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# BURLINGTON

■■■■■■■■■■ PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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## SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**DATE:** Tuesday, September 28, 2021

**TIME:** 7:00 pm

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

### ATTENDEES

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Thomas F. Murphy, Jr., Vice Chair Mrs. Katherine Bond, Mr. Carl Foss, Mrs. Christine Monaco, Ms. Martha Simon, Superintendent Eric Conti, Director of Operations Bob Cunha

**MEMBER(S) ABSENT:**

**MEMBER(S) REMOTE:** Assistant Superintendent Patrick Larkin, Business Manager Nichole Coscia

**GUEST(S) REMOTE:** Parent and SEPAC Membership Chair Ms. Beth Colburn, Ways & Means Committee Members Mr. Roger Riggs and Mr. Steve Morin, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Mr. Ray Porch

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:**

### CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Murphy called this meeting to order at 7:00 pm and 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 utilizing participation for the public via Webex technology only. He further explained that if someone would like to be recognized to raise their hand virtually.

### APPROVAL of MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Simon to approve the minutes of the September 14, 2021 meeting; seconded by Mrs. Monaco. Mrs. Monaco - aye, Mr. Foss - aye, Mrs. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye, Mr. Murphy - aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Steve Morin notified the committee that he was having difficulty in hearing the meeting.

### INFORMATION / REPORTS

#### A. Subcommittee

##### Burlington SEPAC

Mrs. Monaco introduced membership chair Ms. Beth Colburn from [Burlington SEPAC](#) (Special Education Parent Advisory Council). Ms. Colburn opened by thanking Mrs. Monaco and Mrs. Bond for attending the business meeting last week and provided an update on what SEPAC has been working on. She highlighted that they recently had a booth at Burlington's Truck Day on September 19th, where they gave away goodies and had a raffle and enjoyed in person face time with the community. On October 5th at 7:00 pm, there is a virtual meet and greet scheduled with Christina Cicolini, Interim Director of Special Education, Ray Porch, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and district team chairs. WEBEX Meeting Information may be found on their [website](#).

In response to Ms. Colburn's first question concerning the MSMS WIN block schedule, Dr. Conti responded that he would find out the answers and follow up. Ms. Colburn's second question concerned special education bus transportation driving students without bus monitors. Understanding that it is a staffing issue, she is requesting that parents be notified in the morning so parents could make the decision in getting their kids to school safely. In response, Mr. Cunha confirmed that it is a staffing issue and has requested better communication from the bus company. Ms. Colburn expressed that some of the students have bus monitors for their own safety and stressed that it is a safety risk when a monitor is not available. Mr. Cunha acknowledged that notification is critical for student safety and will continue to work on improvements.

One of the requests from SEPAC when Mrs. Bond and Mrs. Monaco attended their business meeting, is a guideline to request mask exemptions. In response, Dr. Conti shared the request with Mrs. Cicolini and she put together some language for SEPAC to review. Ms. Colburn confirmed that SEPAC was in receipt of Mrs. Cicolini's edits, and they are actively working together to review. In addition to supporting and stressing the need for bus monitors for student safety, Mrs. Monaco noted that SEPAC was also working on a new document on bullying.



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that the majority of students who are identified as close contacts will be asymptomatic and will be able to remain in school with this program. Our focus will be on students in grades PreK through grade 7 because these students do not have a vaccination option at this time. Our grade 8 through 12 students who, if vaccinated, are not considered a close contact. Dr. Conti further explained that the state does allow guidance for students, who are identified as close contacts, can ride the bus to school in the morning and participate in the Test & Stay program upon arrival.

In response to Mrs. Monaco's question about the percentage of vaccinated middle and high school students, Dr. Conti emailed that information to the committee about a week ago, but recalls that about 64% of 16-19 year olds are vaccinated and we are below that percentage for 12-15 year olds.

In response to Ms. Simon's question with regards to the type of rapid test, Dr. Conti confirmed that it is a shallow nasal test (BinaxNOW) and results are available in 15 minutes. Secondly, Ms. Simon asked as to whether or not students who are currently out on quarantine can participate in the Test & Stay on Monday, October 4th; in response, Mr. Larkin confirmed that we currently do not have any elementary classrooms that are out on quarantine, but would contact CIC to have staff available to test should there be a need. All building principals have been asked to have a space available in each building for CIC staff to test students (as in some cases, it will not be the nurse's office).

Both Dr. Conti and Mr. Larkin welcome any feedback from other communities as there will be challenges. Should you have any questions with regards to the program, please email: [covidconcerns@bpsk12.org](mailto:covidconcerns@bpsk12.org).

### **B. School Buildings / Facilities Update**

#### **High School Feasibility Audit**

Mr. Cunha provided an update indicating that the company we are working with is finishing up three of the four draft reports, and he should have them by the end of the week. We will be able to share and focus on the three draft reports while they are working on the fourth draft.

