

# DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

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## **MINUTES**

**June 2, 2021**

*(Approved July 28, 2021)*

### MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Tracey White, Chair

Dr. Melissa Pearrow, Vice-Chair

Mayanne Briggs

Joshua Donati

Victor Hebert

Cailen McCormick

Christopher Polito

### MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ABSENT:

None

### MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Michael J. Welch, Superintendent

Ian Kelly, Assistant Superintendent

Sam Rippin, Assistant Superintendent for Business & Finance

Meeting Location: Dedham Middle School

Meeting commenced at 7:05 p.m.

## **Recognitions**

The School Committee recognized Athletic Director Stephen Traister and the DPS Food Service workers for their outstanding efforts serving food to the families of Dedham throughout the pandemic. Mr. Traister personally and voluntarily delivered meals to families in Dedham who did not have transportation. Food Service Director Jeanne Johnson, who was unable to be in attendance, also thanked Mr. Traister and her team for their selfless efforts over the past year, via letters read aloud at the meeting.

## Public Comment

Colleen Hynes, 137 Quincy Avenue, commented on a topic from the May 19 School Committee meeting, asking for more collaboration with parents on sensitive topics. Ms. Hynes also requested that the schools be clearer when answering parent questions around Critical Race Theory being taught in the classroom.

Erin Colligan, 215 Adams Street, asked for corrective action on lack of communication, response to lack of basic human rights and anti-bullying policies.

Rebecca Gates, 35 Goshen Road, read a statement of behalf of Ann Gentile, 181 Vincent Road. Ms Gentile, via email correspondence, asked to have her statement entered into the record:

Thank you, madam chair my name, is Ann Gentile and I live at 181 Vincent Road

I've notice from recent school committee meetings and policy subcommittee postings there are many changes underway to curriculum, instruction, and policy within the Dedham Schools. I am deeply concerned by the lack of transparency and explanation from the administration when questions are brought up to the school committee about these changes. What is the procedure and process of these changes, are there public hearings, and what are the opportunities for parents and the community to be involved and to give feedback PRIOR to implementation?

For example, the May 25, policy subcommittee meeting agenda had - IGA - Curriculum Development; and IHAMA - Parental Notification. What do the abbreviations IGA and IHAMA mean? Going forward can we avoid the abbreviations and spell out each agenda item.

Also, will there be public hearings and how will parents and the community be informed about the PROPOSED curriculum and policy changes?

Another example is the library review directed by Dr. Fox Roye and Dr. Kelley. There is a movement about the country called critical race theory or cultural responsive teaching in which classic novels written by white men such as Shakespeare and To Kill a Mockingbird are being removed from school libraries and replaced with books supporting CRT. I am asking you tonight to publish the book review plan online, including the books being removed, if any, and to post the books that are being added to the schools' libraries, and what grade level, and which books are required reading.

I feel with a lack of information comes mistrust. I urge the school committee to take the actions needed so the community is notified and involved in these changes – and hopefully, nothing drastic will occur in July and August when people are away and not paying attention, such as a buy-in to critical race theory or cultural responsive teaching - where we teach students based on the color of their skin and not as individuals.

## Superintendent's Update

*Supt. Welch provided the following update to the Committee:*

Today was the 156th day of the 2020-21 school year. We have 14 school days left this year. Just as a reminder, the last day of school is Monday, June 21 and this is a half-day for students.

This is a busy week in the district. Dedham High School will be celebrating graduation for the Class of 2021 at Veteran's Memorial Field at Stone Park at 11:00 AM on Saturday, June 5th. Last night was the annual "Class Night" complete with academic achievement awards presented

by DHS Department Chairs and administrators. This event was held outside in order to allow attendance by family members and friends. Additional senior events are occurring during other days this week.

Despite this challenging pandemic-influenced year, at this year's Class of 2021 graduation, Dedham High School will be awarding 236 scholarships (40 more than last year) valued at more than \$229,000 (up \$50,000 from last year). There are 116 members of the senior class receiving at least one scholarship, representing an increase of 15 students. Many thanks to the DHS Scholarship committee (especially College/Career Counselor Ashley Mansfield and all the DHS Counselors) that invests a huge number of hours to equitably distribute these generous resources from the community.

