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SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, June 13, 2023

TIME: 7:00 pm

LOCATION: 123 Cambridge Street, Burlington, MA 01803
Administrative Offices, School Committee Room

ATTENDEES

MEMBER(S) PRESENT: Chair, Ms. Martha Simon, Vice Chair Ms. Melissa Massardo, Mr. Jeremy Brooks, Ms. Chris Monaco, Ms. Katherine Bond, Superintendent Dr. Eric Conti, Assistant Superintendent-to-be Dr. Lisa Chen, Finance Director, Ms. Nichole Coscia, Director of Operations Mr. Bob Cunha

MEMBER(S) REMOTE: None

MEMBER(S) ABSENT: None

GUEST(S) PRESENT: Donna DiNisco from DiNisco Design, Inc., Christina Dell Angelo (Dore & Whittier), and Neil Harrigan (DiNisco Design)

GUEST(S) REMOTE: None

PUBLIC PRESENT: Clinical Social Worker Michelle Wexelblat, Resident-Veteran James Sparks, Resident-BEC Barbara Martinez, Resident-BEC Martha Duffield, Resident Gloria Doherty, Resident Donald Doherty, Resident David Woodilla, Resident Melissa Interest, Resident Andrea Bono-Bunker, Resident Valerie Bono-Bunker, Resident/TMM Shari Ellis, Resident Cindy Phillips, Resident-TMM Eileen Sickler, Resident-TMM Sara Carley, Resident Karmela Schmailde, Resident Adam Heisler, Resident Deirdre Heisler, BHS Student Nate Carey, BHS Student Jack Carey, Resident/TMM Nicci Kadilack, Resident-Parent Kerry Abramov, Resident-Parent Nila Almstrom, Resident-Parent Elizabeth Melo, Resident and Teacher Judy Crossman, Resident Kristin Russo, and Resident Jessica Dubadey

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REMOTE: Presbyterian Church Pastor Burlington Rev. Trina Portillo, Amanda Laskowski

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Simon called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., and read the following statement: The public can also access this meeting via WebEx Technology. The Burlington School Committee will hear public comment in person and virtually. Meetings are also broadcast live on Burlington Cable Access TV (BCAT) as usual. Chair Simon reminded participants that comments and statements are limited to 3 minutes each. Meeting Access Code: Meeting number (access code): 2330 165 9873 | Password: Tuesday.

EQUITY STATEMENT

Educational equity means **that every child belongs and receives whatever support he/she/they need to develop his/her/their full academic, emotional, and social potential to learn and thrive every day.** This begins with kindness and valuing the humanity of every child or individual.

The Burlington School Committee supports our LGBTQ+ students, staff, families and community members. We regret that there have been recent incidents in the middle school which have been painful to the LGBTQ+ community, as well as incidents targeting other groups through antisemitism and racism.

The Burlington Public Schools are focused on the students and making sure that all perspectives are welcome and all students feel like they belong. The Marshall Simonds Middle School held a Pride theme day on June 2nd to support the LGBTQ+ community. It is an established practice at the school to hold theme days to celebrate student life. Unfortunately, during the Pride theme day there were behaviors that were hurtful to students and the school community. We are now involved in a healing process. We do not think that there are any "hateful" middle school students. Students at this age are finding their voices or changing their voices or challenging adult voices. Middle school should be a safe place for ALL students to express themselves, to make mistakes, and to learn from each other. We provided support to students and staff who were negatively affected, and administered consequences for behavior that is against our policies. The school met with the entire student body in classroom based groups to educate them about how their behaviors affect others, to take responsibility for their behaviors, and to help us become a more inclusive community where all of us feel that we belong. Although we do not publicize every aspect of the schools' response, the middle school dedicated significant time last week to process with students to help them better understand how their words and behaviors impact others.

Burlington is a community made up of many different people and groups - diversity is one of our strengths. We are doing our best to help our students learn to communicate, empathize, and care for one another across differences, and to embrace our many commonalities.

