Chairman Russo called this meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m. in the School Committee Room, Administration Offices, 123 Cambridge Street, Burlington, Massachusetts. Present: Mrs. Christine Monaco, Mr. Stephen Nelson, Mr. Thomas F. Murphy, Jr. and Ms. Martha Simon. Superintendent Eric Conti, Asst. Superintendent Patrick Larkin, Finance Manager Nichole Coscia, and Director of Operations Bob Cunha also present.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

A moment of silence was held in observance of the recent passing of retired custodian John Harbour, who worked for 37 years in the school department. Condolences were offered to Mr. Harbour’s family.

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Nelson to approve the warrant; motion carried 3-0-2 Mr. Murphy & Mr. Nelson abstained.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Mrs. Monaco and seconded by Mr. Nelson to approve minutes of 12/11/18; motion carried 4-0-1 Mr. Murphy abstained.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

INFORMATION/REPORTS

Dr. Conti announced the upcoming Kindergarten Information Night on January 16 in the BHS auditorium. He stated events were being held tonight in Malden, New Bedford and Fitchburg to support increasing the Foundation Budget after 25 years of the same school funding formula. The Mass. Association of School Superintendents is in support of this initiative.

Student Representative

Riya Karmani reported on a number of upcoming student fundraiser events.

Subcommittee Reports

Nothing to report.

Ways/Means

Members in attendance: Sue Harrigan and John Iler.

INSTRUCTION/TECHNOLOGY

MSMS Robotics Team

Twelve members of the middle school robotics team and their advisors, Jourdan Marino, Jane Lynch, and John Walsh were in attendance. Mr. Marino explained this is their third year in existence and they have approximately 50 participants on 6 teams. The Space Potatoes team explained their individual contributions and their State competition project entry for a more efficient way to grow plants via space farming. The robotics activity is in the initial phase of expanding to the elementary grade levels and the middle school students are mentoring elementary students.

MSMS – Principal Perchase

Middle School Principal Cari Perchase and Assistant Principal Josh Murphy presented a comprehensive overview of the administrative leadership transition plan which included vision, mission, core values, focus for the year, faculty focus groups, building relationships with families and students, accomplishments and upcoming areas of focus. Some of the new accomplishments identified by Ms. Perchase included an extended day program for students, increased after school offerings for students, and they have honored but updated school traditions. A Faculty Advisory Committee has been established and tasked with looking at the student class schedule. Some School Committee member comments: Ms. Perchase & Mr. Murphy have taken great steps in transitioning, which is difficult after four decades of a previous leadership team, expressed admiration in their pacing of changes, they seem to be covering all bases with the inclusion of people in decisions, the transition is taking place with grace and professionalism and exhibiting positive role models for students. In response to Mr. Nelson, Ms. Perchase replied that the future need at the middle school is for a second assistant principal to allow them more time to provide instructional leadership.

NEW BUSINESS

2019-20 BHS Program of Studies – First Reading

By consensus, this item was taken out of order. A lengthy presentation of over an hour followed with BHS Principal Sullivan reviewing the 2019-20 Program of studies, including 6 new courses and prerequisites, no current courses will be deleted, and courses/programs that will be modified. Guidance Coordinator Joe Attubato reviewed new course descriptions including: dual enrollment courses, student career/academic pathways, and courses offered in the ELL (English language learner) program.

MSMS Transition Plan
A discussion followed, including concerns of: students needing to follow either a music or computer science course path (but not both), Massachusetts has approved Computer Science as either a core science or core math course (rather than an elective), a Civics course & project will be a future state requirement to graduate high school, and required prerequisites to enroll in sequenced courses and AP courses. For the next meeting, Mr. Attubato will provide an addendum for an art course and a Science course flowchart with the addition of an AP Biology course. Some School Committee member observations: complimented them on offering upgraded courses, as well as interdisciplinary courses, a balance of course offerings between liberal arts and technical, and the variety of elective courses. As this is a first reading, the Committee will take the matter under advisement and vote on it at the January 22 meeting.

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mrs. Monaco to open a public hearing; motion carried 5-0-0. Dr. Conti explained that Principal Sullivan is again seeking to replicate the current limited school choice program at BHS by admitting non-Burlington students for a maximum of ten students in grade 9, five students in grade 10, five students in grade 11 and five students in grade 12. Principal Sullivan stated that new school choice students are not accepted until all Burlington students have been enrolled into the fall course schedule. The School Committee members were in support of this program which has been in existence for 10 years. Moved by Mrs. Monaco and seconded by Mr. Murphy to close the public hearing; motion carried 5-0-0. Moved by Mr. Nelson and seconded by Mrs. Monaco to approve limited school choice in grades 9-12 as submitted in our back up material; motion carried 5-0-0.

