

CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

August 10, 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 welcomed all to the meeting where the three reopening school options will be shared. He thanked everyone who sent in emails with questions and comments since the last meeting on August 4, 2020. The Committee will discuss the three plans: full in-person; hybrid; and remote learning. They will then vote on these plans which will be sent to DESE. Then discussion of the plans will take place and a vote will, most likely, be taken on the option for reopening the CPS this September.

Good News

Mr. Doherty shared that the virtual graduation on Friday night and the speeches given were wonderful! The Chelmsford Telemedia crew did a “wonderful job”! He is thankful to all the volunteers who helped on Saturday to give out diplomas.

Ms. Santos thanked the Parker and Harrington PTOs for the successful mask sale!

Public Comments

Allison Barnes, of 104 Garrison Road, thanked all involved for their hard work in providing social services and other supports going beyond the requirements of educators. She appreciates the consideration given to education as well as to the needs of families and working parents. She appreciates The Committee wearing their masks during their in-person meetings, thereby setting a good example for families and students. When schools reopen she asks for transparency when COVID-19 cases arise, while adhering to confidentiality.

Jamie Brown, of 118 Graniteville Road, thanked all for the effort in handling the task of planning for the reopening of schools. She stated that without a vaccine, the threat of this virus will continue to exist. She wonders how effective remote learning will be and asks if students and staff will all be tested on a regular basis. She would like parental input concerning the cohort their child is assigned to facilitate families who are helping one another with child care, transportation and remote learning. She would also like to know if teachers or classroom aides will be available to respond to students' questions during the remote lessons. Will parents working schedules be considered when defining students' participation times? She is concerned about households where several children need to be online at the same time. Additionally, she wonders if there will be packets sent home in paper form since not all families will have the technology to print assignments. She believes that it will be possible to provide an in-person education while keeping our children and staff safe.

New Business

1. Return-to-School Planning Update

a. Review of CPS Learning Plans (In-Person, Hybrid and Remote Learning Options)

Dr. Hirsch spoke first of the full in-person return to school, even though The Committee eliminated that option for the reopening of schools in September. Even with repurposing the spaces in the schools, it was not possible to maintain six feet of space between the students.

The hybrid plan would have half of the students in school on any day. There would be two cohorts and those students would be kept in the same groups. This option would have cohort "A" attend on Mondays and Tuesdays and cohort "B" on Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays would be a deep cleaning day. Accommodations would be made for families to request a specific cohort if that would help with child care, transportation and remote learning support. Working on schedules would have the hybrid be a modified early release day which would be longer than a half day but shorter than a full day. All students would be in school for at least four hours per day. Students would take lunch home with them. This is the hybrid plan which will be submitted to DESE, if approved.

The remote plan would have all students online for the full curriculum.

Ms. Newcomb motioned for The School Committee to submit the full return reopening plan, the hybrid model reopening plan and the full remote model reopening plan as presented to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

b. CPS Learning Plan Adoption

Dr. Lang explained that the full in-person return is not viable at this time but hopes it will be in the future. In tonight's agenda packet, he shared: a memorandum about the two reopening options; a letter sent to parents containing details of the plans and the parent survey; and a slide show displaying the parent survey responses. Parents were asked to fill out an individual survey for each of their children who attend CPS. All of these are available to the public in tonight's agenda packet. Additionally, you may view tonight's meeting in full by going to Chelmsford Telemedia/YouTube. The date for the beginning of school has not yet been determined. The parents completed surveys for 4,028 students, which was a significant response. 65% opted for the hybrid option, while 33% opted for the full remote option. About 2.3% responded that they would opt to take their child(ren) out of the Chelmsford Public Schools. More elementary parents opted for the full remote as opposed to the hybrid. The 92 responders who would opt out of CPS, Dr. Lang believes, are looking for a full return to in-person learning. When parents were questioned about what choice they would make if CPS offered only the remote option, 8.3% said they

would opt out. The largest number who opted out were parents of kindergarten children. Dr. Lang's preference is the hybrid option. In collaboration with the AFT, scientific metrics will be established to determine when it is safe to use the hybrid model and when remote is the safer option. Dr. Lang believes that if the hybrid model is chosen, CPS may be able to provide bus transportation to additional students beyond the required demographic.

