

BURLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF OCTOBER 27, 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 if someone would like to be recognized to raise their hand.
- APPROVAL OF MINUTES** Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mr. Foss to approve minutes of 9/22/20 Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0. Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mrs. Bond to approve minutes of 10/13/20 Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.
- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** None.
- INFORMATION/REPORT**
Student Representative Sara Shaikh stated that student council elections have been held and the college application deadline for seniors is November 1. The Equity Committee met last week and formed four working groups. Ms. Simon commented that the working groups are focused on some of the action items. Ms. Shaikh inquired if the Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion agenda item could be moved up earlier on tonight's agenda.
- Subcommittee Reports None.
- Ways & Means Roger Riggs – nothing to report.
- COMMUNICATION**
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Job Description & Timeline - Approval By consensus, this item was taken out of order. Dr. Conti emailed the Committee a draft job description¹ for tonight's second reading for the position of Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He stated that he had incorporated feedback that he'd received into the job description and commented that it is an accurate description of what the school district wants this individual to perform. Tonight he is requesting that the School Committee approve the job description and after approval, it will be school district work. Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mrs. Bond to approve the job description as submitted. Mr. Murphy, aye; Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye. Motion carried 5-0-0.
- Mr. Foss thanked Dr. Conti and Mr. Larkin for being receptive to feedback given by himself and the Equity Committee at the meeting last Thursday. Chairman Monaco stated that she had attended the meeting on Thursday, appreciates the meeting needs to be posted and it was interesting to hear the input from everyone. She noted that changes have been made for this second reading of the job description as well as the job title. She commented that the word Inclusion resonates with the thought of special education inclusion and inquired to what extent will this person interact with special education students; particularly if inclusion is part of the job title, and the implication is that it includes special education students. Dr. Conti stated that the intent was to listen to feedback from different stakeholders and that inclusion in the job title is more about belonging and being included in all parts of the organization. He further explained that this position will be working with all students but special education students are not primary; the school district has a Special Education Director and an ELL Director. There will be a level of overlap of the three positions and remarked that belonging is part of the job description. In direct response to Chairman Monaco's inquiry, Mr. Larkin replied that special education students will be part of the minority groups that this positions supports. Ms. Simon stated that the position will interact with special educations students, address racial injustice, and expects the position to also support women and to include all students.

¹ Job Description: Director DEI

The Superintendent also emailed the Committee a draft hiring process timeline² with Assistant Superintendent Larkin facilitating the process and putting together an interview group (similar to hiring a building principal). A job posting will be created for advertisement, a paper screening will follow, the interview committee will hold a pre-meeting to discuss process and agree on interview questions. Virtual screening interviews will be conducted by Human Resources Director Joanne Faust, followed by interviews with candidates and the interview committee. The interview committee will then participate in site visits with two or three identified finalists and will be followed up by an interview with Superintendent Conti. No vote on the timeline is required from the School Committee.

The Superintendent recommended that the School Committee create a formal advisory Equity Subcommittee of the School Committee with Mr. Foss and Ms. Simon continuing their representation on it and to carry on with the Equity discussion group comprised of students and staff, and facilitated by Mr. Larkin that has been in existence for a couple years. The school district based Equity discussion group holds internal school conversations and does not require a meeting posting. Ms. Simon explained the history/background of the current equity discussion group/committee which came out of the district capacity committee. Dr. Conti further explained that a formal Equity Subcommittee could have other representatives from the town such as Town Manager Paul Sagarino, Board of Health, as well as interested community members who can focus on community equity challenges. This formal subcommittee would follow open meeting laws, post agendas, and create minutes. Chairman Monaco observed that if other School Committee members would like to attend meetings, the meeting would need to be posted. Ms. Simon commented that she's happy to not participate in the district equity committee so that they can continue their work but would like to participate in a formal advisory Equity Subcommittee. Chairman Monaco requested that Dr. Conti research the required process and inform the School Committee of the requirements. Dr. Conti and Chairman Monaco thanked Sarah Shaikh for her participation and assistance.