Dr. Conti stated he is disappointed in the behavior of some middle school students during the events organized by the middle school Spectrum Club recognizing Pride month but wanted to remind everybody these are middle school age children and most behaved appropriately. While consequences are sometimes appropriate, it is the follow-up conversations that are most important with children of this age. Dr. Conti reiterated what he stated in his community message, "like any spirit day celebration participation is optional, respectful behavior across the entire student body however, is non-negotiable." Dr. Conti noted that in response to the June 2nd event at the middle school, he has received various kinds of communications including requests to quickly hire a DEI Director. The need for a DEI Director and the middle school incident from June 2nd are related, but not causal. Middle school age children reflect what they see adults do without thinking about the consequences of their actions. Ascribing hate to middle school children who are not fully developed, is a mistake. Dr. Conti stated his top priority in filling the DEI Director position is thoughtful development and not hasty repetition. Dr. Conti stated it was important to hire an Assistant Superintendent, first. Dr. Lisa Chen joins the team on July 1st and will quickly get to know Burlington, the Equity Audit will be completed in several weeks, and the district will be working with a DEI coach from William James College. Dr. Conti stated he will continue to work with his DEI coach in prioritizing the findings of the audit report to address a concrete path forward and will shape the DEI job posting around these priorities. Those of us paying attention to DEI efforts around the state and country should appreciate this approach in light of the backlash against DEI efforts occurring everywhere. Burlington is not immune to the divisive and polarized political climate of the country. Many adults are siloed in regards to their culture, religion and personal history. Public schools, however, are not siloed by design. Our schools have become the places where all perspectives, religions, cultures and personal identities come together. Most of our students, your children, experience more diversity everyday than the rest of us. Learning to collaborate across these differences is a critical skill in the world your children will be living and working in as adults. I don't want public education to back away from promoting tolerance and inclusivity or its critical role in protecting our democracy. At the next School Committee meeting, I will speak more completely about the district's DEI efforts in September, but for this evening I want to state unequivocally, that here in the Burlington Public Schools we are committed to tolerance and inclusivity for all, and that includes our LGBTQ+ students. We are committed to working hard so that all students feel safe and supported so they can reach the depth and breadth of their abilities.

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

Ms. Monaco made a motion to approve the warrant as submitted; seconded by Ms. Bond.
Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks - aye, Ms. Massardo - aye, Ms. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye.
Motion Carried 5:0:0 by Roll Call Vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Bond made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of 5/23/23; seconded by Ms. Massardo
Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks - aye, Ms. Massardo - aye, Ms. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye.
Motion Carried 5:0:0 by Roll Call Vote.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following individuals spoke about the MSMS Pride Day Event: Nate Carey, Parent Kerry Abramov, Michelle Wexelblat, James Robert Sparks, Nicci Kadillac, Amanda Laskowski, Ericka Holly, Kate Mun (Kate Mun read a statement from Meredith Benston), Karmela Schmarlde, Martha Duffield, Nila Almstrom, Barbara Martinez, Melissa Interest, Sherry Ellis, Andrea Bono-Bunker, Jessica Dubadey and Rev. Trina Portillo.

Rev. Portillo read a statement on behalf of Rabbi Susan Abramson; Temple Shalom Emeth; Rev. Ed Koonz, United Church of Christ Burlington; Chais DiMaggio; Ranjani Saigal, Hindu priest; Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA; The Rev. Daniel Bell, Priest-in-Charge, St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

Ms. Simon thanked everyone who came to speak and support the LGBTQ+ community.

INFORMATION / REPORTS

Student Reports

Mr. Matt Shannon re-introduced himself as the Student Representative to the School Committee, a position that he was re-elected for next year by the student council members throughout the high school. Mr. Shannon shared BHS news that the Class of 2023 graduated; BHS held the Junior Book Awards, where top performing students are awarded different distinctions based on their merit; and students from MSMS and BHS are currently at the University of Maryland competing in the National History Day competition. The BHS sports teams have made deep runs in the playoffs, namely the Varsity Softball team will play in the Division 2 final four facing off Westfield in Worcester. Furthermore, during the last week of school the students are eagerly awaiting summer vacation but this also means an intense week for the high school students as this a week of finals.

Mr. Shannon concluded with a statement regarding the recent events at MSMS, noting that this is an issue that needs to be talked about by teachers, students, parents and Burlington community members.

Subcommittee Reports

Fox Hill School Building Committee Update

Dr. Conti stated that Ms. Donna DiNisco from DiNisco Design is in attendance this evening to review the timeline of the design process with the committee. Dr. Conti noted this is a first reading so it doesn't need a vote now but there will be a need for a vote at the next meeting. The Educational Program and Space Summary review is a critical part of the design process and the application needs to be submitted to the MSBA.

Ms. DiNisco stated that the educational program is the first step in the feasibility study stage. The BPS is fortunate to have been selected to be part of the MSBA core program. It shows a true need but with that there is a prescriptive process that must be completed. Ms. DiNisco continued with her presentation and asked the committee to review the packet she distributed at the meeting in order to vote on the educational programs and space summary at the next meeting.

Ms. Simon confirmed that a vote to approve the educational programs and space summary will need to take place at the next meeting on Monday, June 26, 2023. This approval will then go to the Burlington Elementary Building committee in order for them to submit it to the MSBA. Ms. Simon clarified that two different educational programs are written because we are considering all options; one is if we just rebuild the Fox Hill School for 325 students and the other is if we combine both schools, Fox Hill and Pine Glen, for 640 students.

Ways & Means

None.