#### **Seasonal Building Transitions**

As we transition from a warmer season to the cooler season, Mr. Cunha stressed to continue to keep fresh air in the buildings as much as possible; keep windows open, keep the univents, ceiling and floor vents running and not blocked.

In response to Ms. Simon's questions about our univents, Mr. Cunha responded that prior to school opening our maintenance and contracted HVAC technicians go through each building. They perform CFM (Cubic Feet per Minute) readings on our machines which measure airflow, replace filters in rooftop units and in our classroom univents and perform cleaning, maintenance and repairs as needed. We also continue to perform CO2 testing within the buildings. Mr. Cunha meets with consultants Mike Walters and Ed Parsons to continue the work as promised last year.

#### **Building Rentals**

As a follow up from our last meeting by reintroducing groups into our buildings, Mr. Cunha explained that we have had numerous requests. We understand that the committee would like to focus on student based activities at this time (allowing water/snack/mask breaks when needed), but the focus is on the activity and wearing a mask during the activity. We have declined group events that are food focused (pizza, dinners, etc.) and have declined events that would include students from other towns (ie dance groups). Mr. Cunha is requesting further input/guidance on what we are calling student based activities.

After some discussion, all were in agreement and eager to have more groups use our facilities, however, we will continue to take "baby steps" and evaluate as restrictions are lifted and more adults and students are vaccinated. For now, we will continue to allow Burlington student based activities and events that are non-food focused and hope to meet most of the demand we have at this time.

Mrs. Monaco noted that it should be a community goal to get the vaccination rate higher (parents/students) so we can open up the buildings safely.

### **C. Fox Hill School Building Committee - Meeting Update**

Mr. Cunha reported that we held the first Fox Hill School Building Committee meeting on September 22nd where 16 of the 20 members attended. It was a hybrid meeting held in the School Committee Room as well as Webex. We reviewed the project of where we are currently at in the Eligibility Phase. The next target date is February 2022 where MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) votes on our project to be able to move into the Feasibility Phase. We are anticipating an early December meeting for the committee to meet again.

### COMMUNICATION

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#### A. Transportation - Update on Buses and Routes

Mr. Cunha reported that while not much has changed, communication is improving. The bus company is committed to keeping one person in the office to help answer phone calls instead of potentially pulling that staff member to drive a bus when needed. With regards to when we will see help from the National Guard, Burlington is still two to three weeks away (no confirmed date). The bus company is responsible for coordinating those efforts and distributing guard members to routes. We continue to update routes and receive requests, but are making changes at a slower pace than in years past.

In response to Mrs. Monaco's concern about Pine Glen parents complaining about a late bus, Mr. Cunha explained that they did have a problem with a driver on Bus 3 that particular morning. Schools were notified, but too late to try to get the message out to parents. We thought the problem had been corrected for the afternoon run, but were still left without a bus and other buses had to circle back. Schools were notified, but again too late to get full ridership. When buses run 10-15 minutes late, parents often drive their kids to school and/or pick up if they are still waiting at school at the end of the day. In response to Mrs. Monaco's questions, Mr. Cunha confirmed Bus 3 does have a driver and that bus companies state and nationwide are having problems with hiring drivers. We have a contract for 18 general ed buses and 2 mini buses that are wheelchair capable; we are also able to use those buses for field trips and/or athletic events. Any specialized transportation or IEP related needs would not fall within our contract. It would fall under specialized transportation and those vendors are also experiencing the same hardships with staffing.

Mr. Foss inquired if there had been any conversations in the past with regards to owning our own buses noting that the committee had received information about electric buses. Mr. Murphy confirmed that it has come up in conversations before, but nothing formal. There is a general understanding that it would be expensive up front. Mrs. Monaco noted that the most recent time she recalls that it had come up was a couple years ago at Ways & Means by Mr. Gallagher. In addition to it being expensive, there would be no place in Burlington to park the buses. Mr. Cunha commented that we would still need to find the drivers, provide the yearly maintenance, the insurance, and develop a 5-7 year replacement plan. Ms. Simon and Mr. Cunha have informally looked at an electric bus option, but no formal proposal has been presented. Dr. Conti clarified that we have 18 buses with 15 drivers and that until we have 18 steady drivers and substitute drivers available who know the routes, that we will continue to see some problems.

Ms. Simon thanked Mr. Cunha for his efforts and acknowledged the difficult situation for parents/students. Mr. Cunha continues to ask for patience and to try to understand the circumstances.

#### B. Vaccine Clinic Update

Dr. Conti informed the committee that we will be holding [Covid Vaccine Clinics](#)<sup>1</sup> (including boosters) in the Burlington High School cafeteria from 6-8pm / 6:30-8:30pm. The clinics are free and available for students, staff, and the Burlington community. The dates are listed on the [district website](#). The clinics are running at 3 week intervals as the Pfizer vaccine is being distributed. To make an appointment, click on the date. The date will show **red** when it is available to make an appointment. If there is no link at the date you need, please check back.