Ms. Newcomb asked for details on what the hybrid school day will look like from beginning to end. Dr. Lang assured her that all of this being worked on, so that The District will be sharing all the ways in which school operates safely, most of which will differ from procedures before COVID-19. Details will be broken down over the next month, prior to the beginning of school. The elementary students will need breaks which may include a snack from Food Service and may take a bagged lunch home with them.

Dr. Hirsch shared that additional materials, including digital and manipulatives, have been ordered to support both hybrid and remote learning.

Mr. Doherty wondered what the timeline will be for parents to choose between hybrid and remote learning. Dr. Lang replied that, if a model is chosen tonight, staff would work to provide details, including schedules, which would enable the parents to choose the model best for each child. This could be completed by early next week at the latest. Parents would be given seven to 10 days to make the choice, so the data would be received by CPS by the week before Labor Day. HR has already reached out to staff and has received responses from 60% of them on which model would be safest for them. When the hybrid assignments are made for "A" and "B" parents will be able to request changes to accommodate family schedules and coordination for day care, remote learning and transportation. The teachers will begin their school year the week before Labor Day. In response to Mr. Moses's inquiry about being able to change the model selected as the school year goes on, Dr. Lang said a switch from hybrid to remote could be more easily done at any time. A switch from remote to hybrid will be done at certain milestones yet to be determined.

Ms. Santos asked if two separate programs would be run to which Dr. Lang replied he envisions it that way. Those who choose hybrid will stay with their cohort and staff if the COVID-19 metrics necessitate a full remote for a period of time. The remote staff will be matched with the remote students, but the curriculum would be parallel. The curriculum will also be digitized and available on Google Classroom.

In the hybrid model each teacher will be paired with another staff member in the school who will be able to substitute if a teacher in the hybrid model is sick and unable to come to school in the short term. For longer terms a qualified substitute would need to be hired, unless someone else from that department was available.

Dr. Hirsch walked everyone through the model schedules for the hybrid for CHS, the middle schools and the elementary schools. For high schools all but one class would take place in school. After dismissal the students would do their last class of the day from home. In addition to the document which will be prepared for hybrid for each level (elementary, middle and high school), The district will also offer community forums to explain in more detail prior to the opening of schools.

Ms. Santos wondered how the arts, music and theater programs would be taught. Dr. Hirsch said that larger spaces would be used for music so students are able to maintain a distance of 10 feet between them. Fully remote students would probably use more technology for their performances. She was impressed in the spring with the creativity displayed by the teachers in the fine arts in teaching remotely. Cameras will be available for the teachers, so they may be teaching to the students in the classroom and those at home. New technology additions will facilitate this. Google Meet allows both groups of students to view the teacher's desktop simultaneously.

The Committee next moved on to the middle school schedule. The students stay on team for their classes and are dismissed on a staggering schedule. After eating lunch at home, they would have two blocks in the afternoon for specialists and world languages and special education services. Special ed services will also, be provided in the schools during the earlier part of the day. The middle school world language teachers and specialists will be teamed up with the core subject teachers during the in-person part of the day. Ms. Santos wondered if student activities would run in the hybrid model and Dr. Lang felt that it could possibly happen, once the schedule is up and running. Activities, as always, would take place after school hours.

Finally, Dr. Hirsch shared the slide for the elementary schedule, which is quite colorful and detailed! The classes will start with “morning meeting” which for the first few weeks will involve learning the classroom procedures. Phonics, reading, math, literacy and writing are all included in the schedule. It also includes time for a mask break and snack. After dismissal and lunch at home students would access social studies, science and specialist remotely. During the in-person school time, specialists will be working collaboratively with classroom teachers. Instructional paraprofessionals will be working both with classroom teachers and paras who specialize in working one-on-one with students will do so as they always have. If a fully remote schedule is adopted there may not be a need for all of the employees required for the hybrid schedule.

