

BURLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

Chairman Monaco 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: Mr. Carl Foss, Ms. Martha Simon Mr. Thomas F. Murphy, Jr., and Mrs. Katherine Bond. Superintendent Eric Conti and Director of Operations Bob Cunha also present. Assistant Superintendent Patrick Larkin and Business Manager Nichole Coscia absent. WebEx technology was utilized for participation by the public.

- CALL TO ORDER** Chairman Monaco read the following statement: Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the School Committee is being conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings as provided for in the Order.
- APPROVAL OF WARRANT** Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mrs. Bond to approve the warrant; motion carried 4-0-1 Mr. Murphy abstained.
- APPROVAL OF MINUTES** Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mr. Murphy to approve minutes of 9/8/20; motion carried 5-0-0.
- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** None.
- INFORMATION/REPORTS**
Student Representative Student Representative
Student representative Sarah Shaikh commented that the first days of school had different reactions from both students and teachers. Lunch is not long enough, students are on their phones and seated at individual, assigned seats. Wednesday's all remote day of seven 40 minutes periods felt too rushed, there was not enough time between classes, and technology glitches experienced by both students and teachers. She commended teachers, explained we are all learning together, and everyone is working together and doing their best. Ms. Simon inquired about the possibility of hacking into the school network; Mr. Cunha replied that there are measures in place to deal with this, they complete updates and refereshes; however, it is possible.
- Subcommittee Reports – Equity Committee Update
Ms. Simon noted the Equity Committee will meet this week, where they hope to advance the action plan and begin on portions of the plan. Staff has been reaching out to students and families. There seems to be support for the warrant article for a Director of Diversity submitted by town meeting members for the September town meeting. Mr. Foss explained a subcommittee meeting was held with the Board of Health Thursday where they discussed medium and long term goals, agreed to meet quarterly and also conferred about covid testing and quarantine protocol. Ms. Simon noted that if covid testing is required, a molecular test result will need to be provided in order for a student or staff member to return to school. Free testing is available on the Stop the Spread website. Chairman Monaco inquired about a best model for a Director of Diversity position and would they work with students directly. Dr. Conti replied there are different models for the position, many other school districts have it, their successes will be reviewed, the work of the position needs to be defined, and it's a community discussion, not just a school one. Sara Shaikh commented that the Burlington Public Library has a social justice series available that people should check out and explained that she and another student had made a video regarding this subject area and requested that the School Committee view it prior to the next School Committee meeting.
- Ways & Means
John Iler explained that Roger Riggs will be the new school subcommittee chair for Ways & Means and Steve Morin will also be on the subcommittee.
- Coronavirus Update from the Superintendent 2020-21 School Year Opening Report
Dr. Conti stated that elementary students began on September 10, he and Mr. Larkin visited the four schools, and both students and teachers were excited to be back in a classroom setting. Drop off and pick up routines will need adjustments. Grades 6 and 9 had orientation on September 10 and 11. All students were in session on September 14. Teachers teaching remotely are doing a wonderful job but find it difficult to start a school year to establish relationships with students and everyone feels like a first year teacher.
- Transportation
The Superintendent pointed out that planning for transportation services were being worked on until the last minute; they tried to get as much information as possible to update students who'd

decided to be dropped off at school or to attend remotely. Transportation takes a couple weeks for adjustments and for fine tuning of bus routes. Students are taking health concerns seriously regarding social distancing and mask wearing.

He stated that support from the Board of Health continues, the nursing staff is trying to be proactive under Nurse Leader Barbara Conley, and the district is trying to manage risk. Mistakes happen, but we are adjusting as quick as we can, things will improve, and parents are appreciative. The school district is taking it one safe day at a time and are proud of staff for their efforts and flexibility. By offering a hybrid and remote school model, it makes planning more complex and affects staffing needs. It's rewarding that Burlington is able to offer in-person learning to students who choose to be in a classroom as well as offering families the choice of Remote Academy. Mr. Foss inquired if drill scenarios for positive covid test results have been completed; Dr. Conti replied that currently real situations are being handled, they are struggling with the level of communication, everyone is learning new skills, and the district is being guided by the Board of Health as well as the State Health agency.

