

CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

August 4, 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 which will focus on school reopening plans. The different committees have been meeting to propose three possible options of reopening schools in the fall: in-person; hybrid; and remote. Other subcommittees have discussed special education services, facilities and communication strategies which are part of the proposed three plans. Once the three plans are approved they will be submitted to The State. The School Committee will then discuss and decide on which of the three options would be best for The Chelmsford Public Schools to reopen schools soon.

Good News

Ms. Santos was excited to share that “incredible parents” who are also PTO members held a mask fundraiser led by the Harrington PTO in collaboration with Center Sports in Chelmsford and sold over \$10,000 worth of masks. A percentage of the profits is being shared with all the PTO’s. She thanks Allison Stevens and the team at Harrington School.

Public Comments

Speakers are asked to limit their comments to three minutes and to address only items on tonight’s agenda. Responses will be forthcoming when the topic comes up in the agenda.

John King, Chelmsford parent and teacher, is concerned with the data about children and COVID-19 which is changing often. An epidemiologist from Harvard has said that a hybrid model is the worst and Dr. Fauci advises no full return to schools. Mr. King believes that Chelmsford is not ready for in-person learning. The schools’ ventilation systems, he believes, will put students and staff at risk for the virus. As an educator he knows how important in-person instruction is but believes it is not safe yet.

Peter Malloy, also a teacher, echoes the sentiments of John King. *The Boston Globe* reported today that the largest daily increase in cases in Massachusetts for the last two months occurred today. Although that may not reflect the rate in Chelmsford, residents of The Town do go out to larger spaces where transmission may occur. Bringing anyone back to the school buildings is in direct violation of many of our values. He urges The Committee to opt for remote learning.

Rob Russo, a lifetime Chelmsford resident, who represents teachers and staff through the AFT, shared that The Chelmsford Public School staff is dedicated to provide the best education possible even under dire circumstances. Although the staff prefers to teach in-person, there is a great deal of anxiety around the reopening of schools. In collaborating with The District, the staff wants to make be sure the safest decision is adopted.

New Business

1. Return-to-School Planning Update

- a. Timeline for Initial and Final Plan submission to MA DESE**
- b. Review of the MA DESE Guidelines**

Dr. Lang shared the importance of completely vetting the three options for return, as during the year the model in place may need to change. The Committee is not charged with deciding during this meeting. Dr. Lang posted slides during the meeting and shared a summary document with details of the plans in tonight's agenda packet.

On June 25, 2020, DESE submitted guidance documents to The District. Working groups gathered to plan for the three options for reopening school from July 13th through July 31st. Some of these groups will continue to work for the next several weeks. On July 31st, a summary submission was sent to DESE. Monday, August 10, 2020, is the deadline for the three plans to be sent to DESE. Later in tonight's meeting The Committee may want to express which plan they favor. It is important to remember that the selected plan may have to change during the school year to meet the safety concerns.

- c. Review of the Working Groups' Plans (In-person, Hybrid and Remote Learning Options)**

Dr. Hirsch shared that the three subgroups for teaching and learning work closely with the other groups like "facilities", "special populations", "communications" and "personnel". She shared slides which included details about the process. You may view the slides by watching tonight's meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia You/Tube. Parents were well represented in all the groups as were Committee members. Meetings were held virtually and in-person. Over 70 parents were included in a forum on "teaching and learning" which provided feedback to be shared with the Working Groups.

Dr. Hirsch presented the "In-person Learning Model" first. This would offer instruction in-school full-time in an environment that meets DESE health and safety requirements, including 3 – 6 foot spacing. This would also include a "remote" learning option for families who prefer their children learn from home. For safety reasons, students would be seated in rows and working in groups would not be allowed. Fewer transitions through the buildings would happen (they may eat lunch in the classrooms and specialists may teach in the classroom instead of in the gym, art room, music room or library) and outdoor learning would be encouraged when possible. The students would be assigned to a cohort and stay with that group. To provide more distance between students, alternate spaces would be used for instruction like the cafeteria and the library.

She then shared the “Hybrid Model” where students would alternate between in-person learning and remote. Students who have “high needs” may need to spend more time in school to receive needed services. The fully remote model is still available for parents who prefer their children learn at home. Each week one fully remote day will allow for teachers to connect with students needing more support and would provide time for PD for staff. Students will still be in cohorts and would remain with that group. Self-management and parental support are necessary for this model to be effective.

