

DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

March 2, 2022

(Approved 3/16/2022)

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:

Dr. Ian Kelly, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Edward Gotgart, Assistant Superintendent for Business & Finance

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT:

Olivia Hanley

Meeting Location: Avery Elementary School

Meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

None

Superintendent's Update

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Ian Kelly summarized Superintendent Welch's March 2 Update. The following is the update as submitted to the Committee by Superintendent Welch:

Today was the 108th day of classes for the 2021-22 school year. We are now in the 7-week stretch of relatively uninterrupted learning from February Break to April Break. This is generally the most valuable learning time of the school year, and everyone is excited to be back in school fresh from the most recent vacation. Just a reminder that tomorrow (Thursday, March 3) is the district's second-to-last early release half-day for educator professional development.

Since we have only had 5 days of classes in our schools since our last School Committee meeting, I will keep this update brief.

Today was an important milestone in the ongoing MSBA process toward the vision of a new school to serve our Oakdale students. At today's Board meeting, the MSBA voted to welcome the Town of Dedham into the [Feasibility Study](#) stage of their multi-step process. This is another huge hurdle and victory for Dedham's School Building Rehabilitation Committee, and signals the start of a process that will take 9-12 months to complete. Dedham is one of only 4 districts to meet this threshold out of the 15 districts invited into the eligibility phase from the spring 2021 cohort.

Tomorrow members of Dedham's SBRC will be participating in a "[Module 2 Orientation](#)" to learn more about the expectations and requirements of the District and the Town during the Feasibility Stage. This training will provide guidance about how to form the Project Team, including the [Owner's Project Manager \(OPM\)](#) process and the [Designer's Selection Panel Process](#). These are critical decision steps that the SBRC will need to make during Feasibility, and I encourage Committee members to review these stages carefully in order to be fully informed. There are strict regulations and criteria that must be met to satisfy the MSBA's requirements, and these links help explain what can and cannot be done moving forward.

On another MSBA related note, during the vacation week I received a request from Weymouth Public Schools Superintendent Rob Wargo who was interested in bringing a team from Weymouth to tour and study our ECEC. Their Weymouth team will be touring the ECEC on Friday this week.

I received another call yesterday from Robert Jokela, the Superintendent of the Fitchburg Public Schools, who also asked if their district could send a team to visit the ECEC. These requests are most certainly a result of the ECEC's "Model School" status. It is a great honor to be hosting teams from around the state as we get to show off our fantastic facility!

Yesterday, 4th graders at the Greenlodge School participated in the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) testing. This school and grade was randomly selected as a representative group from Massachusetts to complete this annual nationwide assessment. Thanks to Principal Jenny McGowan and all the impacted students and staff for their assistance in this obligation.

Coincidentally, we recently learned that 4th graders at the Oakdale School have also been randomly selected to participate in the [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(TIMSS\)](#). This assessment is given every 4 years to a representative sampling of 4th and 8th graders around the world. Somehow, the 4th graders at Oakdale were selected. They will be completing this assessment later on this spring.

Superintendent's Covid-19 Update

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Ian Kelly summarized Superintendent Welch's March 2 Update. The following is the update as submitted to the Committee by Superintendent Welch:

On Friday, February 18, the [MA EEC \(Department of Early Education and Care\) updated their masking regulations](#) statewide for schools and child care facilities. This update rescinded the mask mandate for all EEC preschools. This removed the mask mandate previously in place, and aligned with updated guidance for all K-12 Public Schools.

On Friday, 2-25-22, the [CDC released new color-coded COVID-19 guidance](#) based upon metrics collected from individual counties across the entire country. This guidance placed Norfolk County in the "low risk" (green) category with very limited associated recommendations.

The CDC guidance from Friday, 2-25 also included [new regulations regarding mask wearing on public transportation including K-12 Public School buses](#). This new guidance no longer requires mask wearing when on public transportation. While individual school districts may enact their own requirements, I do not recommend implementing a mask mandate while on school buses at this time.