Some School Committee comments included: thanking staff and administrators, encouraged forgiveness and flexibility, school is off to a good start, communication for what is working as well as not working is important, and they have never seen the school department work on anything so difficult as reopening schools, and it's an incredible challenge.

Student Enrollment

Chairman Monaco inquired if there are plans to increase in-person learning time for special education students. Dr. Conti replied that after completing three weeks of school, they will evaluate the positivity rates, if they are low and precautions are working, they will begin to have conversations on that subject. Special education students would be the first population to return to full time learning. He stated that 400 students attend remote academy which helped to allow the social distancing needed to offer morning in-person learning to elementary students. Student enrollment is as follows:

- BHS – cohort A = 380, cohort B= 367, Remote = 130 (13% remote)
- MSMS – cohort A = 311, cohort B = 295, Remote = 138 (18% remote)
- Elementary – Remote = 400 (24% remote), Balance of students are in-person

Due to social distancing requirements, cohorts at BHS and MSMS cannot be merged together. An enrollment overview will be presented at the October 13 meeting.

BPS Staffing

Dr. Conti reported there a number of unfilled staff positions, 17 interim teachers have been hired, 9 permanent teachers were hired, math and reading specialists have been reassigned to classroom teaching, some instructional assistants have been put into teaching spots, 22 teachers are assigned to remote academy, and the district has accommodated staff medical needs.

Chairman Monaco inquired if by transferring instructional assistants to teaching spots if that left a number of open positions. Dr. Conti explained there are some holes, they are being very cautious about hiring new staff, the district has spent 10 years building a tiered instructional framework and that had to take a backseat this school year. The district is not doing some things that have been done in the past in all grades, there are limitations by having to keep cohorts of students together, and it's a different educational model. Interim teachers have been assigned to four maternity leaves and a total of 26 teachers have been hired. They are starting to fill open custodial positions now as an in-person school model was approved. In response to Chairman Monaco, Dr. Conti will confirm if an 8th grade accelerated math class is still offered; he believes an Edgenuity course with remote algebra 1 is being offered to students.

Transportation

Mr. Cunha reported that there aren't enough bus seats to accommodate all bus requests, they are trying to respond quickly, and if a student changes to remote or no longer requires a seat, it frees up an extra seat. He's had to say no to a number of student seat requests due to the limited number of seats available. Mr. Cunha explained that student seating assignments are constantly changing and students are being loaded from the back forward. Dr. Conti further explained that buses only have 30% capacity, the number of buses can't be tripled; however, Mr. Cunha has permission to research if adding one more bus for approximately \$65,000 would satisfy a number of requests/seats.

School Building/Facilities Update

Mr. Cunha stated that a second round of HVAC testing was completed in the schools and posted on the website. Results improved particularly with units that were repaired or were

underperforming. A second round of air quality testing was completed in 4 schools and the other two buildings will be tested next week; results will be available after testing is completed. Air quality and water testing will continue; however, there are costs associated with increased testing and the additional costs will be discussed with the School Committee. Mr. Foss requested that Mr. Cunha provide details of plans for colder weather with the heating systems and keeping air exchange levels that will give people peace of mind. Mr. Cunha explained that at Memorial, the new wing of the middle school and parts of BHS have electronic systems which can be managed through the computer. Other buildings that have univents don't have that same option, those units have to be controlled by the hot water in the boiler. When the boilers are turned on, then the water will start to heat up and begin circulating but there will be some fluctuation when we have hot and cold days, those fluctuations may be 5-10 degrees in each classroom, so people may want to wear layers, close open windows a bit, but the system is still bringing outside air in as well as heating classrooms.

The turf has been installed at Memorial playground. Auditorium work at the middle school is in progress. The BHS gym floor has been found to have a water saturated concrete base that needs an epoxy layer applied to eliminate water vapor; they are waiting on the insurance company to approve the expense and Mr. Cunha anticipates the floor installation should be completed in about a month.

In response to Mrs. Bond, Dr. Conti replied that the schools currently have 12 weeks of PPE, nurses are tracking inventories, and more supplies will be ordered in the next month if schools remain open. Mr. Cunha also noted that more than three months of cleaners and sanitizer supplies were purchased and they are tracking and monitoring inventory. The Superintendent observed that some supplies from overseas are delayed such as cases for student iPads.