Dr. Hirsch then moved to the “Remote Model” which will mean learning full-time online and at home. The standards for learning are the same. Special services will be delivered and technology support with the Google platform will be provided. It is possible that “remote learning” would be necessary if there are increases in the COVID rates. The curriculum will be digitized for easy access. It also makes learning accessible for students who need to be absent from in-person learning for periods of time (i.e. during a need to quarantine). There will be a set schedule for remote learning hours. Expectations and grades would be consistent.

Dr. Lang mentioned that the six-foot distance between students should be followed even with a full return to in-person learning. The facilities working group was charged with maintaining this distance in the classroom settings. Dr. Lang’s belief is that this requirement would make a full in-person return to school impossible and he would take that option off the table now. He is aware that day care issues will need to be considered if a full in-person model does not happen. The Hybrid and Remote models would also present day care challenges. The DESE guidelines ask that students are limited in moving about the schools even when it is time to go to a specialist room (art, music, gym, and library). Even in the Hybrid model, the day may be shortened with only academics being addressed during the time they are physically in school. For elementary students, they may leave school early and go home for lunch and then see their UA specialists in the afternoon remotely. This will look different at the middle and high school levels. Since the classes are more leveled in middle and high school, it will be difficult to keep cohorts together. Union negotiations will play a role in what path is taken. DESE is reducing the number of required student days from 180 to 170. The school calendar will be revised, and students will not be in school the week before Labor Day. Dr. Lang also does not believe the traditional before and after school day care will be offered through the public schools due to necessary safety concerns. An effort will be made to coordinate the students whose families choose “Remote” with the staff members who need to teach remotely due health conditions that put them at high-risk of contracting COVID-19.

Committee members brought up concerns and questions about the three options. Mr. Moses asked if The State would be providing the curriculum for remote learning. Dr. Lang said that has not been determined. Some smaller districts in Massachusetts may need that support. Chelmsford would not need this. Ms. Newcomb wanted to know the condition of the ventilation systems in our schools. How is air quality determined? How do we regulate the air quality to get the maximum learning experience? She would also like to know what the new cleaning protocols are. Dr. Lang stated that extra costs will be needed for both the Hybrid and In-person models. Ms. Santos asked about the technology plan for Hybrid or Remote. Dr. Lang and Mr. Silver have talked about this. If the District goes to Remote for an extended period, the Chromebook carts in the buildings could be broken down and devices given to those who need them. Additionally, there are iPads that might be given to the students in the lower elementary grades. Dr. Lang shared that he and Mr. Silver have applied for a technology grant and should hear about it soon. The District’s goal is to provide a device to every student who needs one. Ms. Santos stressed the importance of the remote learners (especially the younger ones) of having the same device as the teacher, thus allowing the teacher to assist them when they are not sure which key to press on their device. She wants to be sure that technology support will be readily available to the families and that training takes place for students and parents to use the platform of choice (for example Google Classroom). Decisions on the provision of meals for the students will vary depending on the option in place and the relevant schedules. Guidance and funding will hopefully come from The State. It is possible that The State would provide funding to feed all students. Some of the students who need more time in school than two days per week may be able to attend up to four days to provide the services they require.

In response to a question from Mr. Moses, Dr. Lang said that Sue Rosa from the Chelmsford Public Health Department would be monitoring cases of COVID-19 and contact tracing, as well as determining who will need to quarantine. A future public meeting will be held with the medical professionals to provide protocols on how cases of the virus in schools would be handled. Regarding substitute teachers, Dr. Lang stated that paras and specialists may be paired with teachers and would sub if the primary teacher was staying home due to illness. Another possibility would be to hire subs who would be specific to sub in just one school for five days a week, so they would not be subbing anywhere else.

Surveys will be done soon to determine which students and staff would chose the Hybrid Model and which would prefer he Remote Model. AFT conducted a staff survey yesterday. Details still need to be worked out on how education would be provided for high-risk students. A lengthy discussion followed around how to keep students as safe as possible, while still meeting their right to an education as well as the impact on social and emotional issues from lengthy periods of quarantine at home.