This week's pooled testing at all schools shows very promising trends in the overall number of COVID-19 cases in our school community. On Monday and Tuesday of this week we tested a total of **361 pools** that included **1249 individuals**. We received 3 positive pools and 2 "inconclusive" results out of those 1249 individuals for a percent positivity of 0.2%. The 3 positive pools were all from Dedham Middle School. One "inconclusive" pool came from ECEC, and the other "inconclusive" pool came from Greenlodge. Both of the "inconclusive" pools ultimately revealed individual students who were positive. There were **NO POSITIVE OR INCONCLUSIVE POOLS** from Avery, Oakdale, Riverdale, and Dedham High School this week.

The most recent data regarding COVID cases in Dedham and the Dedham Public Schools are below:

[COVID-19 data for Town of Dedham](#)

[COVID cases in MA schools](#) (For comprehensive statewide results, click [HERE](#))

[Positive COVID Cases in DPS Schools](#) (please note that entries in yellow represent 2 weeks worth of data as these figures were obtained during the February vacation week.

[DPS Pooled Testing Participation and Results](#)

As the School Committee is aware, on Monday, 2/28 all schools moved to a “masks highly recommended” (optional) status for all indoor activities. When students and staff returned to schools on Monday this week, I asked Principals to estimate the percentage of staff and students who chose to wear masks at the start of the day. Faculty and staff were very attuned to the need for supporting students regardless of their mask-wearing choices, and I believe we have largely been successful in supporting all students. Here were their responses (all data is anecdotal and approximate):

Percent Wearing Masks		
Monday, February 28		
School	Students	Staff
DHS	60%	40%
DMS	35%	45%
Avery	60%	40%
Greenlodge	25%	10%
Oakdale	50%	50%
Riverdale	50%	10%
ECEC	60%	10%

In conversations with our leadership team, we agreed that the best way to approach this transition period into optional masking was to gradually allow students and staff to become more comfortable with these new conditions, and to not change anything too dramatically and too quickly.

For instance, most current middle school students have not experienced eating in a cafeteria at group lunch tables. Their entire lunch eating experience has been eating at individual desks set up in the cafeteria, gym, and library. There are many obvious challenges that this initially presented, but kids have gotten used to this and we didn’t want to immediately shift to “unmasking” AND then layer on top of that the possible social anxiety that group seating would introduce. As students become more comfortable, more typical seating and social experiences will be added.

By all accounts, the transition to a “mask optional” environment has been without incident or discomfort. Some kids and staff continue to wear masks while others do not. Everyone is being supported for their individual choices. I sense that as the data continues to show low rates of infection and people become more at ease, there will be more people who are comfortable removing their masks.

Reports/Updates

Out of State Field Trip Request to Roger Williams Zoo

The Greenlodge, Oakdale and Riverdale fourth-grade teachers would like to take their classes on a field trip to the Roger Williams Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island. The dates would be (pending confirmation from the zoo):

Greenlodge: Thursday May 26th

Oakdale: To be Determined

Riverdale: Monday, May 16th

Avery: Tuesday, June 7th

This trip compliments the 4th grade study of animal adaptations. Each class participates in a 30-minute program where they encounter 3 different animals and learn about their adaptations. Students see and learn about 100 species of animals from all over the world. Students are engaged and excited to learn about the size, diet, conservation, and geographic regions of these animals which improves their understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

This is an out-of-state field trip and requires permission from the School Committee.

Motion

Mr. Polito motioned to approve the request from the elementary school principals to travel out of state for a field trip to Roger Williams Zoo, Dr. Pearrow second, no discussion; motion passed 7-0.

Safe and Supportive School Environments

Director of Counseling Services Dr. Ashly Dubé gave a presentation entitled *DPS Counseling and Psychological Services Update -Current trends, Programming and Future Directions*. The presentation will be available on the district website.

