

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
October 6, 2020
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 try to read those questions or comments during our second public input session at the end of the meeting.”

The Chair welcomed all and previewed the meeting’s agenda.

Consent Agenda

1. **Approval of the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of September 15, 2020.**

Ms. Newcomb motioned to accept the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of September 15, 2020. Ms. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

Good News

Dr. Hirsch shared that Jennifer Nollet, who is the World Language Coordinator, and the Spanish and French teachers at CHS are working with their counterparts in Spanish and French speaking countries to do virtual exchanges. Guided reading books for the elementary level are being used in class by covering each page with plexiglass to allow students to get close to and touch the books without needing to worry about COVID transmission. Later tonight details will be presented on how the specialist schedules have been changed to allow more specialist time at the middle schools. Parker has been able to hold all their mask breaks outside so far this year. CHS biology teachers are developing labs to test for microplastics in the science pond. A student music showcase is also being shared by Center School students. The Chair shared that Chelmsford was chosen as the 14th best place to live in the United States and mention was given to schools for providing a good education system!

Eddie, 17 Stone Gate in Chelmsford, spoke of the McCarthy band program in which his fifth-grade son is a participant, and shared his concern for time (three times per week at 35 minutes) his son receives. He would like to see this time increased and hopes this time frame is temporary.

New Business

1. Presentation: Massachusetts State Representative Tami L. Gouveia

- a. COVID Funding**
- b. FY21 and FY22 Budget Forecast**

Representative Gouveia joined the meeting virtually. She thanked the superintendent, Committee, faculty and staff for all the work put in during this summer to be ready to welcome students back to school. She appreciates the cooperation from the students and parents for following the guidelines. She and other reps have been in touch with DOE Commissioner Riley and would like to see more progress. The challenge is that the state needs to wait for more information from the federal government concerning financial resources which will be forthcoming. A most recent stimulus package has yet to be passed. There is a proposal by the state to fund expenses at the local-level, so the cities and towns do not need to make up the shortfall. Rep. Gouveia is awaiting confirmation of this next week. Meetings will continue to take place during October. She does not expect a state budget will be presented until after the November 3rd election. The current formal legislative session has been extended through January and citizens should contact Ms. Gouveia with their concerns. She asked The Committee to share how things are going so far.

Ms. Newcomb expressed her displeasure with the guidelines and guidance from the Department of Education. To plan for the reopening of schools with changing DOE guidelines became impossible. Beginning the school year with the hybrid plan was done without help from the DOE. Ms. Gouveia has found it challenging to receive timely and consistent information from the State. Ms. Newcomb has mixed feelings about proceeding with MCAS next spring. Ms. Gouveia shared that legislation has been filed to put a three-year moratorium on MCAS. The Committee should feel free to send a letter or proclamation to the elected state officials concerning MCAS and other important issues.

The Chair asked if Rep. Gouveia would be able to share what she knows so far about the FY22 budget. Rep. Gouveia is expecting to receive a report on this next week. Information will address not just this year and next but also into FY2023. There is a possibility of needing to take some money from the “rainy day” fund.

Dr. Lang asked about students who are choosing to “home school”. This year the increase is up to 60 or so more students as compared to previous years. Chapter 70 funding is not usually provided for these students. He is wondering about a “hold harmless” plan for the youngest students going forward.

Ms. Santos raised the issue of Chelmsford needing a new high school.

Mr. Moses asked if the State has plans to expand and improve testing for COVID. Although the testing for those in residential facilities has been augmented by the State, she is not aware of any plans for testing for school children and staff. She will investigate this.

Ms. Newcomb inquired about the federal “Rebuild America’s Schools Act”, since she believes that this may be helpful in building a new high school in Chelmsford. Ms. Gouveia responded that the Massachusetts delegation to Congress is pushing for increasing the educational opportunities for all students and she will reach out to Representative Trahan to learn more about this. The Chair expressed thanks to Representative Gouveia on behalf of The Committee.

