

CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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April 7, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Mr. Dennis King (Chair), Mr. John Moses (Vice Chair), Ms. Maria Santos (Secretary), Mr. Jeffrey Doherty and Ms. Donna Newcomb. Attendance taken by roll call.

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 p.m.

Chair Opening Statement

The Chair stated that this online meeting will be recorded and posted on the Chelmsford Public Schools' website. It will also be recorded and televised by Chelmsford Telemedia. The public is welcome to make comments by contacting either Dr. Lang or Chairman King via email. Comments emailed during this meeting will be addressed at the second "Public Comments" time. The Chair also previewed tonight's agenda for the viewing public.

Consent Agenda

1. **Approval of the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of March 20, 2020**
2. **Approval of the minutes of the regular school committee meeting of March 27, 2020**

Mr. Moses motioned to approve the minutes of The Committee for March 20, 2020, and March 27, 2020. Ms. Newcomb seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

Public Comments

Ms. Santos received an email regarding ELL requesting that translations be available on the website. She responded that translation is available and then heard back that the family was all set.

Ms. Newcomb was contacted several times about the status of April vacation. Dr. Lang responded that he had been waiting to hear from The State. The State has decided this issue should be handled by the individual school districts. Dr. Lang was informed that the Teacher's Union did a survey of their members and 85% were in favor of teaching through the April vacation week. The Committee agreed with Dr. Lang's suggestion to send a survey to the parents about April vacation. Dr. Lang will take care of the survey and will have results by the end of this week. The Chair stated this will be brought up again tonight under "New Business". Several other Committee members have also been contacted about April vacation.

Ms. Newcomb wanted to remind the public that non-perishable food items may be dropped off at Harrington School on Wednesdays from 9:00 until noon. They are also in need of diapers and "pull-ups".

New Business

1. Update on the Status of the Chelmsford Public Schools Closure

District Communications:

Dr. Lang shared that the district has received very good feedback on “District Communications” from the public. The first two announcements received 6,500 and 5,000 hits respectively. Individual schools are using the SMORES format to communicate with families. Dr. Lang will continue to provide a district-wide update weekly which will be followed by updates from the different schools and departments. All communications through the website may be translated into several other languages.

Department Updates: Special Education and Technology:

A memorandum from Amy Reese, Director of Student Support Services, is included in tonight’s packet providing information on how special education services are being delivered. This includes how directives from the State and Federal governments are being addressed. Individual special educators are working directly with families to fulfill IEP requirements during the school closure. In addition, links are provided on the website to address special education concerns.

Bill Silver, Technology Director for the district, presented tonight sharing highlights of the way technology has been assisting our students and educators during this time of school closure. Mr. Silver shared that prior to our schools being closed only a couple of grade levels were using Google Classroom or doing any type of online learning. During the past few weeks, all the other grade levels and all classroom teachers have set up and used Google Classroom for teaching. Prior to the closure our district had only about 500 Google Classrooms in use. By April 2, 2020, nearly 1,300 Google Classrooms were in use. Posts to Google Classrooms were averaging 1,300 or 1,400 posts per day. As of the second of April, those posts reached a high of 2,700. This represents an enormous increase in file transfers of student work back and forth between students and teachers. Almost 77,000 new files have been added to the Google Classrooms docs. iReady is being widely used and provides a pathway to learning for individual students based on their specific needs and current standards. There were over 8,000 logins to iReady just in the past week. Other tools like Brain Pop and Brain Pop ELL are showing increased usage. Platforms for math, science and keyboarding are also in high use. Mr. Silver closed by thanking his department members for working hard and closing a new high level of “help desk” tickets. Committee members expressed receiving positive communications from parents and students on assistance from the technology department. Mr. Silver’s entire presentation may be viewed on Chelmsford Telemedia/YouTube.

Status of Events and Programming

Schools will remain closed up until May 4, 2020. Dr. Lang and other area superintendents are hoping to hear an update from the Commissioner of Education soon. Travel both in state and out-of-state is closed through June 30. Rental use of school facilities to outside groups are closed until May 17, 2020. The MIAA is hoping if schools reopen to have an abridged spring sports season through June 27th. No official decision has been made yet on MCAS testing. Dr. Lang expressed sadness for the graduating seniors who may not be able to hold the typical activities they had expected at the end of this year. He will be meeting with CHS staff later in the week to discuss what might be done for the seniors.

Expectations for learning/Operations/Staff

A guidance document was sent to staff this past Saturday which provides a framework for going forward through the next several weeks. Expectations for parents concerning their students' learning was also sent. This document will be a "living document" and changes will be made as needed. School counselors and psychologists continue to reach out to families. Parents who feel their children are struggling should reach out first to the classroom teacher. The staff continues to reach out to other members of the team concerning student support. Students should not be spending more than three or four hours a day (half the time of a regular school day) on school work. Staff should use their best professional judgment. Students at all grade levels will need to take breaks and be physically active. Art and music should also be incorporated into the schedule. Ms. Santos is concerned about the ELL students and Dr. Lang is going to speak with Kelly Rogers and Dr. Hirsch and suggest that ELL staff have direct contact with the parents and students.