#### C. RFP for Equity Audit

Dr. Conti is excited to discuss this long awaited RFP (Request for Proposal) Equity Audit<sup>2</sup>. Mr. Ray Porch and Ms. Nichole Coscia have worked together as it will be a public request for proposal and bids will be submitted. An Equity Audit is about all students and all actions of the district. Like any audit, there will be things we do well and things we can improve on; and having all the facts will help us make better and informed decisions going forward.

Mr. Porch opened the discussion explaining that the focus of the audit is tied into the district's improvement plan as well as the superintendent's goals. We are looking to account for, assess, and understand outcomes for achievements for all students and no one group of students is more important than the other. All students depend on having a well rounded inclusive, educational experience to have the best opportunity to achieve their potential. There are six primary areas of the audit that highlight the overall process: (1) Academic Achievement, (2) Equitable Access and Inclusion for all Learners, (3) Equitable Treatment inclusive in all Learning Environments, (4) Equitable Opportunity to Learn, (5) Equitable Resources, and (6) Accountability. This is a nine month process, but will update findings and ask for feedback as we proceed.

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<sup>1</sup> [Covid Vaccine Clinics](#) (printed from district website)

<sup>2</sup> RFP Equity Audit Bid #22-94-12

### D. DEI Community Conversations

Dr. Conti is excited to support the DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) community conversation and asked Mr. Porch to explain in more detail. We will offer a monthly session called "Let's Talk About It!" It will be an inclusive opportunity for all parents, caregivers, district administration, community partners to better understand and discuss what has worked well and what we can improve on / or what can be done in a more coherent way. As the facilitator, Mr. Porch explained that the idea is simplistic but very important to be able to build bridges through dialogue. These sessions will serve as a space where people can come together to have their questions answered and create an environment to build trust and tackle the work to be done together. There will be a lot of resources at the sessions each month and it will be a collaborative effort in which Ms. Jennifer Knight (Director of Family and Community Engagement), Mrs. Christina Cicolini (Interim Director of Special Education), and Ms. Beth Colburn (SEPAC Membership Chair) have been invited to share information. The first session will be held virtually on Wednesday, October 20th from 7:00 - 8:30 pm. [BEF](#) (Burlington Education Foundation) is supporting this event. There will be a flyer emailed through Aspen and information will be posted on the district website. In conclusion, Dr. Conti welcomed Ray's expertise in this area and expressed that change is hard, but communication is necessary - "Pace of change is highly correlated to the pace of trust."

### Additional concerns not outlined on the agenda

Mrs. Monaco discussed the following from parent messages:

- There is a TikTok challenge to destroy bathrooms, and there has been some vandalism that has happened in our middle and high school bathrooms. As a result, bathroom restrictions were put in place. In response, Dr. Conti noted that there were higher levels of supervision and more bathrooms open today. Bathrooms were not shut down to discipline students, but were shut down as they were not functioning properly due to the damage. If parents have individual concerns, they can contact the school. Both Mrs. Monaco and Dr. Conti ask parents to partner with the schools and monitor their children's social media accounts. Dr. Conti noted that students are adjusting to being back together 5 days a week for the first time in a while and are adjusting to rules, routines and being a part of a community again. Mr. Foss, who also works in a middle school, affirmed that readjustment to school routines is something everyone is going through.
- There is a concern about students not being able to have proms due to Covid, but that can be addressed at a subsequent meeting.
- There are cafeteria issues and mostly at the elementary level. Cafeteria workers are preparing and packaging student meals and then need to deliver them to classrooms. They are working longer hours, and there are not enough people to work. In response, Dr. Conti is aware of the problem and is making some adjustments. He expressed gratitude to all the cafe workers and know they are all working incredibly hard as it is a challenge to feed students in classrooms. The reason why we are not using the cafeteria is that lunch is a mask free activity, and we are not able to provide the distance needed. We are hopeful that as things change and as we receive new guidance, we will be able to use the cafe space at some point. Mr. Cunha agrees with all that Dr. Conti and Mrs. Monaco discussed and in addition noted that we are experiencing lack of staffing, shortages of packaging materials, etc. We know this is additional work, have approved additional hours, and have shifted support from building to building when needed. We will continue to work on possible solutions and present them at the next meeting.

### ADJOURNMENT

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Motion was made by Mr. Murphy to adjourn at 9:00 pm; moved by Mr. Foss, seconded by Mrs. Monaco. Mrs. Monaco - aye, Mr. Foss - aye, Mrs. Bond - aye, Ms. Simon - aye, Mr. Murphy - aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

### SUBMITTED

Respectfully,



Kristen Downie  
Recording Secretary

Date Submitted: 10/12/21  
Date Approved: 10/12/21