dempsey – aye
Liza O’Reilly - aye
Kerry Ni – aye

Questions and Comments from the Community included:

There were no comments or questions at this time.

Superintendent’s Report:

Interim Superintendent Dr. Gary Maestas gave a report that included:

- Enrollment numbers in each school in the district
- Recent COVID-19 data
- Information about visioning sessions taking place for the Foster School Building Project
- An overview of his goals as Interim Superintendent for the current school year
- A discussion of the plans to hire a District Communications Specialist

Committee member Tim Dempsey asked if the COVID-19 data report could include information regarding students quarantining if there are any.

Superintendent Search:

Chair Kerry Ni updated the committee on the search for a new superintendent. She stated that the job has been posted and that the School Committee will be attending a workshop on Tuesday, October 5th with a representative from NESDEC.

Vice-Chair Michelle Ayer suggested that they change the order of the New Business items and the committee agreed.

Proposed Drama Club Field Trip to New York City:

Dr. Gary Maestas introduced Hingham High School Drama teacher Anita Levy-Sisk. Ms. Levy-Sisk explained that the proposed field trip is one that has been taken many times in previous school years. She explained that the trip is for High School students in the Drama Club and in drama class. She described the itinerary of the proposed trip which include attending three shows either Broadway or off-Broadway, seeing tourist attractions, and taking classes with Broadway professionals. Ms. Levy-Sisk also stated that the hotel for the trip is located in New Jersey.

Chair Kerry Ni asked about financial aid. Ms. Levy-Sisk stated that in the past they have been able to financially assist students and would try to do so again if there is a need.

- On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti
It was **voted**: To approve the proposed Drama Club field trip to New York City to take place from April 8-April 10, 2022

Michelle Ayer – aye
Jen Benham- aye
Nes Correnti – aye
Carlos A.F. DaSilva - aye
Tim Dempsey – aye
Liza O’Reilly - aye
Kerry Ni – aye

Potential Therapy Dog for Hingham High School:

Hingham High School Principal Rick Swanson was present to explain the proposal. Mr. Swanson noted the meeting back in February of 2021 when the issue was discussed as a class gift, stating that the money that was gifted for a therapy dog is no longer needed and has been returned. He explained that the School Resource Officer currently has a rescue dog that he has been training to become a therapy dog. Mr. Swanson provided details regarding the dog's recent training and asked that the School Committee consider allowing the dog to become a therapy dog at the High School with the School Resource Officer (SRO) as its handler. Kerry Ni asked who currently owns the dog. Rick Swanson reported that the dog was gifted to Officer Ford and he is the owner. Michelle Ayer stated that when this was discussed in February committee members, as well as members of the public had expressed concern about the resource officer being the handler instead of a counselor. Jen Benham asked about the training of the dog for clarification of the difference between a therapy dog and a resource dog. Nes Correnti and Liza O'Reilly also noted that back in February they had concerns about the SRO being the handler of the dog. Nes Correnti also noted Mass General Law states a School Resource Officer shall not serve in place of a counselor therefore there is a disconnect between the intention of the dog's use and MGL. Liza O'Reilly noted a concern over the SRO bringing the dog to a sporting event as the SRO has other responsibilities. Tim Dempsey stated that he is a supporter of therapy dogs in schools, but asked what has changed since this was discussed in February regarding the process of the resource officer obtaining the dog. Carlos DaSilva stated that he doesn't have a problem with the resource officer being the handler, but suggested that an adjustment counselor be an alternate handler during school hours. He also noted the issue of the cost of the dog and asked for confirmation that the handler would be absorbing the costs of the dog. Kerry Ni asked about liability. John Ferris stated that when this was brought up in February he had checked the insurance policy and issues related to the potential therapy would be covered under the current policy. Kerry Ni stated that back in February she expressed concern about the School Resource Officer being the handler of the dog, and asked why the committee is hearing about this again, after the officer already has a dog. Liza O'Reilly stated that it was made clear in February that there were concerns with the resource officer being the handler. Principal Swanson asked that those concerned speak with the School Resource Officer to hear from him about the dog and the extensive training he is going through with the dog. Kerry Ni clarified that the concern the Committee is expressing is not regarding the individual officer, but the position and if the position is suitable for the resource dog. The Committee agreed they are in favor of having the Policy Subcommittee review this and create a policy. Jen Benham as the Chair of the Policy Subcommittee agreed that they would take up the issue.

