

BURLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF OCTOBER 13, 2020

Chairman Monaco called this WebEx virtual meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m. Present: Mr. Carl Foss, Ms. Martha Simon Mr. Thomas F. Murphy, Jr., and Mrs. Katherine Bond. Superintendent Eric Conti, Assistant Superintendent Patrick Larkin, Business Manager Nichole Coscia, and Director of Operations Bob Cunha also present.

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. She further explained that the Chat function is off and if someone would like to be recognized to raise their hand.
APPROVAL OF WARRANT	Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mr. Foss to approve the warrant. Ms. Simon, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mr. Murphy, abstain; Mrs. Bond, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 4-0-1.
APPROVAL OF MINUTES	No action taken, minutes deferred until the October 27 meeting.
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	None.
INFORMATION/REPORTS	Chairman Monaco thanked town meeting members for the approval and funding for a Director of Diversity position in the school budget. She also thanked student representative Sara Shaikh for her efforts with this project.
Student Representative	Sara Shaikh explained that students are adjusting to a new schedule and high school students will complete a survey sharing feedback on things such as sleep and school work load. Student council elections will be held next week and not all student clubs will be held this year. Dr. Conti noted that Sara was helpful with input for the student survey and also helped shape the questions. Sara commented that she has gotten positive feedback from people on the new Director of Diversity position and is excited to get things moving along. The Superintendent stated that Sara had created written stories and filmed a micro aggression video she'd created with another student and has shared both with the School Committee. Chairman Monaco explained that Equity Committee meetings will be posted public meetings so that all School Committee members can attend if they would like to.
Subcommittee Reports	None.
Ways & Means	New Ways & Means school subcommittee chair Roger Riggs announced new subcommittee members as Steve Morin, Cody Case and Kelley Pappas.
Coronavirus Update from The Superintendent Student Enrollment 2020-21	Dr. Conti reported that teachers, principals and staff are working hard to get into a rhythm and to also provide a remote school experience that is as high quality as possible. Administration is reviewing completed surveys from parents, students and staff; changes will be made to the August reopening plans, and adjustments will need to be made as the year progresses. Student enrollment is down slightly from last year (charts in tonight's meeting packet), home schooling has increased as well as increased student enrollment at private and religious schools. The Superintendent expects these students to return to public school eventually, but families are making decisions on their children's' best model for education. Dr. Conti reviewed class sizes at the four elementary schools as well as at Remote Academy.
Delaying Choice of Switching Hybrid to Remote & Remote to Hybrid	The Superintendent explained that during reopening planning it was thought that it would be simple to move students between fully remote and hybrid and what they are finding is that it would be very disruptive for students, teachers and staffing levels. During the summer, administration was hoping to allow families to make a shift in November if they wanted (i.e. from fully remote to hybrid or from hybrid to fully remote). He further explained that if student switching were allowed, all schools would need to be redesigned starting right now. He stated that in practice, changing student learning modalities with a large movement of students would be very disruptive, would recommend delaying allowing student shifting until at least mid-year, and takes responsibility for the situation. Chairman Monaco commented that the School Committee doesn't need to take a vote but should discuss the recommended change. In response to Mr. Foss, Dr. Conti replied that there have only been a handful of student change

requests, he is not sure if people have been waiting until after the first quarter, but families have been patient with initially keeping their children in their first choice. In response to Mr. Murphy, the Superintendent explained that social distancing is part of the issue but its also staffing and needing to reassign or transfer them. If large shifts take place, there would be class sizes of 24-27 in some cases and other classes would be really small with 4-7 students. Currently, classes and relationships are being formed, they don't want to break up student/teacher relationships, and new positive school routines. He further explained that student transfers to the alternative mode of learning are being looked at on a case by case basis. DESE has indicated that student learning change requests are not mandated but are a local decision. Mrs. Bond asked if they have received feedback from student/parents/staff; Dr. Conti replied yes some but we expect more. He also explained that if the entire school district is forced to go to full remote, there would not be any student learning mode choices.

Preliminary Survey Results

Mr. Larkin reported that to date, 542 parent survey responses have been received and 98 (18%) would like to switch from hybrid to remote and he will provide additional data at the next meeting on October 27. Dr. Conti noted that staff will further review survey data and break it down over the next two weeks. Principals are recommending that students remain enrolled in their current modality for as long as possible. First term ends the first week in November and decisions made need to be made in a budget neutral manner. Chairman Monaco inquired about the opportunity for special education students to attend school full time in person; Dr. Conti replied there have been conversations around this and explained that the remote portion of their day also is important particularly at the elementary level in case the district has the need to go to a fully remote model. Chairman Monaco observed that special education students do not get a lot out of a remote experience and the school district will do our best to get more in person learning. Dr. Conti commented that a discussion regarding district programming including more in person learning for special education students will be held at the next meeting.