Coronavirus Update from
The Superintendent
Parent, Student, Staff
Data & Survey Results

The Superintendent commented that the CDC has changed the definition of close contact to cumulative exposure of 10-15 minutes, the Massachusetts Department of Health was operating under 15 minutes of exposure, and this will not change anything in Burlington schools. Massachusetts has received 2 million rapid tests, some piloting is being done, however the Burlington Board of Health doesn't accept rapid tests as a definitive result. The Commissioner of Education announced today that they are expecting students to stay in school. The state is pushing to keep schools open and to stay open even if communities are in the red on the state covid map. Governor Baker shut down hockey rinks for two weeks and it's not clear if Burlington Ice Palace will reopen. He further commented that there has been no guidance on winter sports but it looks like it will be highly unlikely that indoor winter sports will operate. Mrs. Bond stated she'd spoken to Representative Gordon and hopes that the ice rinks will reopen in two weeks.

The Superintendent explained that surveys were sent to students, families and staff. Responses were received from 713 families representing 1,000 students. The largest number of responses were from 235 middle school families and 197 high school families. The majority of families would like to stay in the mode of instruction they began the year in. The original plans was for the school district to offer the opportunity for families to change their child's mode of instruction in November but as discussed at the last School Committee meeting, this has been delayed until mid-year. Dr. Conti reviewed a powerpoint presentation on Initial Parent Survey Data on Opening of School³ showing that: 91% were satisfied with the opening of schools and 97% thought Burlington Public Schools provided a safe return to schools. A majority were satisfied with logistics in the areas of school communication, teacher communication, and technology devices. Lower scores for a majority were in the areas of bus transportation and student schedules, which both came out late. The majority of responses were either very good, good, or acceptable experiences of: communication with teacher/school, consistency on learning, social and mental support, quality of at home learning, access to digital resources, and having the time/capability to support my child on their learning process. In the area of rating their child's experience with technology screen time a majority of the responses were that there was an appropriate amount in the areas of synchronous remote learning, asynchronous remote learning, and in-person learning. He explained that more conversations with the School Committee are needed to address student stress levels. Mr.

² DEC Hiring Process Timeline

³ Initial Parent Survey Data on Opening of School

Larkin stated that they are seeing more stress in students and staff; social/emotional needs for students and staff are the first priority. In depth conversations are happening in this area with staff and the Interface program resources have been put in place for students and families for counseling services. Dr. Conti explained that the district needs to make sure we stay responsive to student wellness needs and will also look at homework assignments and amount of sleep. In response to Mr. Foss, Dr. Conti confirmed that 30% of BHS students have been flagged by the DESSA screener (this is the first year high school students have participated). Chairman Monaco stated that October 1 was cited as a time to possibly look at, for instance, adding lunch at the elementary level, adding time to school days, or changing school hours. Dr. Conti responded that school routines are just being set, changes are more structural, more time is needed and changes should happen around mid-year, as the district is in a position to start planning for some changes.

Chairman Monaco stated that it's the opinion of parents (and hers as well) that in-person school time needs to increase. Dr. Conti explained that elementary principals are talking about adding additional language arts time but transportation will need to be considered but the middle and high school can make some changes. Social distancing protocols and safety protocols can't be relaxed; there is not enough space to accommodate all elementary students. He further explained there are limitations to the changes we can make, but safety protocols may be relaxed by the state later in the school year. Chairman Monaco commented that children should be back in schools as much as possible and transportation costs will be addressed/funded.

Mr. Larkin informed the Committee that staff devices are an impediment to doing school work, wants to take this burden off staff, and proposed solidifying a funding source to address remote learning by midyear. He further explained that prior to March the district had no google meets with students and since March 100,000 google meets have been conducted by teachers with district students. Dr. Conti stated that current staff chromebooks are not good enough for the remote teaching environment and due to current device breakage there is not much cost difference by replacing them with a MacBook which should be good for four to five years.