Ms. Newcomb motioned for The School Committee remove the full return to school option for the September opening of 2020. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.

The Committee decided to schedule a meeting on August 10, 2020, for further discussion. By that time the completed facilities' report and special education report will be made available to The Committee from the working groups. Dr. Lang will work on the surveys for the families and staff. He will also begin discussions with HR concerning the staff. Even if the Remote option is chosen for the beginning of school, Dr. Lang believes the classrooms in the schools will be safe for teachers to teach from there and have the technology and materials they will need to teach. This was not possible in the spring because no access to the buildings was allowed.

Reports

1. Liaison Reports

Mr. Doherty shared that Alumni Hall of Fame dinner has been postponed and will not take place in September.

Action/New Items

Today the high school graduation was changed from in-person to virtual. This will take place Friday night and Saturday they will be able to come to CHS to pick up diplomas, yearbooks, etc.

The Chair stated that MASC sent out a revised emergency policy. He would like members to review it, so a vote may be taken soon.

Mr. Moses asked if parents of students who are eligible to ride the bus to school, prefer to drive their children. He thanked Michelle Tang, a parent, for this suggestion. The hope is that this might make seats available to others who do not qualify but are not able to bring their children to school. Her suggestion was echoed by other parents in The District.

Ms. Johnson-Collins stated that she is working with the accountant for The Town on a plan to refund the bus money to families who paid, but do not now qualify for the transportation. She expects the refunds to go out by the end of August or early September.

Public Comments

(emailed to the Chair during tonight's meeting)

The Chair received 22 emails which he plans to summarize and send to the other Committee members:

Colleen Gianino wants to know if a new survey will be sent out to parents.

Emily Sloan is concerned about students who will need in-person services.

Lori Grant is in favor of the two-two Hybrid Model.

Lauren Romano asked about live-streaming of lessons under the hybrid model. She would also like access to pick up materials at school before school begins.

Megan Keough is concerned about the lack of socialization if the Remote Model is selected. She would like to know to if some of the specialized courses at CHS would need to be cut.

Katie Draper asks what standards would indicate that the pandemic is under control. She is concerned about working parents who may be asked to also facilitate learning at home.

Carrie Lucia asked if parents may change the model they have chosen during the school year. How would cohorts be arranged at CHS with students taking different courses? What is the protocol if someone in school tests positive?

Allie Barnes asked if the teachers will be cleaning the rooms while students are there. She also asked about the air filters for the circulation systems. In the Hybrid Model would staff be teaching in person and remotely simultaneously? Will parents of students who require special services be contacted once a plan is decided? Parents would like answers as soon as possible.

Tanya Ponte asked how CHIPS will work.

Chris LaValley also asked if teachers will teach in both Hybrid and Remote classes at the same time.

Jessica LaRoche asked if paraprofessionals would be assigned to work with individual students to meet the requirements of the IEP for one-on-one services.

Dan Tang suggests that the Hybrid Model might be better if each cohort attends school for a four-day week, rather than two days.

Katie Koocher wants to know if the start of the school year will be delayed. Dr. Lang said school will not start prior to Labor Day. A new school calendar will be forthcoming.

Amy Marcotte would like to have parents take another survey once the model is selected.

Amy Malloy wonders if the cohorts could be based on neighborhoods to facilitate transportation.

Adam Felzani requests information about the "opt out" option. Would just one teacher be dedicated to those remote learners?

Peter Malloy is concerned that any model which has students in the school building would make the virus more easily spread.

Tara Purdington wonders if kindergarten will be full day in the Hybrid Model.

Hana Barker requests that the Power Point slides from tonight be added to the agenda packet or to the website. Dr. Lang will do that tomorrow.

Ann Waters said that some CHS courses which are highly specialized will be difficult to teach remotely.

Teresa McCann would like to know what it will take to be able to open schools fully.

Responses to these questions will be addressed at the next School Committee meeting.

Dr. Lang also received emails.

Antonio Tuscoso would like more information on the hybrid models.

Some parents would like the bus transportation issue discussed further.

The Chair will create a Google document in which he will place these questions and others that arise.

Adjournment (8:20 p.m.)

Ms. Newcomb motioned to adjourn to executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation and not return to open meeting. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. 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*