

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
March 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), 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.”

- 1. Approval of the minutes of the regular school committee meetings of February 23, 2021, and March 2, 2021.**

**Ms. Newcomb motioned for the school committee to approve the minutes of the regular school committee meetings of February 23, 2021, and March 2, 2021. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.**

**Good News**

Dr. Hirsch shared that on March 12th, the CHS acapella groups participated in a virtual northeast quarter final of the International Championship of High School Acapella. The Crescendos ranked in second place and The Thursdays ranked first! The award for best solo went to Jackie P. of The Thursdays. The competition videos are available on the District Website. Ms. Newcomb recognized Amanda Roeder’s dedication to these groups and the process involved in submitting entries during COVID. The groups have done well under her guidance.

## Public Comments

Peter Molloy, a parent from Three Village View Road, called in and thanked all for the effort put into to the current school year. He was critical of the communication in the process of rolling out standards-based report cards. He noted the lack of major stakeholders being polled on the subject. He is also troubled that teachers have been using their planning time to work on the standards-based report card issue during this current school year.

Shelley Bethel, a parent of CPS students, a teacher at McCarthy and the CFT Secretary, expressed concern, that despite the move to standards-based report cards being put on hold, changes are being made in X2 this September to include standards categories instead of the categories currently used. The April 7<sup>th</sup>, PD is scheduled for this focus. She wonders if the report cards are being changed and when parent input will be heard for future changes. She stated that PD this school year has been centered on standards-based report cards. The PBIS initiative has been ignored during this pandemic school year in favor of the focus on report cards. Staff and students would have benefitted more by PD which addressed students' behavior interventions and support strategies to help them "build confidence and self-worth". She is speaking on behalf of the middle school teachers who feel the change to standard-based report cards is being rushed. She would like the reason for this to be discussed later in tonight's meeting. She requests that the April 7<sup>th</sup>, PD day be used as a building day to build morale and provide staff with information on what school will look like when students return for the full day. She would like the report card changes to be addressed after the pandemic is over.

The Chair read an email from Kristen Williamson, of three Prairie Road and a parent of a 6<sup>th</sup> grader and 9<sup>th</sup> grader. Her question was about the standards-based report cards not being implemented for the 2021/22 school year. She would like The District to go forward with their plan of providing an information session on standards-based report cards. Parents would like the opportunity to ask questions directly. She was disappointed that a meeting scheduled for March 31<sup>st</sup> was cancelled.

The Chair also read an email from Christine Maher, a parent of a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader, who would prefer the District **not** move to a standards-based grading system at the middle school level. She is in favor of it at the elementary level but prefers letter grades for middle and high school students, because she believes this grading system provides more motivation.

## New Business

### 1. Presentation: Spotlight on the Schools – Byam Elementary School

Jason Fredette, the principal of Byam Elementary School, introduced some of the Byam students and staff and provided a slide-show and overview of what is happening at their school and how they "adapted" to their new way of life and approached school creatively. Betsy Dolan, Byam's assistant principal introduced: Betsy Driscoll the school's librarian; Kathy Jackson from the fourth-grade team; Amy Brown the art teacher; and Christy Streeter and Karla Kooken with their third-grade student, Finn O'Leary.

Highlights included Ms. Driscoll's and her bitmoji library which is her virtual classroom where students may click on a book and see the video recoding of Ms. Driscoll reading the book aloud. She has recorded several hundred books for her students. Dozens of her third and fourth graders also recorded read-aloud books to share with the younger grades on a voluntary basis. She plans to continue this even when everyone returns to school. She has also been doing book clubs related to the reading curriculum.

Ms. Jackson shared information on virtual field trips available to the fourth graders. A virtual visit to The Marine Science Center in Florida's "Rescue, Rehab and Release Program" was donated by a fourth-grade parent. The students toured the center and learned about rescued turtles, which relates to their science curriculum. They are looking forward to an author visit and creating fictional characters of their own.

Art teacher, Mrs. Brown, was pleased to show everyone the Byam art room. This year's focus was on creativity and using multiple materials. Each student was given a "home art kit". Many of the projects provided opportunities for families to work together. Children created their own amusement parks. An application called Padlet allowed students to share and appreciate one another's work. Soon a family paint night will be held with the help of the BSA and 80 families have already registered for this.

Tonight's presentation concluded with poetry with the assistance of Lyn Hoopes, a poet in residence, who has been working with Byam children for twenty years and encourages "free verse" writing. This year she "visited" the students via Google and read her poems aloud and shared photos from animals and plants for inspiration. A photo was sent to each student. Google Jamboard and Google slides were used for Ms. Hoopes to work virtually one-on-one with the student poets as they created. The last slide featured Finn sharing his picture and reading his poem entitled *Little Loon*. His poem received applause from the School Committee and Administration! Tonight's presentation may be viewed on Chelmsford Telemedia YouTube.