Transportation Update

Mr. Cunha reported that Trombly has just begun keeping seating charts as the bus company was waiting for finalized bus lists and the bus lists have been shared with school building secretaries and bus employees. Some buses will have stop changes, a few empty seats, and the business office is trying their hardest to reply to families as soon as possible regarding bus requests. Each bus can only accommodate 30% of normal student capacity and hundreds of changes have been made to bus lists in the past couple weeks. He also explained that recording daily student attendance on the bus has just begun, they have started loading students from the back to the front of the bus, the process is not perfect and they are trying to tighten up the process. School Committee members expressed concerns regarding the buses: students behaving properly, social distancing, correct mask wearing, and not being able to afford a bus monitor on each bus. It was requested that Dr. Conti send a gentle reminder with visual examples out to families regarding expected student bus behaviors, social distancing, and mask wearing.

School Building/Facilities Update

Mr. Cunha stated that custodians and maintenance staff are working constantly to keep up with the increased work load and thanked them. Work is continuing on warrant article projects and building projects. Air quality testing is ongoing both by external contractors and in house personnel. Airflow monitoring is also ongoing and being performed by internal staff for the past couple weeks. He is currently conferring with a consultant regarding airflow monitoring for the winter season. In response to Mr. Foss, Mr. Cunha replied that CO2, HVAC, and air quality testing numbers can be published on the school website and further noted that all results are in a good range. In response to the question of what is the minimum ACH when the heat is turned on, Mr. Cunha replied that the ASHRAE standard is around three, every room is being addressed individually, and air changes can be handled in multiple ways. He further noted the ultimate goal is to have a number greater than three in each space and if that number is not attained, that room will be addressed to fix the situation.

In response to Mr. Murphy, Mr. Cunha stated that the wood for the BHS gym floor has been delivered, a vapor barrier will be installed last week, and then the wood floor will be installed; it should be completed in a month. In response to Ms. Simon, Mr. Cunha responded that a new hvac system for BHS has been put on the back burner a bit and he's spoken with an engineering consulting company to put together a schedule to hold a meeting. Dr. Conti stated that he's been contacted by the Mass. School Building Authority regarding the Fox Hill statement of interest and a phone conversation is scheduled for tomorrow.

Chairman Monaco thanked Dr. Ed Weiner and Susan Lumenollo at the Board of Health for their help and support. Mr. Larkin provided an update from the Board of Health explaining that

the last positive coronavirus case was on October 1, the number of positive cases has not increased in the schools, and BHS sports have begun. He further explained that the Board of Health had a question regarding buses and he explained that there are seating charts but it's an ongoing process. The Superintendent announced there will be a town flu clinic on Saturday, October 17 at BHS beginning at 10 a.m. and encouraged families to take advantage of this offering as students will be required to have a flu shot prior to the end of the calendar year.

Ms. Simon stated that the Department of Agriculture is providing free breakfast and lunch for all Burlington students, she requested that a simplified announcement be sent to families regarding options and arrangements for food pickup, as well as doing some outreach to families who school personnel think might need it. Mr. Cunha noted that this free program will be offered until June 30, 2021. Dr. Conti explained they are seeing a vast increase in student breakfast/lunch participation and are adjusting the associated logistics.

COMMUNICATION
Director of Equity &
Inclusion

Dr. Conti referred the Committee to the email he'd sent this afternoon of a draft job description¹ for the new position of Director of Diversity, Equity and Belonging. He recommended the position be at a Director level in the job hierarchy of the school department to fit in with other leadership positions in the district; similar to the Director of Guidance and Director of ELL which are also 12 month positions. In speaking with his colleagues, who indicated that this position's duties have changed over time, this draft job description allows for flexibility over time. He further suggested that some feedback on the job description be gathered, tonight would be a first reading for the draft job description, and that the Committee should vote on it at the October 27 meeting. Chairman Monaco requested that she would like a representation of the daily interaction of the position with students, teachers, administrators, etc. Mr. Larkin thanked the Equity Committee who originally created this job description. The Superintendent commented that the timeline is on track for the position and he will have specific milestones for the next meeting. He anticipates next steps will be: hiring processes, identifying a hiring committee, approval of the job description and posting it by the end of the calendar year, development of interview questions, holding interviews in January/February, scheduling finalists to meet with student panels and leadership teams, and to complete the hiring process for a start date ideally in February or March dependent on the applicant's current job situation.

Monthly Financial Update

Dr. Conti directed the Committee's attention to the second page of financials in tonight's meeting packet – line 8 shows salaries for Directors and line 11 shows the where the salary for the Director of Inclusion is shown (a temporary location). If the Committee agrees this will be a Director level position, that salary would be moved to line 8 with the other Directors salaries. He pointed out that on page 3 the \$350,000 FY21 budget reduction is shown.

