

DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
REMOTE MEETING

MINUTES

March 17, 2021

(Approved 3/31/2021)

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT via REMOTE PARTICIPATION:

Lisa Laprade, Chair

Tracey White, Vice-Chair

Stephen Bilafer

Mayanne Briggs

Joshua Donati

Dr. Melissa Pearrow

Victor Hebert

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ABSENT:

None

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION REMOTELY PRESENT:

Michael J. Welch, Superintendent

Dr. Ian Kelly, Assistant Superintendent

Sam Rippin, Assistant Superintendent for Business & Finance

Meeting Location:

Per Governor Baker's order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A sec. 20, the meeting was held via Zoom as posted on the agenda: <https://dedham-k12-ma-us.zoom.us/j/98807925022>

Remote meeting commenced at 7:03 p.m.

Ms. Laprade read the following statement regarding the remote meeting:

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order concerning imposition on strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, meetings in the Town of Dedham are being conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings as provided for in the Order. We have arranged for a call-in number for those who would like to listen to this meeting. While it is possible that some members of the public may be invited to comment, it is also possible that despite our best efforts, we are not able to provide for real-time involvement, we will post a recording of this meeting as soon as we are able.

Ms. Laprade called the School Committee meeting to order.

Ms. Laprade took a roll call attendance:

Stephen Bilafer - Present
Mayanne Briggs - Present
Joshua Donati - Present
Dr. Melissa Pearrow – Present
Victor Hebert - Present
Tracey White, Vice-Chair - Present
Lisa Laprade, Chair – Present

Public Comment

None

Superintendent's Update

Today was the 109th day of the 2020-21 school year.

The district has been spending a tremendous amount of time planning for the upcoming transition back to full in-person learning for all Kindergarten through Grade 5 students beginning on Monday, April 5. Supt. Welch thanked the Leadership Team members and support staff for their monumental efforts toward this plan.

March 12 was the deadline for parents and students to opt for a change in their current learning model placement. There were many change requests. Given the reduction in COVID-19 cases and the Governor's/Commissioner's announcements last week, this has motivated a move toward more in-person requests. The Middle School reported 118 requests to increase time in school. Principal Hillman had been working to assess whether the school could accommodate all these students given the current Memorandum of Agreement with the DEA. Late today she indicated to Supt. Welch that all was set for these changes to take place this week. Other schools reported the following transition requests:

ECEC (K)	=	17
Avery	=	32
Greenlodge	=	3
Oakdale	=	7
Riverdale	=	2
DMS	=	118
DHS	=	47
Total	=	226

The district has been working to support faculty and staff in their pursuit of COVID-19 vaccines. On March 14 Supt. Welch sent out a survey to all Faculty/Staff regarding the vaccine and whether they needed help in scheduling a vaccine appointment. He received 443 responses as of today and the district

has helped more than 25 teachers obtain personal individual vaccine appointments. Supt. Welch feels confident that every educator and staff member in the district who wants a vaccine appointment has obtained one. Of the 443 faculty/staff who responded, 75% have already received their first vaccine dose.

On March 16, the Finance & Warrant Committee held its review of the Capital Expenditures Committee's recommendations. Supt. Welch thanked the many staff members who were present during this Zoom meeting. Assistant Superintendent Sam Rippin, Technology Director, Dr. Don Langenhorst, and High School Principal Jim Forrest all spoke in support of DPS requests particularly the replacement and repair of the high school turf field and library renovations.

The FY22 Operating Budget will be presented to the Finance & Warrant Committee on March 18. The FY22 Budget Book was electronically sent to all Finance & Warrant Committee (and School Committee) members on March 12. Supt. Welch thanked Communications Coordinator Sara Errickson who spent many hours polishing this document along with Sam Rippin and his business/finance colleagues.

On March 5, Supt. Welch presented the MSBA with a "virtual" site visit of the Oakdale School in order to complete the next phase of the MSBA "senior study". He thanked Director of Facilities Denise Moroney and Principal Kimberly Hermes for their early morning tour to provide video footage for the MSBA to observe. He gave a special thanks to Dedham graduate Justin Crowley of JLC Productions for his prompt and professional filming and editing of this submission.

On March 18, the high school Counseling Department will be hosting a virtual 9th and 10th Grade Planning Night. They will have a panel of undergraduate admissions counselors from Stonehill College and UMass Amherst participating. A Zoom link has been sent to all parents and students so that they can participate remotely.

Supt. Welch read the following information from High School Theater Instructor Steven Bergman:
"I'm thrilled to say that tickets for the DHS streaming production of "The Addams Family" are NOW available! The students have been working hard on this production, and I hope you will watch them - from wherever you are - next weekend (March 19-21). Here is the link: dedhamhs.booktix.com You have three chances to watch, so reserve your time. There is NO charge for you to watch, but the production was certainly not free to put together, so I'll hope you'll consider a suggested donation of \$10, which can be given once you've received your specific streamlink."

COVID-19 Update

COVID positivity rates and overall cases continue to trend downward in Dedham. Current positivity rates have dropped to levels similar to November and conversations with the Dedham Health Department suggest a continued downward trend. New data will be released tomorrow.

DPS continues the expansion of COVID-19 pooled testing in schools. Pooled Testing Coordinator Emily Kadhejian continues to work closely with the state-assigned vendor (Concentric by Gingko) to track student and staff consents and monitor the testing of students.

This week testing expanded to all grades at ECEC, Riverdale, and Oakdale. These schools join Greenlodge and Avery and testing is now occurring once per week on all consenting individuals at all of the elementary schools. On March 22, Supt. Welch hopes to include the Middle School and on March 29 the High School. He is also exploring ways to introduce COVID-19 pooled testing to athletes on sports teams at the high school. Information on pooled testing can be found on the district website. Ms.