Each year Dedham High School students submit videos for entry into the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) Boston/New England Chapter Student Production Awards contest. This is the same group that awards Emmy's to industry professionals. (A description of the award is included below.) Hundreds of schools participate in this contest. Being nominated for an award is an honor, and winning an award is a privilege. *This year's nominees were just announced and Dedham High was nominated in 6 categories! This is the most nominations we have ever received. And, even more exciting, we won two awards! Junior, Hilen Miralda, produced a powerful PSA on the dangers of social media. It is a moving piece that is quite deserving of this recognition. And Sophomore Christopher MacDougall, produced a poignant news package on what it's like to be in school during a pandemic. Very informative and really well produced. Both students deserved this prestigious award!*

The NATAS Boston/New England Student Production Awards recognize outstanding student achievements in production by conferring awards of merit in the chapter's designated award region. The presentation of these awards is intended to be an incentive for the continued pursuit of excellence by those studying media and journalism and to focus public attention on outstanding cultural, educational, technological, entertainment, news and informational achievements by undergraduate college and/or high school students.

See below from Ms. Rocha, advisor of the ECHO Magazine.

The staff of ECHO Magazine is happy to share this year's edition "Stories from a Strange Year." We especially want to thank all who contributed their writing and artistic talents to the creation of this year's magazine including Yoana-Marie Rodriguez, Colleen Kelley, Finn Radner, Olta Milosh, Erin Monahan, John Scaramuzzo, Ricky Spinello, Harlee O'Sullivan, Olivia Dignan, Isaiah Hill, Jada Gourdet, Grace Metcalf-Vera, Lauren Fonseca, and Elaina Dong along with the editorial staff Editor-in-Chief Leila Smadi, Assistant Editor-in-Chief Finn Radner, Colin Finkel, Isabella Annatone, and Christopher MacDougall.

As the Committee is already aware, the DHS Performing Arts Company recently aired the full release of their METG Drama Festival production of MacBeth on Friday, May 28th at 7:00 PM. For those of you who would like to see other shows presented in the METG Together Festival please see the schedule containing the names and productions of all of the high schools in Massachusetts who submitted videos this year - Dedham is on Friday the 11th. CONGRATULATIONS to Ms. Whittemore and the entire Performing Arts Company on their riveting production!

As the Committee is aware, DESE posted new K-12 Graduation/Commencement Guidance and Updated COVID-19 Guidance on Friday, May 28. I sent a DPS Update containing this information to all faculty, staff, and families on Monday, May 31. The major takeaway from these updates was that starting next fall all districts and schools will be required to provide in-person, 5 days per week instruction. Remote instruction will not be allowed as a standard learning model in the 2021-22 school year.

This week Dedham Middle School will be giving all students the ELA and Math MCAS assessments. These will be conducted on Chromebooks for all students. This is a massive undertaking with 650 students being assessed in ELA and Math, and 8th graders also completing Science/Technology assessments. It will be a busy week at DMS.

In addition, this week our elementary school students who have continued with fully remote learning will be completing their MCAS assessments in ELA and Math. These will be done entirely remotely and online, while monitored simultaneously by their remote instruction teachers. This has never been attempted before, and all districts are struggling with how to do this in an equitable/fair manner. We have about 30 students (total) in grades 3-5 who are currently still fully remote and participating in this testing.

On Thursday, May 27 I attended (virtually) the annual Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents annual Spring meeting. The focus of this conference was the work underway to advance racial equity, diversity and inclusion in the Association and our districts. Much of the discussion focused on the recently released MASS Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy. It was clear that this work is a priority in school districts across the state and at the state/DESE level, and I was proud to share our work in Dedham with this group.

DPS Food Services Director Jeanne Johnson recently informed me that due to the majority of schools reopening around the country at about the same time it has put a strain on the suppliers that provide food to school food service programs. This has resulted in deliveries that have not shown up as scheduled and a large amount of products that are becoming more and more unavailable. All the parties involved are working as quickly as possible to remedy the situation. This may cause the need for last minute menu changes to the school lunch and breakfast meals that are served at our schools. We appreciate your understanding and patience as we work through this ever changing food market supply chain and get back on a consistent food availability track.

Finally, included in your folder is an email from DESE indicating receipt before the June 1 deadline of Dedham's decision to NOT participate in the school choice program in 2021-22.