Dr. Hirsch shared that term three grades have been closed for the secondary level. The term started on January 28, 2020, and the secondary principals and the teacher's union both felt the grades should be closed and posted. This will provide grades for at least three of the four terms to generate GPAs. The grades were posted this week after students were given the opportunity to make up any missed work. The last two weeks of term three occurred after the schools had been closed. For elementary schools the trimester two ended on March 10th and grades were posted for the parents. Currently for term four at secondary level grades will be reported as pass/fail or credit/no credit. The elementary final report cards will show the grades as "N/A."

Student Feeding/Meals Program

Meals are still being provided by the high school Monday through Friday. The program will be updated as the closure continues. The district will be able to submit for reimbursement for some of the costs of these meals. The program is running well and safety for all involved is being maintained. Additionally, packages of food continue to be delivered on Fridays to about 40 families to have enough food for the weekends. Dr. Lang will include a list of items needed in his weekly newsletter.

2. Strategic Plan Status – Adjusted Timeline

Dr. Lang hopes to have an updated draft of the Strategic Plan by late May or early June for staff and community feedback. During the summer modifications will be made. The public unveiling of the three to five-year plan will be launched in September.

Dr. Hirsch shared that prior to school closure, she and Dr. Lang were able to meet with students from CHS and McCarthy student councils to receive input for the strategic plan. Dr. Hirsch provided a slide show, which can be found in tonight's agenda packet, articulating student input by grade level. Her entire presentation, including slides, may be viewed by watching tonight's meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia You/Tube. The students at both CHS and McCarthy provided well-thought-out insights and suggestions. It is hoped a meeting may be set up for Parker's student council.

3. Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Status – Adjusted Timeline

The State has not yet provided a date by which this plan must be submitted. Dr. Lang will bring the plan up for review at the next Committee meeting on April 21, 2020. Once the final version is approved by The Committee, it will be ready to be forwarded to the DOE.

4. MSBA Statement of Interest Status – Adjusted Timeline

Dr. Lang will review the SOI with The Committee at the April 21st meeting. He will ask The Committee to vote to approve the SOI and then will schedule it to be reviewed by the Select Board in time for it to be submitted to the MSBA by May 6, 2020.

5. Update on CPS Website Redevelopment

A couple of groups have been reviewing the current website (through Blackboard). Different vendors have been approached to look at starting the website from scratch. One vendor will present information on building a new website using a different platform. Whether we stay with Blackboard or go with a different vendor, the new website should be completed by September.

6. Update on the FY2021 Budget Process

The recommended budget was presented to The Committee, which included a \$2,000,000 increase over last year. This budget was approved by The Committee in February and on March 12, 2020, Dr. Lang and Ms. Johnson-Collins met with representatives of the Town's Finance Committee. The next step is to meet with the entire TriCom Committee. Town Meeting is now scheduled for June 22, 2020.

Concerning the capital budget, which is normally approved in April, which allows us plenty of lead time to assure summer projects are scheduled in time to be completed by the opening of school. The two major projects which were to be done this summer: redevelopment and redesign of Parker School's kitchen and the renovation of McCarthy's auditorium. Elements of these projects need about twelve weeks of lead time to be ordered to arrive in time for the summer projects completion. The service lines for Parker and chairs for McCarthy need to be ordered soon. Dr. Lang is proposing to place those orders through existing funds. He feels that these projects would be supported by Town Meeting in June.

Concerning the operating budget, hiring for the next school year needs to begin now. He does not expect that the amount of aid we will receive through the state under Chapter 70 will change much. The financial issues which have arisen due to the pandemic may very well have an effect on State aid for the budget which will become effective in July of 2021. Ms. Newcomb expressed concern over placing the orders for McCarthy and Parker's project in case Town Meeting does not approve these. Dr. Lang feels that the risk of placing these orders needs to be taken so the projects may proceed as scheduled.

Reports

1. Liaison Reports

Ms. Santos shared that the two PTOs she meets with are still meeting remotely and planning for the upcoming school year. There is hope that the PTOs and their meetings will be able to provide more support for parents throughout school closure.

Action/New Items

The Committee agrees that the survey on April vacation should proceed. Dr. Lang will send out a one or two question survey tomorrow, requesting responses be received by the weekend. The Committee agreed to meet again on Monday at 6:00 p.m. to decide on April vacation week. The next regular Committee meeting will be on April 21, 2020.

People should also remember to fill out the 2020 Census.

Public Comments

Dr. Lang received word from a Center School teacher, who has 11 ELL students in her class, that staff has been doing an excellent job reaching out to them and technology use in their homes is going well.

Adjournment

At 7:42 p.m. Mr. Moses motioned to adjourn from regular session to executive session for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining and to not return to regular session. Ms. Newcomb seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Giglio*