Questions and Comments from the Community Included:

- A concern that this needs more time to determine who is handling the dog, and how the dog will be used
- A discussion of the legal rights as they pertain to therapy dogs and service dogs that are trained for medical purposes
- A concern that there are unanswered questions with this idea
- A question as to whether the handler should be trained in therapy
- A question about the dog's job description

Other items as may not reasonably be known 48 hours in advance of the meeting:

Chair Kerry Ni stated that the School Committee had held a workshop on October 2nd along with members of the Advisory Committee, and the Advisory Committee Education Subcommittee. She also noted that a member of the Select Board was present as well as the Town Administrator Tom Mayo, and thanked all the participants for joining them.

Subcommittee and Project Reports/Warrants Signed

Michelle Ayer reported that there is a meeting this week with the Superintendent and the METCO families. She also reported that some of the Foster School Building Committee members will be taking a field trip to view other schools to look at their designs, the first such visits will be this week in both Danvers and Marblehead. Michelle Ayer also reported that the Special Education Subcommittee will be meeting soon and that the High School Council will also be meeting on October 20th.

Jen Benham reported that the Foster School visioning sessions have begun and they have been looking at designs and visioning goals. She also stated that she will be scheduling a Policy Subcommittee meeting soon.

Nes Correnti reported that the East School Council will be meeting in two weeks and that the Finance/Capital & Facilities Subcommittee met today. She reported that two community members are looking to submit a CPC Application to build a wellness center at Hingham High School out of an existing storage shed that was an old concession stand. She noted that the School Committee needs to approve the application before it is submitted and since it has to be done soon, the committee agreed to meet for a special meeting to discuss it later in the week on October 7th.

Carlos DaSilva stated that the South School Council met on September 29th, and the Climate Action Committee met on September 22nd and they in the process of coming up with a charter for the committee.

Tim Dempsey reported that the Hingham Education Foundation had its annual fundraiser recently.

Liza O'Reilly reported that there will be two Salary and Negotiations Subcommittee meetings this week, on October 5th to address the superintendent search and the full school committee is invited, and the other meeting will be on October 7th to discuss strategy for negotiations with the HEA, the next negotiating session will be on October 19th. She also reported that the Wellness Subcommittee will be meeting on October 13th.

Chair Kerry Ni reported that there will be a meeting of the Curriculum Subcommittee this week on October 8th and that she recently attended the Hingham Educational Foundation fundraiser. She also stated that the Plymouth River School PTO has an upcoming PTO meeting and a School Council meeting coming up as well.

Michelle Ayer added that she attended the SEPAC meeting at which Dr. Suzanne Vinnos gave a presentation on IEP meetings.

Adjourn:

- On a motion by Michelle Ayer and seconded by Nes Correnti
It was **voted:** To adjourn at 8:41PM

Michelle Ayer – aye

Jen Benham- aye

Nes Correnti – aye

Carlos A.F. DaSilva - aye

Tim Dempsey – aye

Liza O'Reilly - aye

Kerry Ni – aye

Respectfully Submitted By:
Nes Correnti

Documents Included:

 10.04.21 Agenda.pdf 

 Item 2.1 Joint Session Minutes of September 14, 2021.pdf 

 Item 2.2 09_20_21 Minutes.pdf 

 Item 7.1 Potential Therapy Dog.pdf 

 Item 7.2 Proposed Drama Club Field Trip.pdf 

 Item 9 Warrants Signed.pdf 