Mr. Polito inquired into when school facilities would be able to be used again by outside organizations, specifically the Police Department for its Fit Club program. Supt. Welch explained that due to DESE regulations masks still must be worn inside school buildings and visitors must remain socially distanced at 6 feet apart. He is waiting until the end of the school year before reassessing school facility rentals. He will make his decision along with recommendations from the Board of Health.

Dr. Pearrow acknowledged that at Senior Night the previous evening, approximately a quarter of the seniors received the Abigail Adams scholarship.

## Superintendent's COVID-19 Update

DPH COVID-19 Case Data For Dedham									
DPH COVID-19 Data Website									
		Average Daily Incident Rate		Relative Change In		Total Tests		Total	Percent
MA Map	Total	Case Count	Per 100,000	Change In		Last 14 days	Positive Tests	Positivity	Change In
Week Of	Case Count	Last 14 days	Last 14 Days	Case Counts	Total Tests	Last 14 days	Last 14 days	Last 14 days	Positivity
<a href="#">May 27</a>	2453	18	4.7	Lower	75475	2171		0.97%	Lower
<a href="#">May 20</a>	2446	24	6.3	Lower	74484	2323		1.08%	Lower
<a href="#">May 13</a>	2435	30	7.8	Lower	73386	2532		1.22%	Lower
<a href="#">May 6</a>	2425	42	11.0	Lower	72092	2858		1.50%	Lower
<a href="#">Apr 29</a>	2405	68	17.7	Lower	70771	3303		2.33%	Lower
<a href="#">Apr 22</a>	2377	86	22.4	Higher	69150	3565	86	2.69%	Higher
<a href="#">Apr 15</a>	2333	71	18.5	Higher	67606	3616	71	2.32%	Higher
<a href="#">Apr 8</a>	2292	62	16.2	Lower	65649	3508	62	2.25%	Lower
<a href="#">Apr 1</a>	2264	81	21.1	Lower	63966	3293	93	2.82%	Lower
<a href="#">Mar 25</a>	2226	100	26.1	Higher	62140	3276	111	3.39%	Higher
<a href="#">Mar 18</a>	2186	84	21.9	Higher	60528	3569	99	2.77%	Higher
<a href="#">Mar 11</a>	2134	74	19.3	Lower	58867	3938	87	2.21%	Lower
<a href="#">Mar 4</a>	2097	86	22.4	Lower	57033	3879	98	2.53%	Lower
<a href="#">Feb 25</a>	2053	116	30.2	Lower	54861	3938	135	3.43%	Lower
<a href="#">Feb. 18</a>	2013	157	40.9	Lower	52898	4147	181	4.36%	Lower
<a href="#">Feb. 11</a>	1941	254	66.2	Lower	50926	4414	277	6.28%	Lower
<a href="#">Feb. 4</a>	1866	349	91	Higher	48783	4979	377	7.57%	Higher
<a href="#">Jan. 28</a>	1705	282	73.5	Higher	46410	4727	315	6.66%	Higher
<a href="#">Jan. 21</a>	1518	274	71.5	Lower	43770	4773	306	6.41%	Lower
<a href="#">Jan. 14</a>	1407	274	71.5	Higher	41732	4279	301	7.03%	Higher
<a href="#">Jan. 7</a>	1242	182	47.5	Lower	38972	3412	203	5.95%	Higher
<a href="#">Dec. 31</a>	1129	184	48	Lower	37177	3654	200	5.47%	Higher
<a href="#">Dec. 24</a>	1040	188	49	Higher	35496	3951	202	5.11%	Higher
<a href="#">Dec. 17</a>	941	176	45.9	Higher	33420	4055	190	4.69%	No Change
<a href="#">Dec. 10</a>	850	141	36.8	Higher	30887	3329	154	4.63%	Higher
<a href="#">Dec. 3</a>	760	93	24.3	Higher	28833	3058	100	3.27%	Higher
<a href="#">Nov. 27</a>	700	69	18	Higher	27523	3313	77	2.32%	Higher
<a href="#">Nov. 19</a>	655	52	13.6	Higher	25623	3132	60	1.92%	Higher
<a href="#">Nov. 12</a>	622	38	9.9	Lower	23997	3296	43	1.30%	Lower
<a href="#">Nov. 6</a>	599	51	13.3	Higher	22489	3050	55	1.80%	No Change

Dedham's COVID-19 positive case numbers continue to trend downward. However, we did have two positive COVID-19 cases within our schools last week. One case was at Oakdale and the other was at DHS. The Oakdale case was uncovered by our district's pooled testing program, again showing how important this initiative has become as a means for keeping COVID-19 out of our buildings. It is clear that while the virus is less prevalent, it has not gone away completely.

