

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
January 19, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Mr. Dennis King (Chair), Ms. Donna Newcomb (Vice Chair), Mr. Jeff Doherty (Secretary), Mr. John Moses and Ms. Maria Santos.

Also present: Dr. Jay Lang (Superintendent), Dr. Linda Hirsch (Assistant Superintendent) and Ms. Joanna Johnson-Collins (Director of Business and Finance).

Call to Order

6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Opening Statement

“Tonight’s meeting is being live-streamed by Chelmsford Telemedia and posted to the CPS website for interested community members to access and watch. Although we are not allowing for in-person public participation, interested community members are encouraged to submit their names and addresses to Superintendent Lang if they would like to participate remotely under the public input portion of our meeting. During our public input session anyone who has joined us through the *gotomeeting* platform and expressed interest in making a comment will be recognized by the Superintendent and allowed to speak with The Committee. If anyone watching this meeting live has questions or comments to share they are encouraged to email one of us during the meeting. We will read those questions or comments during our second public input session at the end of the meeting.”

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. An Executive Session was held earlier this evening.

Consent Agenda

1. **Approval of the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of January 5, 2021.**

Ms. Newcomb motioned for the school committee to accept the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of January 5, 2021. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

CHS Student Representative Announcements

Dr. Lang re-introduced Sudeep and Katrina who will continue to be student reps and will join the meetings virtually beginning this evening.

Sudeep shared that semester two will be starting on January 26th. Sudeep has been part of the hybrid learning model and feels that it has gone well. He did express concern over the amount of screen time required.

Katrina is enrolled in the remote learning model. Although it requires a lot of screen time she does feel that the “break out rooms” are beneficial in that they allow conversations between students in the class. Overall, her experience has been “pretty good”.

Good News

Dr. Hirsch shared that a collaboration between the different levels of education on types of learning is going on through the pandemic. This document was a team effort of many school districts with many highlights from Chelmsford. It was included in last week's newsletter.

Ms. Newcomb received a note from The Table of Plenty to thank families of Byam Elementary School for their food drive in December, and the families of Harrington School for food donations made this month.

Public Comments

Lauren Cochran and Katy Sullivan from the teacher's union joined the meeting remotely. Ms. Cochran spoke first to provide an update from the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers. She is aware that questions are not answered during the Public Comments time but will pose questions/concerns which she looks forward to being resolved. Ms. Sullivan expressed concerns about the two COVID dashboards (one that tracks students and staff who have been in the schools, and another which tracks students and staff who have not been in the school buildings). Her question is "are there two dashboards?". Ms. Cochran wants to know why contact tracing information is shared often after the quarantine period has ended. This leads to staff not being in quarantine when they should have been. She would like The Committee to share the protocols for this with the union. Ms. Sullivan is concerned about the sprinkling of remote students into hybrid classes. She would like Dr. Lang to share data on this with The Committee. She is also concerned that the data at CHS is inaccurate with many students not attending hybrid classes and staying remote. She is concerned that the MOU is not being honored. She would like to see staff sign off in acceptance of the number of remote students in their classes. Ms. Cochran is concerned about inconsistencies in staff being able to teach remotely at different schools. She would like central administration to intervene to assure that AFT members are "treated fairly and equally with regards to remote assignments". Regarding standards-based report cards, Ms. Sullivan asked if parents of middle schoolers are aware of report card changes in September of 2021 and how many parent meetings have been held concerning these changes. Ms. Cochran appreciates regular meetings with Dr. Lang and open communication with The Committee.

Arun Venugopal, CHS Alumni (2015), joined the meeting virtually to present "Chelmsford CARES and the Antiracism Movement". Mr. Venugopal is the liaison for The Town and Chelmsford Public School's administration for this initiative. He shared a slide show concerning this initiative while enlightening the audience on the details. The group was grown by public interest after the George Floyd Vigil held on June 5, 2020, on the Chelmsford Commons. Its purpose is to unite the various antiracist organization and resources in and outside Chelmsford. The full presentation of this important coalition, its goals and action plans may be viewed by watching tonight's meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia.

The Chair has received emails asking about changes to close contact protocols (with particular concern about younger students) and testing for COVID which may create anxiety for younger children.

New Business

1. Presentation: Spotlight on the Schools – Community Education Program

Robyn Adams, Director of Community Education, joined the meeting virtually for her presentation and included her slide show in tonight's agenda packet. She detailed: The Extended Day Program (2019-2020 school year); Adult Education (2019-2020); Summer Quest (6th grade – 9th grade beginning in 2019); virtual classes offered during COVID; Lion's Pride (full-day preschool); and community outreach.

She also shared upcoming plans. Her entire presentation, including wonderful photos may be viewed by watching tonight's meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia. Her presentation was appreciated by all at the meeting.