## **2. Presentation: Spotlight on the Departments – World Languages & Exchange Programs**

Ms. Jessica Nollet, Department Coordinator for World Languages and Student Exchange Programs, shared her department's updates. This was the first year in which CHS offered American Sign Language for students. This is available as a two-year commitment to fulfill the CHS language requirement for graduation but may also be taken as an elective. Also, this year an ASL club has been run for the two middle schools. ASL has been received with enthusiasm.

Travel was prohibited this year due to COVID, so exchange programs could not take place. CHS world language classes have paired with classes in other countries for students to share and practice their language skills. She shared correspondence between CHS French 2 and 3 students and their partners in Quebec. Spanish 2 students also shared with partners in Argentina. In addition, Spanish 2 students have shared with students in Madrid, Spain. Sharing has been done successfully in letters, photos and Google docs.

In the middle schools this year fun lessons using technology have been embraced by the teachers and students. Music has been the focus during March.

Last year Chelmsford began participation in the "Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy". This allows seniors who demonstrate proficiency in English and a world language to have a special seal affixed to his or her diploma. Proficiency is demonstrated in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Last year 17 students opted for this, while this year 26 students did. Proficiency is demonstrated through an online exam or portfolio assessment. Over 65 different world languages are spoken by students and families in the Chelmsford Public Schools. Students may qualify for the State Seal for languages they have learned in school, or languages they have spoken for many years or speak at home with their families. Ms. Nollet's full presentation and slide show may be viewed on Chelmsford Telemedia YouTube.

## **3. Return-to-School Planning Update**

As a recap of the last meeting, Dr. Lang reminded all that phase one will add Wednesdays as a half day beginning on March 24, 2021. Phase two will extend half days to full days but retaining existing cohorts.

Phase three would be to bring everyone back to in-person learning. Positive feedback was received from staff and families alike. However, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for the State met and changed criteria for “student learning time”. The Commissioner has stated that the regulations state that all K-5 students should be back to school by April 5<sup>th</sup>, followed by middle school students returning on April 28<sup>th</sup> and a future date to be determined when high school students must return to “full in-person learning”. The only waiver to the regulations which CPS qualifies for is to have the fifth graders return to school with the rest of the middle school students on April 28<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Lang recommends applying for this waiver. COVID protocols will continue for the rest of this school year and maybe into the fall.

#### **a. Community & School COVID Data Trends**

The first slide in tonight’s presentation is an update chart with this data. The trend is down for both the community and the schools.

#### **b. Staff COVID Vaccination**

Per the Governor **all school staff qualify for the vaccine**. 717 CPS staff previously expressed interest in receiving the COVID vaccine. As of tonight, we have over 500 staff who have received the vaccine (66%) or have a scheduled appointment to do so.

#### **c. Staff & Students COVID Pool Testing**

Two weeks ago, families were sent information and an online consent form to participate in this voluntary program with no charge to the staff or families. 865 in-person students have consented to participate, as well as 296 staff members. Pool testing began yesterday but does not include remote students. There were no positive test results. (Last week’s pilot test of staff members revealed one staff member who did test positive and necessary protocols are being followed.) A dashboard for the pool testing will be on the District’s website by the end of this week. More students and staff can register for pool testing at any time. At this point in the meeting a demonstration of pool testing was done by The Committee. To fully appreciate this and the entirety of Dr. Lang’s presentation, please view tonight’s meeting on Chelmsford Telemedia YouTube.

#### **d. MCAS Update**

Dr. Hirsch shared that the Legacy Biology Test (paper-based) is scheduled for honors biology students From June 1<sup>st</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup>. Students will be required to come to the school for testing. Although this is a federal testing requirement, many in Massachusetts would like to see it and MCAS postponed until next year. The Committee agreed to work on contacting officials to request postponing this year’s testing. There is no firm date for AP testing yet.

#### **e. Planning for Elementary and Middle School Full In-Person Learning**

Dr. Lang stated that a full return to school (in-person, five days a week, full-days) will begin for elementary students on Monday, April 5, 2021. For middle schools the date is Wednesday, April 28, 2021. The date for CHS are to be determined. Over the next few weeks, schools will be hosting meetings to help students transition back to school which will cover all the safety protocols and setting building expectations (much like what is done at the opening of school each year at summer’s end). Families will be surveyed, looking at the April return dates, to choose fully remote or full in person for the remainder of the school year. In discussion, The Committee, expressed the importance of returning the CHS students to school as soon as possible. Dr. Lang said he and the union looked at the first week in May for returning to high school.