As of Wednesday, May 12th, the Pfizer COVID vaccine has been approved for use by young people, including ages 12 and above. Hundreds of vaccination sites are available across the state and many of these now accept walk -in appointments, including the mass vaccination sites and CVS and Walgreens pharmacies. The COVID vaccine is free for all, and no ID or insurance is needed to obtain the vaccine. On Tuesday, May 18 DESE released a memo encouraging parents to get their children vaccinated. More information on these sites, as well as safety information, and helpful Q&As are all available at [www.mass.gov/covidvaccine](http://www.mass.gov/covidvaccine).

Pooled COVID-19 testing continues at all 7 DPS schools. We continue to urge parents to sign consents to have their children participate in this voluntary program, as it is another effective layer of protection for all faculty, staff, and students. Parents can see the DPS webpage info on pooled testing in the district. This has a direct link to the consent form for parents.

<b>DPS COVID Testing Summary To Date:</b>			
<b>Totals To Date:</b>		<b>Positives</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Pools</b>	<b>Tests</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Positivity</b>
<b>1468</b>	<b>12,526</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.06%</b>

As I do every Tuesday, yesterday afternoon I met with DPS Director of Health Services Gail Kelley along with Dedham Health Department Director Kylee Sullivan, and ECEC Nurse Carol Laurino. This was our weekly scheduled COVID-19 meeting to review current case trends and guidance. We discussed the possible availability of vaccines for children under age 12 and the latest information is that the vaccine will NOT receive Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the CDC. Therefore, I believe it is highly likely that elementary schools across the state will continue with mask mandates next fall.

On Wednesday, 5/26 I attended a DESE Pooled Testing Webinar that provided additional insight on the future of pooled testing in MA schools. It is highly likely that this program will remain in place throughout the summer and into the fall for districts that wish to take advantage of the funding source from the state. We anticipate continuing the use of pooled testing once per week in all Dedham Public Schools summer programs. This will take place for all students and staff who have provided written consent to participate.

On Thursday, 5/27 the district conducted a comprehensive COVID-19 vaccination clinic for any pre-registered students ages 12 and up. Clinics took place at DMS (morning) and DHS (afternoon) in conjunction with the Dedham Health Department and Dedham Board of Health. Over 100 students provided consent forms and were vaccinated using the approved Pfizer vaccine. This required tremendous collaboration and a quick turnaround, as this vaccine must have a second dose in 3 weeks. This will allow DPS to repeat this effort on Thursday, June 17 and have students completing their vaccine sequence before school lets out on Monday, June 21.

Mr. Hebert inquired into the funding of COVID-19 pooled testing in the fall. Supt. Welch does not know at this time if the State will continue to cover this expense. Dr. Pearrow asked about the Emergency Policies put into place during the pandemic and if they needed to be revised. Supt. Welch noted the State of Emergency will be lifted on June 15 and he would need to look into it further.

## **Reports/Updates**

### **Dedham High School (DHS) Special Education Work Study Program**

Director of Special Education Elizabeth O'Connell, Dedham High School Special Education teacher Kathleen Megan, School Psychologist Svea Bissonnette and Career Counselor Ashley Mansfield came before the Committee asking to support a Work Study Program for the DHS

Alternative Program. Their presentation included the definition of work study, background of the Alternative Program, student data patterns, graduation credit requirements, proposal for the work study program, and goals of the program. The presentation will be posted on the district website.

Superintendent Welch stated he supported the program.

