

CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

July 28, 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 read those questions or comments during our second public input session at the end of the meeting."

The Chair feels that many viewers are tuning in to receive updates on the school reopening plans. Tonight information will be shared concerning the reopening committees who have been meeting for the past few weeks and continue to meet to discuss the three different options for reopening the schools this fall: in-person; hybrid; and remote models. Other committees are focusing on special education services, facilities and communication strategies. The work will be wrapping up this week and be presented to The Committee at the meeting on August 4th. The Committee will then discuss and decide on the best option for the Chelmsford Public Schools.

Consent Agenda

1. Approval of the minutes of the regular School Committee meeting of July 7, 2020

Ms. Newcomb motioned to approve the minutes of the regular meeting on July 7, 2020. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

Good News

Dr. Hirsch shared that work is being done on plans!

Public Comments

Lauren Cochran spoke regarding an email she had sent to The Committee concerning integrating anti-racist materials into the curriculum. She is hoping that anti-racist books, literature, films (which are part of the District's Professional Development offerings) may become required for all students K through 12.

She would like to see a timeline for this. She wonders if outside speakers may be coming to the district to work on professional development on these topics, which can be difficult for many to discuss. She would like assurance that there is follow up on this “important” topic.

Emily Sloane shared with Dr. Lang her question which he read aloud. “DESE has indicated that special education in pre-school students should be prioritized for in-person learning to accommodate their complex needs.” She would like confirmation from Chelmsford that this is being considered for both CHIPS and Lions Pride learning. Additionally, she would like to know if Lions Pride day care will be open full-time. Students this age often are not able to benefit from remote options.

Laurie Grant wants to know if the district has considered the number of families who may use the Families First Coronas Virus Act to take a paid leave of absence due to the closure of their children’s schools. In this case, the parents are responsible for their own children’s remote learning. Do we how many of these teachers may not be able to work five days a week. Will schools be able to open without them in attendance? Since Chelmsford’s plan will not be sent to DESE until August 10th, will that allow enough time to address the changes that may take place? Dr. Lang stated that these situations have been considered and details will be shared in the reopening plan.

Rachel Donovan shared with Dr. Lang that she wonders if outreach about reopening schools has included people of color in the conversation. Has the outreach been multi-lingual? What about outreach to low-income households who may not have access to social media or the district’s website?

The Chair stated that additional emails received during tonight’s meeting will be shared during the second public session of the meeting.

Ms. Newcomb shared an email that wonders how the forthcoming plan will address households with two working parents (one of whom is an essential worker). The second parent works from home and is not able to spend hours of the day on the children’s education. There are three elementary school children in the family. What will be the district’s commitment to supporting families like these in the learning process?

Ms. Santos will share her email during the appropriate part of tonight’s agenda.

New Business

1. 2019/2020 Superintendent’s Evaluation

Tonight’s agenda packet contains the evaluation summary with the overall ratings for Dr. Lang along with each Committee member’s evaluation in the four standards and a statement about Dr. Lang’s achievements for this past year. Also included are comments and suggestions made by individual Committee members. The Chair read the evaluation aloud. The overall rating was “proficient”. Specifically, in the standard of Instructional Leadership, the rating was also “proficient”. The rating for Management and Operations was “exemplary”. In Family and Community Engagement the rating was also “exemplary”. The rating for professional culture was also “proficient”. The Chair also read the summary which is included in tonight’s agenda packet. Members of the Committee shared supportive comments for how Dr. Lang handled such a challenging school year!

Ms. Newcomb moved to accept the overall summative performance evaluation for the superintendent for the 2019/2020 school year as presented. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

2. Final FY20 End-of-Year Budget Report, Adjustments and Transfers

Included in tonight's packet is the year-to-date budget report of our 61-million-dollar budget, as well as the balances in the grant and revolving funds and the student activity accounts for CHS and the two middle schools. Ms. Johnson-Collins included details on the budget in tonight's agenda and shared the overview with The Committee during the meeting.

Ms. Newcomb motioned to approve FY2020 local operating budget transfers totaling \$ 707,148 from twenty-four favorable DESE Categories to the nine DESE Categories noted above. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

Dr. Lang thanked Ms. Johnson-Collins and her department.

3. Student Activity Account Audit Report: Chelmsford High School

Ms. Johnson-Collins discussed the contents of the audit report, which can be found on the District's website. The auditors made three recommendations for improvement. Ms. Johnson-Collins and Dr. Lang responded to questions from The Committee.

Ms. Newcomb motioned to accept the report provided by Powers and Sullivan regarding the student activities funds at Chelmsford High School for years ending 2018 and 2019. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

4. Parent Survey Results: Remote Learning

In addition to his memorandum concerning the survey, Dr. Lang has also included the Power Point showing the survey results which he had shared at the last meeting. There is also a compilation/summary of the numerous additional comments that were received when the survey was taken. The feedback will be used to guide future remote learning when it is needed in the District. The data has also been shared with the working groups who are addressing the plans for the reopening of schools. All this data is included in tonight's agenda packet.

5. Personnel Report: June 2020

No action required.

Dr. Lang shared that hiring for the upcoming school year is going well.

