

**CHELMSFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
February 8, 2022  
Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr. Dennis King (Chair), Mr. Jeff Doherty (Secretary), Mr. John Moses, Ms. Donna Newcomb 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. In-person public participation will be taking place tonight in accordance with social distancing and safety protocols established by the Chelmsford School Committee Public Participation Guidelines. Anyone interested in speaking during the public input portion of the meeting would have notified the superintendent’s office by yesterday afternoon and would have been provided with the guidelines and assigned a time to attend the meeting to speak. 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 their comments or questions during our second public input session at the end of the meeting.”

**Good News**

Dr. Hirsch shared that, despite the snow, McCarthy Middle School students were able to present the play *Moana Junior*. It was nicely done, and they had a good time. Nine students will be representing CHS this year for the Massachusetts Music Educators Association and their All State Festival. They will perform a concert at Boston’s Symphony Hall in March.

Mr. Doherty thanked the local attorneys who volunteered their time to help with the CHS Mock Trial.

**Public Comments**

None.

**New Business**

**1. Presentation: Social Emotional Learning and Student Mental Health Update**

Presenting tonight are Ms. Shannon Bischoff, Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning & Counseling Services, and Ms. Katie Simes, Coordinator of Health & Physical Education. Ms. Simes shared that the

Youth Risk Behavior Survey was done this year for grades six through 12 to gather mental health data. Ms. Bischoff added that the Pandemic “exacerbated the growing crisis in youth mental health” and well-being. Addressing these needs for our students and our community is an ongoing collaboration between school and community resources. The district has incredibly dedicated counselors, psychologists, social workers, teaching staff and administrators, as well as interns from local colleges, who respond to the current needs. The slide show included in tonight’s agenda packet provides information on this staffing for all education levels and Ms. Bischoff elaborated on their roles and the support they offer. Ms. Simes shared and spoke of the data gathered on the student survey. In summary, many risky behaviors were reduced significantly from the previous surveys (i.e. drinking alcohol, vaping, marijuana use, sexual intercourse). These changes were most likely an impact of COVID and the accompanying changes in daily life, with people of all ages spending more time at home! Sadly, some mental health concerns remained stagnant while others have shown slight increases. Student participation at CHS was only 80%, which was probably because the survey was given right after the December holiday break, when the absentee rate was higher than normal. The data shows that improvement can be made for more students to feel that they can speak about a problem with an adult staff member in school. Self-harm data also stagnated from the last survey, with about 15% of middle school students and 17% of high school students reporting self-injury. This number should also be decreasing. About 12% of middle school students reported seriously considering suicide during the past 12 months with the majority of the students who reported this identified as “other” or “transgender/non-binary”. About 14.4% of high school students reported seriously considering suicide, which is an increase from two years ago. These results indicate a more pro-active approach is needed from the mental health support staff. Questions about stress, anxiety and depression on a daily basis during the last 30 days, showed that 73% of middle school students were not experiencing these mental health issues.

Ms. Bischoff shared that this data informs the need for more support for students, by school staff and community resources. Addressing the mental health needs of the students will remove obstacles to learning and social-emotional well-being so each student can reach their potential. Many community resources have reached the maximum of their ability to provide services, which is currently placing more demand on the school resources. To help meet the increased need, more training is offered for the support staff. Recently local school districts began collaborating in clinician training, trauma-informed practices and services offered to groups of students. Partnering with families and care-givers at home is key to helping students. Sadly, in-patient services, which are over capacity, often need to resort to waiting lists. After school clubs and programs are offered at CHS and both middle schools. LGBTQ training was conducted this last week for staff. A database of SEL resources is being compiled state wide, which will help provide some teletherapy.

Ms. Bischoff shared positive updates on curriculum and programs at all levels to address Social Emotional Learning. MTSS facilitators are available at all levels as well and Tier 1 and Tier 2 teams meet regularly to review data and plan accordingly. The Second Step SEL program is now being used at the middle schools (after several years of success at elementary). Counselors and health teachers are collaborating on programs to address suicide prevention and mental health awareness curriculum. A new SEL curriculum at CHS called “Character Strong” has been added this school year and is taught by classroom teachers. Many additional initiatives are under way to lead students to seek mental health resources and provide more peer-to-peer support at the high school. It is important during these stressful times that the adults help students to recognize their strengths and resiliency and inspire “hope”!