Kedehjian continues to offer informational parent zoom meetings for students and parents to learn more about this program. The district is seeing about 30% of students participating, but anticipates that number will increase as the testing becomes more familiar and routine.

On March 16, Supt. Welch was informed about two positive pooled test results. There were 13 total individuals included in the two pools. All impacted students and staff were contacted that evening and were individually “reflex tested” this morning using the BinaxNOW Rapid Test to determine the source of the positive case(s). The BinaxNOW tests were administered by DPS nurses in a “drive-through” format so that individuals never entered the school buildings.

These BinaxNOW rapid tests were able to definitively identify the positive individuals from each pool within 15 minutes of being administered. This effectively removed these asymptomatic individuals from the schools and prevented any transmission in the community. This proves the impact of this effort and it demonstrates another layer of protection and safety for the DPS community.

Reports

Special Education Update – Special Education Director Elizabeth O’Connell

Ms. O’Connell updated the Committee with a presentation titled “Special Education and the Pandemic: A Year in Review”. The report can be found on the district website. The report included enrollment trends (in and out of district), Federal and State mandates (legal requirements), pandemic challenges, key initiatives, samples of specialized instruction, assessments, professional development, fiscal considerations, and lessons learned.

The Committee commended Ms. O’Connell and her team for all of their hard work through the challenges of the pandemic. They were also pleased to hear that all IEP meetings are now up to date. They discussed the drop-off of PK enrollment due to COVID and the expectation of an increase in the fall. They talked about compensatory services and measuring growth of those services through questions designated in the progress report. Ms. O’Connell explained how she is working with Dr. Kelly’s office to ensure that summer programs, fall curriculum and support services are aligned for all students needing remediation. The Committee and the Administration once again expressed concern for the mental health of children transitioning back into the classroom. Many students (Grades 6 and 9, and new students) will be entering their school buildings for the first time. The effect on mental health caused by the pandemic is still uncertain and can’t be assessed until students are back in the classrooms. There will need to be a lot of screening to make sure students are getting the support they need. Supt. Welch noted that due to the restructure, the Special Education Department was well positioned to handle the challenges of teaching and providing appropriate services over this past year as well as providing training for their peers.

Old/New Business

Discussion on Next Steps for Grades K-8 In-Person Learning

Supt. Welch updated the Committee with his plan to bring Kindergarten through Grade 8 students back to the classrooms. The presentation can be found on the district website. The report included a timeline, review of

feedback from back-to-school surveys, logistical issues, and challenges. Supt. Welch hopes to have all kindergarten through Grade 5 students back in school five days a week on April 5 and Grades 6-8 on April 26. DESE has not yet determined a requirement for high school students.

The Committee asked about Preschool. Superintendent Welch stated that those plans have not been made yet, but that ECEC Principal Kim Taylor was working on a plan. The Committee asked if a task force should be formed to work on a return to school plan. Superintendent Welch has asked the principals to work with teachers in helping to solve the logistical challenges. He feels the people working in the buildings know what's best for their schools and principals are sharing ideas with each other. Supt. Welch noted that one of his main concerns is providing programming for remediation. Dr. Kelly stated it will cost around \$100,000 for materials to open the schools and probably another \$350,000 for summer remediation. The Committee expressed its displeasure with the push from DESE to return students to school with limited guidance. Dr. Kelly explained that the first 40 to 50 days of in-person learning will be repairing and identifying gaps in student learning. Supt. Welch stated that support resources will be provided for students with the most risk factors.

Subcommittee Updates

Policy Subcommittee

Dr. Pearrow noted the Policy Subcommittee has discussed and voted unanimously to add the following verbiage to Policy JICFB Bullying Prevention, which aligns with the Mass General Law Chapter 71, Section 370 part 3. This is the second reading of amended policy JICFB-Bullying and Prevention.

To add as vulnerable groups, "...pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics."

The next meeting of the subcommittee will be on April 16.

Donations

Ms. Briggs motioned to accept with grateful appreciation a donation of 250 student packets of school supplies to the middle school from Staples, Dr. Pearrow second; a roll call vote was taken:

Stephen Bilafer- Yes

Mayanne Briggs - Yes

Joshua Donati - Yes

Dr. Melissa Pearrow – Yes

Victor Hebert - Yes

Tracey White, Vice-Chair- Yes

Lisa Laprade, Chair – Yes

Motion passed 7-0

Minutes

Ms. Briggs motioned to approve the minutes from February 24, 2021 and March 3, 2021 as presented, Mr. Hebert second; a roll call vote was taken:

Stephen Bilafer- Yes

Mayanne Briggs - Yes

Joshua Donati - Yes

Dr. Melissa Pearrow – Yes

Victor Hebert - Yes

Tracey White, Vice-Chair- Yes

Lisa Laprade, Chair – Yes

Motion passed 7-0

Acknowledgements and Announcements

Ms. Briggs recognized the passing of John Raffa, a former teacher and long time principal of the Riverdale Elementary School.

Mr. Donati noted the next Master Plan Community meeting will be held virtually on March 30 at 7:00pm

Mr. Bilafer motioned to adjourn the meeting of March 17, 2021, Ms. White second; a roll call vote was taken:

Stephen Bilafer- Yes

Mayanne Briggs - Yes

Joshua Donati - Yes

Dr. Melissa Pearrow – Yes

Victor Hebert - Yes

Tracey White, Vice-Chair- Yes

Lisa Laprade, Chair – Yes

Motion passed 7-0

Regular Meeting ended at 8:56 p.m.