Mr. Cunha stated that the current bus contract expires in June, he and Nichole are familiar with the bidding process but they are collaborating with a transportation consultant who has 30 years of experience and has worked with over 100 school districts. The consultant will provide assistance with analyzing the current contract, consider improved efficiencies, cost savings, and use Versatran bus route software. The Superintendent explained that the school district spends approximately $1.2 million per year on buses and at the request of the Board of Selectman, they will be looking at how to creatively run bus routes and find cost savings/efficiencies. Mr. Cunha explained that the consultant charges an hourly rate, transportation to/from Burlington and the project has a not to exceed $5,000 limit. In response to a School Committee member, Dr. Conti explained the expense will be paid from either the international student or school choice account. Mrs. Monaco requested that the $5,000 be put on the unbudgeted expense list. In response to Mrs. Monaco, the Superintendent replied that as of now the school budget is not frozen but that may change after FY19 financial update at the January 22 meeting. Dr. Conti will invite the consultant to a future School Committee meeting to explain transportation options. Transportation costs next year will not be firm until after bids are received for the bus contract.

None.

Dr. Conti stated that this policy was submitted for a first reading on July 24, noted that the issue is students who turn 5 after August 31 and up to October 1 who are requested to be evaluated/tested as they are not eligible for kindergarten, which also impacts staff workloads. He has spoken with his colleagues and they have moved away from the testing of student academics due to social/emotional readiness concerns. The town of Arlington has made September 1 as the hard cutoff date with no exceptions. The intention of this policy is to give kids the best chance of success and he suggested the Committee consider this revised policy a first reading as the Committee only had a short discussion about it in July. Some of the Committee’s comments during discussion included: concern about younger students who may be ready for kindergarten but not meet the age requirement, concern about evaluating a private school’s curriculum/qualifications, the need to agree on a firm age cutoff date, and many exceptions in the policy. Moved by Mr. Nelson and seconded by Mrs. Monaco to continue the discussion of the School Attendance Age Policy until the February 12 meeting; motion carried 5-0-0. Dr. Conti will submit revised policy language for the Committee's consideration at the February 12 meeting.
New School Building Direction - Discussion

Dr. Conti began the discussion by reviewing student enrollment data from September - December commenting on an increase of 36 students and noted that deadlines for submission to the Mass. School Building Authority for accelerated repairs is February 16 and the core construction deadline is in April. Mr. Cunha explained that to do just the HVAC system at the high school will be approximately $75 million for the total project. After consulting with the MSBA, Dr. Conti stated that they indicated that the high school is more than an accelerated repair and encouraged Burlington to submit it as a core project renovation. He further explained that if the MSBA is putting a priority on approving projects due to enrollment pressures, the high school would not qualify but an elementary school would, particularly as modular classrooms are in use at Fox Hill.

A robust discussion followed and some of the included comments: what should be submitted for the priority statement of interest, increasing student enrollments, condition of the high school, Fox Hill, and Pine Glen, what needs to be done to submit a statement of interest, concern there is not enough time to submit an elementary renovation statement of interest by the April deadline.

The Committee preliminarily decided to: update the BHS SOI proposal for submission to the MSBA in April 2019, meet with town capital planning team to start the conversation to support BHS renovation with local funds if MSBA will not fund $75 million for BHS and then submit the request to town meeting in May 2020, file an elementary school renovation SOI in April 2020, schedule working school committee meetings for discussion regarding elementary space needs, and Dr. Conti will prepare for February/March a list of questions to be answered including dates/topics for upcoming meetings to discuss school building space needs. Create a small working group with the Superintendent, administrators and a couple school committee members to discuss school building needs and then for them to make a recommendation to the School Committee. Dr. Conti and Mr. Cunha will contact Jack McCarthy from the MSBA to discuss the high school renovation, will update the BHS Statement of Interest and submit it in April 2019 as a core project.

Teacher Sabbatical Leave - Approval

The Superintendent explained that BHS Spanish teacher Daniela DeSousa is requesting to take a one year sabbatical next year to live and travel in Spain, she has been a teacher for 7 years, and when she returns she will be responsible for 2 years of service in Burlington schools. Dr. Conti and Principal Sullivan are in support of this request. In response to a query, Dr. Conti replied that Ms. DeSousa will receive 75% of her salary for the year and it is a benefit of the BEA teachers’ contract. Moved by Mr. Nelson and seconded by Mr. Murphy to approve a sabbatical leave for Spanish teacher Daniela DeSousa for the 2019-20 school year.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

Chairman Russo announced that the Committee had a need for executive session to discuss: contract negotiations, approval of minutes, and potential litigation. The School Committee will only return to public session for the purpose of adjournment. Moved by Mrs. Monaco and seconded by Mr. Murphy at 10:45 p.m. to enter executive session. Mrs. Monaco, aye; Mrs. Russo, aye; Mr. Nelson, aye; Mr. Murphy, aye; Ms. Simon, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Mr. Nelson and seconded by Mrs. Monaco at 11:05 p.m. to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Gilbert
Recording Secretary

Date submitted: 1/22/19
Date approved: 1/22/19

2 District Enrollment