Ms. Simes added that there is a district-wide MTSS team, including one or more representatives from each school as well as administrators from Central Office. Data is reviewed on all programs to address changes and future needs. In addition to students, the needs of school staff are being addressed. Both Ms. Bischoff and Ms. Simes offered answers to questions asked by The Committee.

Tonight's presentation was packed full of information and to fully appreciate it you should watch the presentation on Chelmsford Telemedia You/Tube. Please know that the challenges face by CPS at this time are not unique and are mirrored by the other districts in Massachusetts. The final slide (before the bibliography) was filled with details on the plans going forward to respond to SEL needs and a verbal thank you to all staff for supporting student needs. The Committee expressed deep gratitude for all that is being done for our students.

## **2. Questions/requests for additional information on Superintendent's Recommended FY2023 Budget**

The Chair asked if any Committee member had any questions on the budget they would like to ask tonight instead of waiting for the budget hearing at the next regular meeting. Ms. Santos is concerned about the size of classes. She would like assurance that the recommended class size of 25 will remain in place. She is troubled by some classes which have as many as 27 students enrolled. Dr. Lang responded that the policy states that class sizes should "average" 25. Sometimes it is acceptable to have more than 25 if the class is an honors class for example. That is better than telling some students that the class is full, and they will have to choose another course he explained. He is meeting with middle school administrators to address class sizes there moving forward. A working group will be created to study this for the 2023/24 school year to examine all possible options. Ms. Newcomb asked if classes with students on IEPs have low enough enrollment, so all student needs are being met? Dr. Lang responded that often classes with students of special needs are co-taught by the addition of a special ed teacher working with the classroom teacher. Paraprofessionals are also added to support the teachers as needed. On March 1st during the budget hearing, the public will be able to ask questions as the review goes page by page. Questions may also be submitted by email for people who are unable to attend that night.

## **3. Update on COVID-19 Pool Testing, At-Home Rapid Antigen Testing, and Student Vaccination Status**

Dr. Lang's update tonight is accompanied by slides which are included in tonight's agenda packet. Information shared includes the numbers of students (who reside in Chelmsford) in each age group who are fully vaccinated. He also shared data on vaccination status of students enrolled in each of the Chelmsford Public Schools. Pool testing continues and produces good numbers with a positivity rate of 0.5% most weeks. He included "Test and Stay" figures through January, but the program will be ending. The new "Rapid Antigen Testing" has begun and will be done at home with test kits provided every Friday. One test will be conducted each week. The weekly dashboard information posted on Fridays will be ongoing. DESE's mask mandate is scheduled to end on February 28, 2022. Current district policy requires masks **inside** all school buildings.

## **4. Spring 2022 MCAS Schedule**

Dr. Hirsch included a memorandum in tonight's packet which provides information and dates for MCAS testing this spring. There will be a return to the two MCAS sessions for all students, which was the norm before COVID. The class of 2022 will not need to take MCAS for a competency determination. Their high school course work will support the competency determination through The State. This waiver will also apply to the class of 2023 for science **only**. Students in the top 10% of their class who have exceeded the standards will be eligible for The Abigail Adams Scholarship tuition voucher at Massachusetts State Colleges. Those students took the MCAS this fall to qualify. EL students in the class of 2022 and 2023 will receive an ELA waiver if they pass their English classes with rigor. They may then take their native language tests to receive The Seal of Bilingual Consideration. 18 CHS students have received this Seal in the past two years. Our English Language Learners take the Access test each January and February.

## **Liaison Reports**

Ms. Santos shared that Harrington PTO met on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Parents who attend these meetings are recognized by the school principal. They will be having a math challenge in March, along with many other activities including the Book Fair. Ms. Newcomb stated that South Row still meets remotely but is anticipating in-person meetings soon. They will be holding a virtual science fair, their book fair, and will collect gently used children's books to donate to a community organization. Mr. Doherty reported that the Boosters Club met and many of the coaches and hockey captains attended who thanked Boosters for providing a skate sharpening machine! The Girls Sprint Medley Relay will participate in the national tournament in Manhattan with financial help from The Boosters. Boosters' St. Patrick's event tickets may be purchased on their website. The Chair added that CHIPS had their most successful basket raffle to date! Enrichment activities will continue monthly and staff appreciation events are scheduled.

## **Public Comments**

None.

**Adjournment (8:04 p.m.)**

**Mr. Moses motioned to adjourn. Mr. Doherty seconded. Motion carries 5-0.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon Giglio, Recording Secretary*