Other Announcements

Ms. Simon congratulated all the graduates and stated she attended both graduations, the BHS and the Evening Academy. Ms. Simon stated the BHS softball team won their 13th League Championship in a row and are now in the final four on Wednesday in Worcester and the Lacrosse teams are still in the running. Congratulations to all those students.

LEARNING, EQUITY, THRIVING

Canada Trip in February

Dr. Conti explained that the BHS World Language department is requesting approval for a trip to Canada with the student travel company, Prométour. Prométour Education Tours deliver customized trips to teachers and their students throughout Canada. Our BHS French teacher, Ms. Yuxia Peng, would like to offer our BHS French students a five-day trip to Québec and Montréal during the week of February break 2024. Ms. Yuxia Peng has been collaborating with Ms. Laura Feig, former BHS French teacher and current French teacher at Lincoln-Sudbury High School, and they would like to offer this travel opportunity to both schools as a combined trip. The cost of the trip per student will decrease significantly because the number of student participants will rise with the two schools working together.

Ms. Monaco made a motion to approve the BHS French student five-day trip to Québec and Montréal during the February break 2024; seconded by Ms. Bond.

Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks – aye, Ms. Massardo – aye, Ms. Bond – aye.

Motion Carried 4:0:0 (Ms. Simon was not present during this vote).

2023/2024 School Committee Schedule

Dr. Conti proposed the following School Committee meeting dates for 2023/2024 school year, which are the second and fourth Tuesday of each month: September 12; September 26; October 10; October 24; November 14; December 12; January 9; January 23; February 13; February 27; March 12; March 26; April 9; April 23; May 14; May 28; June 11 & June 25.

Ms. Simon noted the April dates will need to be changed. It was agreed to revisit this issue at the next meeting.

MASC Policies Section E & F – 1st Reading

There was consensus to table this agenda item until the next meeting on Monday, June 26, 2023.

FACILITIES / FINANCE

Finance Update

Ms. Coscia reported that all capital articles and revolving accounts are in good standing. There are no concerns or significant changes from last month with the operating or accommodated accounts so no issues with closing out the year. Within the next few meetings,

Ms. Coscia will have information on the capital articles that are completed but still have balances, in order to close out the articles that are no longer needed.

Cafeteria Update

Dr. Conti stated he and Mr. Cunha will meet with the cafeteria staff and union representatives on Friday to follow-up, as the committee requested.

School Lunch Program

Ms. Coscia distributed a document to the committee with the lunch program information. Ms. Coscia's chart illustrated the lunch participation at the elementary, middle, and high school levels with a comparison of the same months with the prior school year. In addition, it takes into consideration any change in enrollments, etc. Ms. Coscia stated that the flow of expenses and revenues still flow through the school lunch revolving account.

Discussion ensued.

In summary, Ms. Coscia confirmed that by the end of school year, there should be approximately \$881,000 in the account, and if not, Whitsons is responsible to make the district whole.

Fox Hill School Building Committee

Mr. Cunha and Ms. Massardo noted that there are Building School Committee meetings on June 20th, June 28th, July 13th and a Community Forum on July 11th.

BHS Update

Mr. Cunha stated he has started discussions with the principal and talked with parents, teachers and students in an attempt to put together a list for a BHS Building Committee. Once a committee list is established, he will make the recommendations to the School Committee. Mr. Cunha will use the MSBA template that was used to form the Fox Hill School Building Committee.

Dr. Conti stated he will reach out to the Ways and Means to find out if anyone wants to serve on the BHS Building Committee.

Ms. Massardo nominated Ms. Bond as Chair of the BHS Building Committee; seconded by Mr. Brooks.

Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks – aye, Ms. Massardo – aye, Ms. Bond – aye, Ms. Simon – aye.

Motion Carried 5:0:0.

Ms. Bond nominated Ms. Simon to be Vice Chair of the BHS Building Committee; seconded by Mr. Brooks.

Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks – aye, Ms. Massardo – aye, Ms. Bond – aye, Ms. Simon – aye.

Motion Carried 5:0:0.

Pine Glen

Dr. Conti reminded the committee that for the Educational Program and Space Summary that is being voted on at the next meeting, one of the programs is for Pine Glen; it is included as a Pine Glen/Fox Hill combined program.

Ms. Simon reminded the committee that the next meeting is Monday, 6/26/23.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Monaco moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:22 p.m.; seconded by Ms. Bond.

Ms. Monaco - aye, Mr. Brooks – aye, Ms. Massardo – aye, Mr. Bond – aye, Ms. Simon – aye.

Motion Carried 5:0:0 by Roll Call Vote.

SUBMITTED

Respectfully,
Marianne Fabbri
Recording Secretary

Date Submitted: 6/26/23
Date Approved: 6/26/23