Ms. Coscia congratulated business office employee Leslie Netishen who is retiring after over 25 years and thanked her for her service. She explained that on the Revolving Fund summary page 1, the lunch account shows a \$89,388 deficit with no reimbursements from the state for September yet. She further explained that Line 359 is a new account on this report for Lease of Surplus Space with \$139,011 received from the lease of building spaces. The Sprouts Daycare fund is showing a deficit of \$21,201 due to low enrollment, five care spots open, and employee paycheck deductions being pushed back. In response to Mr. Iler, Ms. Coscia replied that the hope is to break even on the school lunch account, they will need to see trends, and she's spoken with John Danizio who indicated that there are some coronavirus relief funds available to help with this item. In response to Ms. Simon, Ms. Coscia replied that there was one international student, but his visa wasn't approved so there are no international high school students this year.

FY21 Budget Reduction -
Approval

The Superintendent stated that with the \$350,000 reduction, there is still a positive operating budget balance of \$206,087 as of October 7. He commented that at the same time last year there was approximately a \$1 million positive budget balance, so there are concerns, and any changes from this point on cannot have an expense associated with it. If the school district is forced to go fully remote, it will affect the budget's bottom line. In response to Mr. Morin, Dr. Conti replied that he doesn't have an exact number of current vacancies and there is a lot of movement of people right now: permanent subs, tutors, and staff leaving for maternity leaves. Ms. Coscia stated that there are just two open teaching positions right now.

¹ Director of DEB, Job Description

Ms. Coscia stated there is a \$76,697 positive balance in the Accommodated Accounts budget currently and the amount of circuit breaker funding from the state should be available by December 31.

Dr. Conti reviewed the 11 proposed budget cuts to attain the \$350,000 budget reduction that was passed at the September 30, 2020 town meeting including:

BEA Stipends	\$123,979
Clerical Salaries	47,953
Vision & Hearing Salaries	3,500
HS Principal Contracted Services	9,995
Contracted Services	20,000
Vision & Hearing Supplies	13,660
Regular Day Transportation	59,940
Regular Day Transportation	32,103
Athletics Transportation	11,869
Transportation – Late Bus	2,925
Kindergarten Trans.	<u>24,074</u>
	(\$350,000)

The Superintendent explained this is a one year reduction and if this reduction continued in upcoming years, it would lead to cuts in programming and services. Chairman Monaco read two questions that were texted to her: Will any cuts affect special education – Dr. Conti replied that he doesn’t believe it will directly. If the school district is able to normalize later during the school year, there would be the need to make tough decisions and expenses would need to be readdressed. Would it be possible to extend the elementary school day - Dr. Conti replied that it wouldn’t affect the operating budget, but we are in a rhythm now, the bus situation would need to be looked at, and administrators are reviewing possibilities all the time. Ways & Means member Mr. Riggs acknowledged that this is a one-year school budget reduction but there are a lot of things in flux.

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Ms. Simon to agree to the cuts list for a \$350,000 reduction in the FY21 budget. Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0. Mr. Murphy inquired if this vote needs to be divided into salary and non-salary amounts; Dr Conti replied that he’s not sure but reductions may change going forward.

In response to Mr. Murphy, Dr. Conti replied that if a club/activity is not run, the BEA stipend is not paid out. If a club/activity is run in a modified way, it would need to be bargained. He noted they are trying to run as many clubs as possible but some activities may be run in a reduced fashion. In response to Mr. Foss, Dr. Conti replied that examples of clubs not running would be concerts, however, band camp was run in a modified way and BHS administrators are working with club advisors to maximize opportunities for students.

BEA Memorandum of Agreement

Dr. Conti thanked the BEA negotiation team and Ms. Simon and Mrs. Monaco for their efforts to shape the working conditions on this Memorandum of Agreement to provide a safe working environment for teachers. A copy of this one-year agreement was included in tonight’s meeting packet and the agreement will need some interpretations. Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mrs. Bond to approve the Memorandum of Agreement with the BEA. Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

MASC Business Meeting Delegate - Approval

Ms. Simon explained the background of the joint MASS/MASC conference to the two new school committee members. This year only the annual MASC business meeting will be held and Ms. Simon has offered to be the official voting delegate for the Burlington School Committee. Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Foss to appoint Martha Simon as the official delegate at the MASC annual business meeting on November 7. Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

Dr. Conti reviewed tonight’s meeting action items with the Committee: post the Director of Equity job description on the website, work with the bus company to finalize implementation of student seating charts, post air quality measurements on the website, send out a second wave of communication about the free/reduced student lunch program, and to seek ways to expand

students' in person school learning particularly for special education students. The Superintendent stated that at the next meeting: the Committee will be asked to vote on the Director of Equity job description and to consider an adjustment to the school calendar to hold fully remote learning for two weeks around the November holiday; although changing/increasing infection rates may make those decisions for us. Chairman Monaco observed that she was pleased that at this time, community covid cases are not attributed to the schools.

ADJOURN

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Foss to adjourn at 9:15 p.m. Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Gilbert
Recording Secretary

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