After having personal internet issues, parent Mimi-Bix Hylan offered her perspective on the Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion position which would also include addressing the needs of special education students. This position would be especially helpful to BIPOC students who are on IEP's and have special needs on how to mitigate discrimination. The position should be addressing systemic and interracial discrimination.

In-Person Learning Time
for High Needs Students

Chairman Monaco commented that there is concern among parents that special education students need more in-person school time. Dr. Conti responded that he'd also like to see more, Special Education Director Mary Houde has met with SEPAC and she knows there some frustration. The district wants all students to have a remote experience, we don't have the staffing for six hours of in-person school, and some staff is in full PPE gear. We need enough staff to cover students in order to do this and we are trying to put a cost to it, but it's not easily done. Chairman Monaco replied that not all teachers need to be in full PPE gear and feels the district keeps promising increasing special education students in person learning; this topic will be further addressed at the next School Committee meeting. Dr. Conti further explained that the district is close to getting a model and identifying costs; however, we need to make sure we can provide this in a safe way for students and staff as well as providing a solution that works. He's also hearing similar requests from his Thursday night group. Parent Beth Colburn stated that she understands there could be large costs, and it can't be done overnight but inquired if there are creative solutions to address equity. She further noted that SPED Director Mary Houde has been great but there are equity and inclusion issues that Ms. Houde is not able to address but that the Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion should be able to handle. Dr. Conti explained that funding is not the only limiting factor, inclusion has been more difficult during this pandemic school year, everyone needs to be considered, and we don't have a solution just yet. He thanked special education parents for being patient and stated that the district is trying to expand in person learning time, but we can't do it right now.

Middle School Update

Chairman Monaco indicated this topic is on the agenda because she has been contacted by parents with concerns; Dr. Conti stated that we'll address what we can and he'd like to hear what parents have to say to help shape the conversation. Parent Jamie Beane thanked teachers and administrators and has two children in elementary school and one student in grade 6. She

explained her concern is at the middle school level. The in-person school time is a positive experience but had concerns with remote days; there are 60 minutes of virtual learning and only 40 minutes with a teacher and there is a lot of down time. She’s spoken with Principal Perchase regarding math and english language arts and students losing time with their teachers. She is requesting that during remote days that students in a remote cohort be able to participate in learning with their teachers from home. Chairman Monaco stated that she’d heard from a number of parents that feel that on the days that students are home don’t have enough time with their teachers and they aren’t learning enough or covering enough material. She inquired about middle school teachers participating in live streaming lessons for remote students at the same time they are teaching live students in the classroom. Dr. Conti indicated that they are making adjustments. Middle school Principal Cari Perchase explained that the iReady tool has been piloted both in math and English language arts and the diagnostic testing has just been completed. This will put students in personalized learning groups at their instructional level for these two subjects. Principal Perchase also explained instruction times are shorter due to a 20 minute later start time (which may be a place for potential learning time gain) and a considerable amount of in-person time is spent on arrival, dismissal, hand washing, and lunch to accommodate safety protocols (approximately 75-90 minutes). WIN block (What I Need) is also scheduled during in-person learning times. Ms. Perchase would like to offer more synchronous time for students with teachers but there aren’t enough teachers to provide that. She indicated that the middle school could consider live streaming as a pilot, teachers are not forbidden to use it, and this offering would need to be looked at to offer consistency across grade levels. On remote days, there are three 40 minute periods that students are not in front of teachers. The Superintendent commented that he is looking at other communities as well as conferring with his colleagues to review their live streaming offerings and will be trying to add as much learning time as we can. Chairman Monaco requested that at the next meeting both of these topics (increased in-person special education and middle school learning time) be discussed more including: what has been tried, where are we going, and what has been piloted. Ms. Simon stated that due to the pandemic there has not been time to talk about these areas, there are a lot of good things happening but there are frustrations. She noted that we need to put on our thinking hats; what is our vision for remote academy, what are ideas for hybrid school, what ideas do teachers have and maybe it’s about re-envisioning education/school. As Dr. Conti previously outlined, priorities for this school year are: safety first, social emotional health, and academics.