Upcoming DESE Comprehensive Targeted Review

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Ian Kelly provided the following overview to the Committee regarding the upcoming DESE audit:

This year the district is being audited by DESE who will be taking a close and comprehensive look at systems and structures for student learning throughout the district (if you would like to look at specific areas of focus please follow [this link](#)). This audit is conducted by DESE's Office of District Management and Reviews (ODRM) under the legislative authority of [Mass. Gen. Laws. c. 15, § 55A](#). Historically these audits have been conducted by DESE staff but for this round DESE has partnered with the American Institute for Research (AIR) to conduct the review and prepare the final report. As such we will have a team of AIR researchers on the ground with us during the week of March 14th.

While this audit is focused in regard to the standards and indicators, the methods used to collect data relative to them are exhaustive. In preparation for this review the curriculum office has completed a thirty-five page self assessment and compiled hundreds of documents for the AIR team to review prior to their onsite visit during the week of March 14th. The onsite visit will encompass classroom visits, educator focus groups, building leader focus groups, student focus groups, parent focus groups, and 1:1 interviews with the central office. While the logistics of this will be managed by the curriculum office and building principals, educators across the district will take part in this audit in two different ways detailed below.

Classroom observations. Members of the audit team will visit classrooms throughout the district over the course of the week of March 14th. Given the number of classroom visits they intend to conduct (30-40 at the elementary level, 20-30 at the middle school level, and 20-30 at the high school level), it is highly likely that you may be visited during the course of this week. Classrooms will be randomly selected by the auditors on the morning of their visit. The middle school will host auditors on Monday the 14th, elementary schools on Tuesday the 15th, and the high school on Wednesday the 16th. These visits will be 15-20 minutes in length and during that time the auditors will be reviewing the specific indicators found in the [document linked here](#).

Focus groups. Teacher and specialist focus groups will be run at the elementary, middle, and high school level. 6-8 educators will take part in each focus group and focus groups will last approximately 60 minutes. Elementary focus groups will be conducted via zoom due to the geographical and scheduling challenges unique to that level. All other focus groups will be held in person. Details on dates, times, and locations are still being sorted out. If you are selected to participate in a focus group we will get details to you as soon as they are available.

Subcommittee Updates

Budget - Mr. Hebert

None

Communications - Mr. Donati

The next School Committee Office Hour is scheduled for Saturday March 12 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Mr. Donati and Mr. Polito will participate.

Curriculum Advisory - Ms. Briggs

The Subcommittee continues to learn more about the curriculum process and will begin pushing out info to the community soon.

Policy - Mr. Donati

The Subcommittee met this evening to discuss the legal advice received around Public Comment.

SBRC- Mr. Hebert

None

Traffic - Ms. Briggs

None

Negotiations - Ms. White

None

Donations

Motion

Ms. Briggs motioned to approve a donation in the amount of \$1,000 from the Dedham Education Foundation to Dedham High School to support the transportation costs of the senior class trip to Six Flags, Dr. Pearrow second, no discussion; Motion passed 7-0.

Minutes

Motion

Mr. Heber motioned to approve the minutes from February 16, 2022 as presented, Mr. Polito second, no discussion; Dr. Pearrow abstained, motion passed 6-0.

Old/New Business

None

Student representative Olivia Hanley gave an update on current school fundraisers. Ms. Briggs thanked local businesses for their contributions to fundraising efforts.

Acknowledgements & Announcements

None

Executive Session Motion

Mr. Hebert motioned to enter Executive Session under Exemption 3 with respect to Collective Bargaining, Mr. Polito second, a roll call vote was taken:

Mayanne Briggs - Yes

Joshua Donati - Yes

Victor Hebert - Yes

Cailen McCormick - Yes

Christopher Polito - Yes

Dr. Melissa Pearrow, Vice-Chair - Yes

Tracey White, Chair - Yes

Motion Passed 7-0

The Committee will not be returning to regular session.

Regular Meeting concluded at 8:45 p.m.