2. 2021/22 Kindergarten Registration

Ms. Johnson-Collins shared information on this year's registration, which will take place by appointment at the PAC on January 20th and 27th. A checklist is shared in tonight's packet to assure parents will bring all needed documentation with them. The next wave of registrations will take place in April. Packets may also be delivered to Central Office.

3. 2021 MCAS Assessment and Accountability Update

Dr. Hirsch shared the third update from DESE this evening. Her memorandum and that from Commissioner Riley from DESE are both included in tonight's agenda packet. The class of 2021 will still meet the competency determination by attending their ELA and Math classes at CHS and meeting Chelmsford's requirements for graduation. Students who will need support because of not passing assessments previously will be offered assistance this summer. MCAS testing for grades three through eight will be shortened. Details on the timing and length of sessions will be forthcoming. Grades five and eight will also take the engineering and science MCAS, which will be shortened as well. Accountability for school districts will not be measured, instead test data will be diagnostic at this time. The information will be shared with the schools when received. Access testing for ELL students is currently taking place. Biology tests will be an option for ninth graders this year. Additional details on how the tests will be administered are not yet determined.

4. Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting Update

Dr. Hirsch met with Education Working Group Sub-Committee from the Town of Chelmsford Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DREIC) on January 12th. She was able to share what is currently happening in The CPS as well as the outlook for the near future and upcoming curriculum changes. Recommendations for future readings for PD were shared as well as plans for speakers for staff and parents. Future meetings are being planned and will be scheduled on a regular basis.

5. FY2021 Budget Report: 2nd Quarter Financials

Ms. Johnson-Collins shared a memorandum and detailed spread sheets in tonight's agenda packet and spoke to The Committee about the information covering the months from July through December. Overall the report is favorable.

6. Recommended FY2021 Budget Transfers

Ms. Newcomb recommend the School Committee vote to approve the FY2021 local operating budget transfer for the Chelmsford Public Schools as presented. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

7. FY2022 Budget Calendar and Discussion

Dr. Lang will roll out the proposed budget for FY2022 at the meeting on February 2, 2021. The first meeting on deliberations will take place on February 23rd.

8. COVID Testing Data, Notification and Close Contact Update

Dr. Lang recommends a revision of notification of positive COVID cases within the schools. Thus far notifications are sent even if those who tested positive were remote students who had not attended school. He believes it better to only notify when those who test positive have attended school and have been a close contact of the notified receiver. CPS still posts weekly updates by school of COVID data. He will update the process in his next newsletter and plan to put the process in place on January 25, 2021. The Committee discussed this recommendation at length. The Committee's consensus was that notifications need not be sent out in the cases where a positive COVID test involved remote students/staff who had no presence in the schools.

Dr. Lang also wanted to clarify "close contacts". Looking at data since the school year began, he feels that we have been "overidentifying" what is a "close contact". This has resulted in entire classes being quarantined for up to 10 days. Dr. Lang would like to align with the CDC definition: "Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated." The CDC guidelines are followed by most of the school districts in the area. Committee members suggested to **not adopt** the CDC guidelines until after February vacation and when more data on mutated strains of COVID is available. The Chair suggested this issue be tabled and revisited at the next meeting on February 2, 2021.

9. COVID Pooled Testing Initiative for K-12 Schools

Dr. Lang included a memorandum and a DESE Power Point in tonight's agenda packet on the proposed "pooled testing initiative". DESE will be offering a pilot program and more information will be presented on January 22nd via a webinar. DESE would fund the initial six weeks of the testing, with The District being responsible for the cost after that. Pooled testing allows more people to be tested at a lower cost. This would allow small groups to be tested but would only cost what a single test would. If the swabs put in the pool are all negative, no further testing is required, and the participants are all deemed negative at that moment in time. If the pooled test is positive, all members of the group would quarantine and be tested separately. The quick test would reveal who in the group is positive and only that person would have to proceed with quarantine protocol. Participation would be voluntary. If Chelmsford participates it might hasten the timeline for students and staff to return to school. Staff vaccinations will also help for an earlier return to school. More information is forthcoming.

10. Personnel Report: December 2020

No action required tonight.

Liaisons

Mr. Doherty attended the CHIPs PTO meeting. They are looking into enrichment programs for the spring which could take place outside. Their "sock drive" will be February 8th until March 12th. New members are always welcome.

Ms. Santos shared that the Harrington Holiday Store was a success. They are also helping with the food drive this month. She also announced that Mr. Doherty has been cast in The Theatre Guild's upcoming mystery movie!

Mr. King shared that The Chelmsford Council of Schools will meet tomorrow virtually.

Public Comments

The Chair received two comments via email expressing opposite opinions about the changing of the COVID testing information.

Adjournment (9:00 p.m.)

Ms. Newcomb motioned to adjourn. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Giglio, Recording Secretary*