Mr. Moses received several inquiries about CHIPS and Lions' Pride. The students in CHIPS who are on an IEP would need to receive services. Once a model for reopening school is chosen, more planning will be done to allow these services to be delivered.

Ms. Santos wanted to ascertain that each student would be able to have their own device (Chromebook). Dr. Lang responded that the incoming fifth and ninth graders will be receiving their Chromebooks under the 1:1 initiative in the next couple of weeks. At that point half of all middle and high school students will have their own device. Mr. Silver has applied for a grant (a quarter of a million-dollar matching grant). Money from the Cares Act given to The Town will be used for this grant. This will allow for purchasing two thousand additional Chromebooks. Dr. Lang will advise The Committee when the grant is approved, and the Chromebooks have arrived. This should enable each student in a family to have their own device.

Dr. Lang believes that even in a fully remote model, teachers would teach from their school classrooms, where it is easy to support their needs. He does realize that for health reasons some staff may need to teach from their homes and efforts will be made to support them there as well.

The Chair asked for an update on the facilities, cleaning plans and health improvements being made to reopen schools. Dr. Lang said PPE equipment is well supplied for several months for students, staff and nurses and SPED staff. Several months of cleaning supplies for custodial staff are procured including the specialized “foggers” for classrooms. An extra custodian is being requested for day time in our schools. Higher grade filters have already been installed in the HVAC systems where possible. In the buildings where this was not possible, higher grade filters will be placed in the classroom systems and replaced on a routine basis. Bathroom protocols are being worked on and may include a person to monitor the number of children in a bathroom at any given time. Hygiene education will be reinforced. More handwashing stations will be in place. Each school has an isolation room separate from the nurse's office. Dr. Lang shared that with hybrid or a full in-person return there will be additional costs to insure safety. Many of these are being covered by FEMA. The State is also offering \$225 per student to help with added costs.

Regarding Special Education some of the students who choose remote will be asked to come to school for services, especially if they are in the “high needs” category. This would be determined on a case by case basis. The same consideration would be given to EL students.

Ms. Newcomb asked how the remote process would differ this school year from last spring. Dr. Lang responded that with remote learning, the challenge would be establishing a relationship between the student and teacher. By the time schools were closed in March, those relationships were well established. Parents who were surveyed also would like to see a firmer schedule for all students this year. Dr. Hirsch agrees that: there will be a set schedule; technology will be available; learning standards will be taught; attendance will be required; and grading practices will return to normal. Accommodations will be made for SPED and EL students. Additionally, there is lots of newly developed online professional development available to support remote learning. Many CPS staff are already involved in PD.

Ms. Newcomb motioned for the School Committee take a roll call vote with each member stating their preference for the hybrid model or the remote model for the start of the school year, pending negotiations with the Unions. Mr. Moses seconded. Ms. Newcomb voted for remote. Mr. Doherty voted for hybrid. Mr. Moses voted for remote. Ms. Santos voted for hybrid. Mr. King voted for hybrid. The vote is in favor of the hybrid model 3-2.

Dr. Lang stated that documents would be defined as will communication plans for families for early next week. A separate communication will be sent out for parents, who will be driving their own children to school, and wish to allow another student to take the bus in their child's place.

Public Comments

The Chair stated that public comments emailed during tonight's meeting have already been addressed. The School Committee will be meeting again on Tuesday, August 18, 2020, at which time 'live' public comments will be addressed as well as those emailed during the meeting.

Action/New Items

Mr. Moses requests that at the next meeting a vote be taken on adopting the MASC mask policy.

Adjournment (9:08 p.m.)

Ms. Newcomb motioned for the School Committee adjourn to executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation and to not return to public session. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Giglio*