COMMUNICATION
Draft 2020-21 School
Calendar

Dr. Conti reviewed a draft Burlington School Calendar¹ that shows 187 days for teachers and 170 school days for students (DESE reduced the required number of student school days). September 10 was the first day for students, five additional professional development dates are included: 11/3, 11/18, 1/13, 1/27, 3/10, as well as a parent conference day on March 31. After conferring with teachers, Wednesdays were identified as preferred professional development days. No snow days are built into the calendar as remote days are available. The last day for students is projected to be June 14 and June 15 for teachers. Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Ms. Simon to approve the 2020-21 school calendar as presented with two modifications; motion carried 5-0-0. Modifications: page 2: last day for students 6/14, last day for teachers 6/15 and more than likely election day on November 3 will not be a staff development day.

FY21 School Budget
Reduction

The Superintendent related that a meeting was held with the Town financial team and Ways & Means. State revenue is level funded but there has been a significant reduction in Town local revenues. The Town looked at a number of areas to make reductions. Dr. Conti commented that covid expenses are being isolated and some extra expenses could be paid from federal covid relief funds, the School Committee is not required to identify what budgets the reduction will come from, and the schools want to do our part and be a partner with the town.

Mr. Murphy further commented that a reduction of \$700,000 overall is being anticipated for a vote at September town meeting with the schools taking a \$350,000 reduction of the overall total. He commented that by the end of the year, the schools will do our best to contribute to a \$350,000 reduction, is concerned with September increased costs, suggested that the FY21 budget total be decreased going forward to show the proposed reduction, review expenses closely during monthly financial updates, but suggested that the School Committee should reserve the ability to come back later in the school year if the schools can't afford the reduction or if more money is needed, it could be brought forward at either the January or May town meeting. He further explained there are other avenues and tools to pay for short term shortfalls (i.e. certified cash) and the school department has a lot of increased expenses due to covid. Mrs. Bond agreed with Mr. Murphy and stated that there are too many unknowns at this point and agrees with the right to review costs later in the year; Mr. Foss also agreed commenting that it's hard to commit to a reduction. Chairman Monaco stated she wants to help out with a reduction, she doesn't see some of the same expenses/issues in other town departments, and suggested that she and Mr. Murphy speak with Ways & Means prior to town meeting next week.

Dr. Conti commented that the town has made an effort to identify areas to reduce other budgets

¹ Burlington School Calendar 2020-21

and further noted that if the schools need to go fully remote by November 1, it would reduce bus contract payments as well as other expenses but at this time we don't know if that will happen. Chairman Monaco expressed concern that with a \$350,000 operating budget reduction, next year's FY22 budget would be \$350,000 less to begin with. She further requested that Ms. Coscia provide to the extent possible a financial picture of the budget by September 30 to see if we can commit to a \$350,000 budget reduction.

Organic School Field
Maintenance

Last year the School Committee voted to allocate \$15,000 to aid the Recreation Maintenance Department for the cost to provide organic field maintenance at Francis Wyman. Mr. Murphy explained this was discussed at a recent Recreation meeting and he reviewed the background history of this project for the two new School Committee members. The Recreation department is seeking confirmation from the School Committee that they are still in support of the organic field maintenance program. Dr. Conti noted that organic maintenance is about consistency, it's also important for safety, it's a relatively small amount in the overall total school budget, and recommended that the organic field maintenance be continued at the Francis Wyman field. Mr. Murphy will confirm with Tom Irwin Company that they will use \$15,000 for organic matter. Mr. Cunha reported that the first treatment was applied this summer, and the field will be over seeded and aerated for \$15,000. The School Committee expressed support in following through with the organic field maintenance at Francis Wyman.

The Superintendent related that administration is working with the BEA union on impact bargaining, have reached a tentative agreement, the Memorandum of Agreement will go before BEA union membership for approval, and they have committed to labor/management conversations going forward. Ms. Simon explained that discussions included health, safety, and working conditions of teachers and anticipates a Memorandum of Agreement will be ratified at the October 13 School Committee meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Superintendent Conti stated there was no need for executive session.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Ms. Simon to adjourn at 9:10 p.m. Motion carried 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Gilbert
Recording Secretary

Date submitted: 10/27/20
Date approved: 10/27/20