Following questions from the Committee, the team elaborated on several topics. Ms. Megan explained how DHS has a transitional specialist that partners with the community (VA Hospital, New Bridge on the Charles, ECEC and others) for internship opportunities and she works with MRC and MassHire Metro South/West for job opportunities. Ms. Mansfield explained that they would love to work with trades companies, but it is difficult because most require students to be 18 years or older. Mr. Forrest noted that this is a pilot program for the Alternative students, but if successful would like to see it expand. The success of the program will be determined by data, success of credits and feedback from the students. There is no specific timeframe set for the pilot program. The team will re-access after the first year and consult the curriculum office. Approximately 6-10 kids will take advantage of work study for the 21-22 school year. Students above the freshman level will be encouraged to participate. All students in the Alternative program work with a licensed clinician.

Mr. Polito motioned to approve the Alternative Program Work Study proposal as presented, Ms. Briggs second. Dr. Pearrow asked for an addendum to the motion to include a follow up report at the end of next school year. Mr. Polito motioned to include the addendum, Ms. Briggs second; motion passed 7-0 in favor.

### Fine Arts Out of State Field Trip Request

Fine Arts Director Eytan Wurman came before the Committee asking for its support of a Fine Arts music field trip to New York City over April vacation 2022. The trip would require a one night's stay for a festival and culturally appropriate tourist attractions. The tour company is called World Strides and insurance would be included.

Supt. Welch explained that Mr. Wurman is following policy JJH, Student Travel which requires a 60-day approval for out-of-state and overnight trips.

Following questions from the Committee, Mr. Wurman elaborated on several topics. World Strides is a legitimate, reputable company that has been used by DHS in the past. Chaperones are required at a 10:1 ratio; however, Mr. Wurman would like to try to increase that to 6:1. Mr. Wurman, along with Dedham Arts Boosters, is looking into fundraising and other scholarship opportunities so all students who would like to attend have the opportunity. A deposit of \$850 needs to be sent to the tour company by June 8 in order to secure Dedham's spot as well as lock in the current pricing. This holds a spot for up to 50 students. Mr. Wurman still needs to see how many students will be participating and if it will be viable to participate in the festival. Changes can be made up to 175 days prior to the trip.

Ms. Briggs motioned to approve the out-of-state field trip on April 22, 2022 through April 23, 2022, Mr. Polito second, discussion: Ms. White asked Mr. Wurman to come back and present to the Committee once all plans were finalized; motion passed 7-0 in favor.

## **Old/New Business**

### Feedback and Vote on Superintendent's 2021-2022 Goals

Superintendent Welch presented the first draft of his goals at the May 6, 2021 School Committee meeting and the final draft at the May 19, 2021 meeting. No further feedback occurred.

Ms. Briggs motioned to approve the Superintendent's goals as presented for the 2021-2022 school year, Mr. Hebert second, motion passed 7-0 in favor.

## **Subcommittee Updates**

None

## **Donations**

Dr. Pearrow motioned to accept with grateful appreciation a donation in the amount of \$2,000 from the Dedham Arts Boosters, broken down as follows:

\$750 to purchase sound equipment to improve the performance of the marching band

\$750 to purchase props to support the marching band performances

\$500 to provide new uniform upgrades for the marching band

Mr. Hebert second; motion passed 7-0 in favor.

## **Minutes**

None

## **Acknowledgements and Announcements**

Ms. McCormick read the following statement:

We stand with our students, educators, staff and families who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and those with other gender identities and sexual orientations. We, as a committee, reaffirm our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and emphasize that by saying these words, we truly mean all are welcome and valued for whomever he/she/they are.

It is our responsibility as a school committee to support policies that afford students their civil right of obtaining a free and appropriate public education, and it is the responsibility of each school to ensure we create a welcoming and safe community for all students. Educators, families, and students who are doing the work of creating this safe and welcoming community in each of



our buildings, we appreciate you and we stand with you. To the LGBTQ+ youth in our district: you are loved, you are valued, and we are so glad you're here.

Mr. Donati asked the full committee to adopt the statement read by Ms. McCormick at the next school committee meeting.

Mr. Polito asked to enter into executive session related to a personnel matter. Ms. Briggs explained that there needs to be a legal reason to enter executive session and, if it is a personnel matter, the person being spoken about needs to be invited to attend. Mr. Polito asked for that to happen at the next school committee meeting.

Ms. Hebert motioned to adjourn the meeting of June 2, 2021, Mr. Donati second; motion passed 7-0 in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.