2. Fall reopening Discussion and Updates

a. Food Services/School Nutrition Program

Included in tonight's packet is a memorandum from Ms. Johnson-Collins providing an update from Nancy Antolini, School Nutrition Director. Funding for breakfasts and lunches are currently provided by the USDA. Data for September is included in the memo as well as information on how the meals are distributed. This program is open to all students. Ms. Johnson-Collins expressed gratitude to all who work to make this endeavor successful.

b. Learning Model Transitions

Dr. Lang shared that so far at the elementary and middle school levels most students seem happy with the model (hybrid or remote) they chose. For those who may wish to change learning models, space will be a primary factor in facilitating this. Some of the CHS students who are involved in athletic programs (about 50) are asking to switch from hybrid to remote, so that a quarantine in their hybrid class will not have an impact on their ability to play sports. This will need to be investigated with the high school because of the disruption to learning these changes would entail. More information on this will be available at upcoming School Committee meetings.

c. Student Transportation Program

Ms. Johnson-Collins included a detailed memorandum and relevant spreadsheets in tonight's agenda packet with transportation updates and proposals. She shared that currently there are 658 students riding the busses. She is recommending the introduction of grade K-8 whose homes are over one mile from their school. This will add 799 more students who are hybrid to transportation. Even if K-8 over two miles who are remote change to hybrid there would still be enough room on the busses for them. New riders would need to register and receive a bus pass, Ms. Johnson-Collins recommends that no fees be required for the current school year for transportation. She also is proposing that to service the CHS students an express bus with 12 stops will run through town and take students to CHS. This would provide transportation for over 600 students. Students would still need to register to help determine how many busses would be needed at each stop. These changes would be effective on Monday, October 19, 2020.

Ms. Newcomb motioned for the School Committee expand bus registration to grade K-8 over one mile from the assigned school with no bus fee charge for the 20/21 school year. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

Ms. Newcomb motioned that the School Committee provide a shuttle bus service to the high school, with no fee charged, for the 20/21 school year. Ms. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

d. Fall Athletics Update: MVC and MIAA

Dr. Lang shared that as of last Wednesday seven of the eleven MVC teams' communities were in the "red" for COVID. The superintendents of the MVC discussed the situation and agreed not to hold competitions for this week, with exception of golf and cross-country. A second meeting will be held this Thursday for further discussion and decision-making.

e. COVID Funding

Ms. Johnson-Collins included a memorandum in tonight's agenda packet providing information on three

new grant sources of funding. One is for \$311,545 from Cares Act ESSER. This multi-year grant may be used up to the first quarter of FY2023. It is to be used to fund technology and remote learning PD. She predicts this funding will be used in 2022. Next is the COVID Relief School Reopening Grant for \$1.1 million. The funding must be used by December 30, 2020. This will help pay for additional custodial cleaning services, cleaning supplies, PPE and instructional technology. Remote Learning Technology Essentials for \$259,000 also ends December 30, 2020. This will be used to fund more Chromebooks. The Town received funding from FEMA which has helped the District to fund PPE, new custodial equipment as well as cleaning supplies, signage, air purifiers, and hand-washing stations. Dr. Lang added that many of the technology devices are still on backorder, but Mr. Silver will provide an update at a future meeting. At this point all families do have devices to use in their homes. Additional “clear-touch” panels have been ordered so that all elementary and middle school classrooms will be supplied.

f. Elementary, Middle and High School Staff Focus Groups

Dr. Lang shared that elementary and middle focus groups met within the last week and the CHS group will meet on Thursday. These groups continue to facilitate staff sharing best practices and ways to help one another with concerns, as well as providing information on needed support from administration. Mr. Doherty, who is a member of the focus groups expressed his sincere appreciation for the staff, who are concerned for their students and supportive of their colleagues. His sentiments were echoed by Ms. Newcomb and Ms. Santos.