The April 5<sup>th</sup> and April 28<sup>th</sup> dates are the last acceptable dates for DESE. The District may choose to use earlier dates. At this point April 5<sup>th</sup> for elementary is a firm date. The middle school and high school dates will need to be worked out with the union. Once the return to school date has been reached the hybrid model of learning will no longer be offered. Early survey results show 85% opting for a full return and 15% choosing to remain remote. The fully remote option will not be offered for the 2021/22 school year. Once in-person learning has been implemented, students who are in-person but need to quarantine due to COVID, will be allowed to link remotely to their regular classroom while the need to stay out of school. The District will do its best to keep students with the teachers they have had this year, but a few changes may need to be made. Students will be kept three feet apart, not six feet when in-person learning returns. "During meal and snack breaks, when students are not wearing masks, a six-foot physical distance will be maintained. As the weather improves, the use of outdoor spaces will be encouraged." To maintain six-foot distancing during lunch, some of the students may need to eat in the classroom while others will go to the cafeteria. The cafeteria tables are being replaced by desks to allow for six feet of distancing. It is possible that the larger rooms will need to be repurposed for classrooms, which may necessitate the specialists for music, art, PE and library to travel to the individual classrooms. Tents are on order to provide for outdoor learning and breaks as the weather improves.

"The addition of Wednesday as a ½ in-person day, rotating cohorts, will still be implemented as planned, beginning Wednesday March 24, 2021. The first week of implementation will have students in Cohort A in-person on Monday (3/22), Tuesday (3/23) and Wednesday (3/24). Students in Cohort B will attend in-person on Thursday (3/25) and Friday (3/26). The second week, students in Cohort A will attend in-person on Monday (3/29) and Tuesday (3/30). Students in Cohort B will attend in-person on Wednesday (3/31) and Thursday (4/1). There is no school on Good Friday, April 2, 2021."

Concerning transportation, any student who resides more than one mile from school may ride the bus at no cost for the current school year. For CHS the shuttle runs are continuing. There will not be before and after school child care this school year. The plan is for this to be in place for the 2021/22 school year.

**f. Vote on MA DESE Waiver Request: Grade Level Consideration**

**Ms. Newcomb motioned for The Committee to support a grade level configuration waiver to delay the implementation of full-time learning in person for our grade five students until April 28, 2021, the date middle school student in grades six through eight are required to return to full-time in person learning. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.**

**4. Middle School Standards Based Reporting Update**

Dr. Hirsch has included a memorandum in tonight's agenda packet concerning standards-based reporting which has been in the works for about two years. These report cards have been in place in the elementary schools for six years. Some work on this initiative for the middle schools has continued since last spring. Her presentation tonight and slide show present data from the parent survey. Close to 70% of responses indicated that families would like a combine SBRC (standards-based report card) with an equivalent alpha (A, B, C, etc.) grade. This type of hybrid grading is being considered and PD will take place on this on April 7<sup>th</sup>, where behavior comments will be updated. The parent meeting for March 31<sup>st</sup> was cancelled, due to the additional considerations given to the grading process.

**5. Vote on School Choice Program: 2021/22 School Year**

**Ms. Newcomb motioned to accept thirteen (13) additional/new students at Chelmsford High School in Grade 9 under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts School Choice Program in the 2021/22 school year, bringing the total School Choice participation in the Chelmsford Public Schools to fifty (50) enrolled students in the 2021/22 school year. Mr. Moses seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carries 5-0.**

**6. Personnel Report: February 2021**

No action required.

**Liaisons**

Mr. Doherty shared that CHIPS PTO is working on the “free little library”. Their sock drive ended Friday and was greatly successful! They are looking forward to springtime activities for the children.

Ms. Santos said that the McCarthy PTO will offer a teacher lunch this month. Currently they are running a virtual book fair. Also, they are using funds from Project 300 for The Table of Plenty and The Pantry. Harrington is running a book fair now. They have a fund raiser tonight at Brick House. The EL Council met with presentations by the public library discussing the variety of resources that are available to the English language learners. The library also offers a “Conversation Meet” for adult English language learners. The Wellness Committee continues to work on rewriting policy.

The Chair and Mr. Doherty went to the Finance Committee meeting, where Dr. Lang’s presentation was well received. The Council of Chelmsford Schools will be meeting tomorrow night.

**New Items**

The next regular School Committee meeting will be held on April 13, 2021. The *How to Be an Antiracist* book meeting will be held on April 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Public Comments**

Sarah Evans, a CHS junior, sent an email to be read. Ms. Newcomb shared it. Sarah questions the situation which will allow to students to attend remotely after the return to in-person learning, in the event of the need to quarantine due to COVID. She is concerned that students who are sick with non-COVID illnesses (such as colds and coughing) will feel they need to go to school. She asks that The Committee be lenient and allow students in this situation to be able to attend remotely. Dr. Lang understands her concern but DESE will determine which students may attend remotely.

**Adjournment (9:19 p.m.)**

**Ms. Newcomb motioned to adjourn at 9:19 p.m. Mr. Moses seconded. Motion carries 5-0.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon Giglio, Recording Secretary*