6. Return-to-School Planning

Dr. Lang shared that the next meeting on August 4th will include information on the different options for reopening schools. The working groups were charged by DESE with looking at three options: full return to school; full remote learning option; and hybrid options. The three options need to be presented to DESE by August 10th. Soon after a decision will be made for the fall. DESE has given the local school districts control over their individual reopening plans. The final decision will be made by The School Committee. Dr. Lang believes the final decision will come during the next two weeks. Guidance from The State has been generated each week to assist the districts with their plans. All stakeholders were encouraged to participate in the five working groups. Due to an overwhelming response there were more volunteers than needed, so people not assigned to one of the groups were able to participate in several forums. These sessions were recorded and are available for viewing on the CPS website. The focus for the groups were: personnel; communications; teaching and learning (with sub groups examining the three opening

options); special populations; and facilities and operations. The recommendations of the working groups will be shared with The Committee by the end of this week and the public will be informed and updated through the process. Dr. Lang thanked all who participated and committed so much of their time to the task. A survey was conducted for the staff by the teacher's union. Once the three options are submitted to DESE, The Committee will reach to the union for additional input to help with the fine-tuning going forward. The Committee will have administration and union input before the final adoption of one of the plans. Dr. Lang will resume sending out his weekly updates to parents and will include information about the reopening of school plans going forward.

7. Updates:

a. Diversity and Equity

Dr. Hirsch included a memorandum in tonight's packet providing information on curriculum reviews by both the social studies and ELA departments, staff book clubs, recommended reading lists, and professional development all to address anti-racism, diversity and bias. Additionally, graduate level courses on civics and UDL continue to be offered to staff through a collaboration between The District and Fitchburg State. Dr. Hirsch looks forward to other departments continuing this work.

Dr. Lang, along with Dr. Hirsch met with a group of recent alumni from CHS and discussed their experiences at CHS regarding inclusiveness and the curriculum. The group meeting was productive and future meetings will be planned. Ms. Newcomb has attended Zoom meetings with these former students and was impressed. Ms. Santos would like to see a program like that offered by the Anti-Defamation League called "The World of Differences Institute" offered to district staff.

b. 2020/21 Student Enrollment

Dr. Lang shared that kindergarten enrollment is up to 373 students. Decisions will be made concerning the number of kindergarten classes needed when the reopening schools' model has been approved. At that time parents of kindergarten children will be surveyed again to determine the exact number of K students who will be attending our schools this fall.

c. 2020/2021 Student Transportation Registration

Guidance from The State requires all students, of all ages, who ride the school bus will be required to wear a mask while on the bus. This includes staff. There will only be one student to a bus seat with alternating seats. Students who live in the same household may share seats with on another. Whenever possible bus windows should be open for fresh air to circulate. Busses that could accommodate 77 students last year will be limited to 25 students per bus. A diagram of bus seating is included in tonight's packet with the memorandum from Dr. Lang.

Dr. Lang asks that families who are able provide transportation **other than the school bus**, please do so.

Dr. Lang is also recommending to The Committee that transportation for this year or during the COVID pandemic only provide bus transportation to those students to whom it is legally mandated to do so. Students in grades 7 – 12 and K – 6 who live less than two miles from school will need to provide their own transportation to and from school. Families who will need to provide their own transportation who have already paid for bus transportation for the upcoming year will be reimbursed. Ms. Santos shared many concerns she has already received about bus transportation for this school year. She worries that some of the special needs' population, who really benefit by direct instruction in school, will not be able to transport their children and will opt for remote learning with no physical days in school.

Ms. Newcomb recommends that the School Committee, in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 68, provides transportation only to students in kindergarten through grade six who reside two or more miles from their assigned school for the 2020/2021 school year. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

Ms. Newcomb recommends that the School Committee fully refund families who have registered for transportation for the school year 2020/2021. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

Dr. Lang will reach out to families for clarification purposes.

d. Chelmsford High School Graduation

Graduation has been cleared to take place on Saturday, August 8, 2020. Details were provided by Principal Murray and reviewed by Sue Rosa from the Board of Public Health, the police chief and fire chief and all have signed off on it. The graduation will take place at Simonian Field at CHS. Mr. Doherty shared that plans are going great and that the rehearsal went well. Hand-cleaning stations will be provided. Each graduate can have two family members attend. This will be a special and extraordinary graduation, thanks to the hard work of many people!

Reports

1. Liaison Reports

Ms. Santos wished to thank Mr. Thomas for handing out plaques to all the CHS students who participated in leadership programs this past year.

Mr. King expressed gratitude to the many parents who participated in the parent input sessions. Dr. Hirsch will be sure to post all information available on reopening schools on the website.

Action/New Items

Mr. King heard from the representatives to the State House, who were late in responding due to mail problems. They are all working hard to make sure Chelmsford gets whatever assistance is possible. Rep. Gouveia will be attending the September 15, 2020, School Committee meeting.

Public Comments

The Chair shared an email from Tara Purdington wanted to know the criteria if a case of COVID happens in school. He responded that the protocols are outlined in the DESE guidelines.

Erica Real wanted to know if a hybrid model is chosen would students of teachers be able to attend school all five days to support the teacher's ability to return to work. She also wonders about Community Education and before and after school care. She wonders how school district will support cohorts in remote learning.

Dr. Lang said that these issues would be addressed during the next two School Committee meetings. He received an email concerning teachers who teach outside of Chelmsford, but whose own children attend our public schools. Would their children be able to attend school in Chelmsford full-time? The State is looking into these situations, so Chelmsford will await the forthcoming guidelines. Dr. Lang has been on vacation but will respond to these emails when he returns.

Hanna Barker wanted to be sure that the social emotional health of the teachers is considered as well as those of the students.

Adjournment (8:44 p.m.)

Ms. Newcomb recommends that The Committee adjourn to executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation and to not return. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

Executive Session: M.G.L. Ch. 30A, Section 21 (a)(3) – The Chelmsford School Committee provides public notice of its intent to convene in executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body or the chair so declares.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Giglio*