3. Discussion and Timeline for Future Adjustments to Learning Models

- a. Half Day to Full Day In-person Instruction**
- b. Full Remote Instruction**

Dr. Lang stated that this transition is being investigated and will be discussed at future meetings. A change to a full day schedule would need to also address changes made to fully remote (if necessary) due to future potential COVID outbreaks.

c. Alterations to Specialist Schedules – Middle Schools

A few extra blocks of specialist time at the middle schools are being added to Wednesday afternoons, including world languages, music and art. This change will begin on October 14th.

d. Use of Community Level Data to Guide Learning Model Decision-making

Dr. Lang shared that the DOE is compiling and sharing data on positive COVID cases. Results are posted weekly on the DESE website. Chelmsford is sharing this information with the State, but Dr. Lang would like to increase contact tracing for school cases. He is asking SC members if they would like to take this a step further and report out on the CPS website as a link. Reporting could be done by school but whether the case involves a staff member or student cannot be shared. The Committee wants to move forward with this. DESE is sharing on their website color coded updates weekly on the pandemic. If the level for Chelmsford were to reach the “red” designation, the district would consult with public health for more information. If the Town stayed in “red” for as long as three weeks and if the designation was due to outbreaks in the schools (versus other segments of the population) then a change in learning models would be recommended to The Committee.

e. Review and refinement of positive COVID case protocols

This was discussed earlier in tonight’s meeting.

4. Fall 2020 Town Meeting

a. Review of CPS Capital Projects: McCarthy Auditorium & Parker Kitchen Products

These warrant articles were discussed at the last Tri Board meeting. Although these were both proposed last spring, they were pulled due to the financial uncertainty of COVID. Town Manager Cohen has recommended they be submitted again. Parker's kitchen will cost \$373,000 and the auditorium at McCarthy will cost \$740,000. The auditorium would be gutted and completely renovated. These will be brought up at Town Meeting next week. If approved, work could be done during the school year.

5. 2020/2021 School Committee and Superintendent Goals

Dr. Lang and The Chair are working on these for the next meeting. Due to the pandemic, the goals need to be short term. Due to COVID the strategic plan is on hold.

6. Memo - Personnel Report: July 2020

No action required.

7. Memo - Personnel Report: August 2020

No action required.

Dr. Lang shared that there are many open positions currently for support staff. Substitutes are currently being hired as building-based subs due to COVID.

Liaisons

Mr. Doherty shared that tomorrow night the Chelmsford Alumni Association will meet. Ms. Santos will, on October 8th, be attending a parent/PTO meeting. ELLPAC (English Language Learners Parent Advisory Council) met the end of last month. The virtual meeting included 15 participants. Four people volunteered to take lead roles. Ms. Newcomb attended the South Row PTO meeting. Due to COVID the annual Pumpkin Fair will not be held. The Acapella group will meet virtually next week. The chair shared that Center School's PTO met last week and discussed "Trunk or Treat".

Action/New Items

Ms. Newcomb shared that the group that met last summer to talk about social justice, equity and racial equality would like to come to a Committee meeting soon.

Ms. Newcomb would also like to discuss how to respond to emails sent to The Committee. The Chair suggested this could be incorporated into the goals.

MASC will be holding a virtual delegate assembly on November 7, 2020. John Moses volunteered to attend. Ms. Newcomb will be the backup delegate.

Public Comments

Ms. Santos read an email from Lisa Orlando-Barrassa who expressed concern about children's privacy during Google meets. (She praised those teaching her children this year.) She has experienced in her own school district parents logging on to the Google meets using their children's log on. She is afraid that this might be a method for predators to threaten the safety of children who are on remote sessions. She would like reassurance that CPS has safety protocols in place to prevent this from happening.

Adjournment (8:57 p.m.)

Ms. Newcomb motioned to adjourn tonight's meeting at 8:57 p.m. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Giglio*