Transportation Update
 School Building/Facilities
 Update

Mr. Cunha noted that the waiting list for students to take the bus is down to single digits, progress is being made with the bus company taking attendance upon arrival at school and at the end of the day as well, school secretaries have created accurate seating charts but minor changes are needed, there have been a couple substitute bus drivers, and a few stops missed. Corrective actions have been put in place. Dr. Conti explained that a parent communication will be going out advising parents that bus windows will be open when possible, students should be dressed appropriately, and will explain that fresh air is a priority. Mr. Cunha reported that he is working with a communication company and has received a draft of the parent bus communication and it should be available to share with the School Committee at the next meeting.

Mr. Cunha advised that there has been a slight hold up with the insurance company on the BHS gym floor replacement: the work has been approved, progress has been made, wood materials have been delivered, the vapor barrier installed, but the insurance company needs to review the progress and give us notice to proceed again. He also thanked custodians and the maintenance staff; there is a lot of work, but not enough time.

In response to Ms. Simon, Mr. Cunha replied that he’s had discussions regarding design work for BHS, but due to Covid, they have not met in person yet. Simultaneously, he is working with BLW engineering Company, has provided them with documents for the high school, are in the early stages of reviewing information and that at this point, information is being gathered.

HVAC Update

Mr. Cunha stated the maintenance team is currently doing repairs on units, conducting testing, and are preparing to do a third round of air flow testing. Dr. Conti reviewed all hvac testing performed to date, explained that he’d committed to teachers to performing another assessment when the heat is turned on, and Bob is creating a third hvac spreadsheet. He then stated that HEPA filters are being purchased for classrooms to work in partnership with univent heaters but classrooms will be somewhat cold with windows being cracked to

maximize fresh air. Some covid relief money may be used to purchase the HEPA filters which will cost approximately \$75,000.

COMMUNICATION
Universal Remote Learning
Weeks – Discussion

As he explained in his weekly email to the School Committee, Dr. Conti was considering having school go fully remote during the Thanksgiving holiday and the week following, but this is no longer a consideration. The Commissioner of Education wants to keep schools open; districts are expected to keep schools open by using the most recent three Department of Health color-coded community reports, and has indicated that if school districts pursue a fully remote option during this timeframe, it would likely trigger an audit by DESE. In response to Chairman Monaco, Dr. Conti replied that an audit would entail DESE reviewing the learning students experienced during the school district’s fully remote week and further commented that if there was a real local need, he’d champion a fully remote model.

Ms. Simon informed the Committee that she will not be able to attend the MASC assembly in November and that Mr. Foss has indicated he would be able to participate. Moved by Ms. Simon and seconded by Mr. Murphy to withdraw Ms. Simon as the delegate and to appoint Mr. Foss as the representative. Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye, Mr. Murphy, aye; motion carried 5-0-0.

Ms. Simon suggested that it would be useful for the School Committee to have a training to explore unconscious bias and to provide a common vocabulary as the school district moves forward with this work and requested that Dr. Conti research available training options for the Committee.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Monaco announced that the body has a need for executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body. The School Committee will only return to public session for the purpose of adjournment. Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Ms. Simon to enter executive session at 9:20 p.m. Mr. Foss, aye; Mrs. Monaco, aye; Ms. Simon, aye; Mrs. Bond, aye, Mr. Murphy, aye; motion carried 5-0-0.

ADJOURN

Moved by Mr. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Foss to adjourn at 10:10 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: 11/17/20
Date approved: 11/17/20