

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
February 16, 2021  
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) and Dr. Linda Hirsch (Assistant Superintendent).

**Call to Order**

5:00 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. The purpose of the meeting is to consider changes to The District’s definition of “close contacts”. Joining tonight’s meeting is Sue Rosa, Public Health Director for the Town of Chelmsford, and Peggy Gump, Coordinator of Nursing Services for the Chelmsford Public Schools.

**Public Comments**

Laurie Pellegrino, of Eight Sunrise Avenue, a parent whose family chose the hybrid model for the current school year spoke first. Her family adheres to all the recommended health protocols, especially to protect elderly family members. She believes CPS should continue to operate as they have since school opened in September. If modifications are made to the protocols and cohorts, her family will need to reconsider hybrid involvement and would need to choose remote (at the expense of her children having in person contact at school) for the balance of this school year.

Lauren Cochran and Katy Sullivan from the Chelmsford Federation of Teachers shared information from a letter concerning returning to “normalcy” in our schools. Until “pool testing” is implemented and teachers are vaccinated, they would like the current successful protocols remain in place. They are seeking assurance that the “remote” teachers will remain in remote status for the remainder of this school year.

Shelley Bethel, representing the CFT, who is additionally a teacher at McCarthy and has two children in the CPS, feels that the current quarantine practices need to be continued to assure safety. She is also concerned about Tier 1 and Tier 2 staff who have been in the buildings, because they cannot afford to live without pay. She would prefer things to stay as they are for the remaining months of this school year.

Mr. Doherty shared that The Committee received an email from a parent, Erica Redner, who had opted for hybrid with the understanding that “close contact” protocols would stay the same. If changes are made she may have to opt out of the hybrid learning model for her children.

Mr. King summarized additional input received by The Committee. Many families prefer there be no changes and may change from hybrid to remote learning if changes take place. Others believe that things have gone so well that changes may not have much affect on the spread of COVID. They would like to see more in-person opportunities for students. They believe struggling students would benefit by more time in school.

Hanna Barker, a parent, would like to hear more about the timing for changes and the ability for more vaccinations for staff. She also is concerned about COVID variants. Additionally, she would like more details on the communication between public health and the school district.

Another parent, Theresa Evans, whose family chose the hybrid learning model in August and has been pleased with this model. She does not believe changing the model is wise currently. She is concerned about the new variants and lack of vaccinations for school staff.

## **New Business**

### **1. COVID Update**

Prior to hearing from Sue Rosa, Dr. Lang stated that the district plans to maintain the six-foot distance for safety, although some districts have lowered this to three feet.

#### **a. Close Contact Definition**

The CDC definition is being used in Chelmsford. “Close contact” means being “within six feet of an individual who tests positive for COVID for more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period”. Dr. Lang stated that in the past, if there has been a positive test, the entire class was placed in quarantine. Testing has shown the other students in the class have tested negative. Dr. Lang would like to change this so that only those who have been in “close contact” will have to quarantine and not the entire class. If the teacher has not been in “close contact” with the COVID positive student, they would not have to quarantine and would then be able to teach his/her other classes where there have been no positive tests.

Sue Rosa shared that the schools and staff have done a “fabulous” job so far this year with adhering to the guidelines. When public health is notified of a positive test in the schools, they contact the parent (to find out when the symptoms started) and speak with either Peggy Gump or the nurse in that school to check on the child’s school schedule and whether they traveled on a school bus. Students are expected to always sit in their assigned seats both in school and on the bus, which facilitates contact tracing. The school busses have cameras which makes it easy to see which seats students were in, even if they moved during the ride. Teachers who have tested positive since September were affected by family spread and **not** school spread. Most spread is from sports outside of school or social gatherings outside of school. Sue Rosa does support Dr. Lang’s requested change.

Peggy Gump shared that the protocols which were in place since September, have led to spreading in the schools **not being an issue**. She feels that overidentifying of “close contacts” has taken in-person school contact and learning away from many students unnecessarily. Even with the proposed change, all other protocols and tracing would continue to be followed. She is impressed by the students’ adherence to mask-wearing and social distancing.

Tonight’s presentation in its entirety may be viewed on Chelmsford Telemedia YouTube.

Ms. Rosa stated that the CDC guidelines have not changed with the arrival of the more contagious variants. For more safety, the wearing of two or three masks, may be a better choice. People also need to wear well-fitted masks that stay put and do not require adjustments by the wearer. Noses must be covered! Data is shared as needed between public health and CPS regarding all positive cases (confidentiality is protected). Ms. Rosa and Ms. Gump answered questions asked by The Committee. Ms. Gump shared that direct service providers in the schools have received vaccines. She will also be sharing a report on the numbers of students and staff who have gone out on quarantine.

After Ms. Rosa and Ms. Gump left the meeting, The Committee members each shared their thoughts on changing the “close contact” protocol.

**Mr. King motioned to support a change in the close contact designation to the CDC guidelines starting March 2, 2021 utilizing the notification process described in tonight’s meeting. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.**

Adjournment (6:27 p.m.)

**Ms. Newcomb motioned to adjourn. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon Giglio, Recording Secretary*