

RECORD OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BROOKLINE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ON **THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2020** AT 6:00 PM (REMOTE VIA WEBEX EVENT). STATUTORY NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS FILED WITH THE TOWN CLERK.

School Committee Members Present: Ms. Federspiel (Vice Chair), Dr. Abramowitz, Ms. Charlupski, Ms. Ditkoff, Mr. Glover, Ms. Monopoli, Mr. Pearlman, and Ms. Scotto.  
School Committee Members Absent: Ms. Schreiner-Oldham (Chair). Also present: Mr. Lummis, Ms. Normen, Dr. Gittens, Ms. Ngo-Miller, and Ms. Coyne.  
Others present: Director of Operations Matt Gillis.

Ms. Federspiel called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS**

**a. Consent Agenda**

**ACTION 20-34**

On a motion of Ms. Charlupski and seconded by Ms. Monopoli, the School Committee VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (by roll call) to approve the items included in the Consent Agenda.

- i. Past Record: April 6, 2020 School Committee Meeting

**2. UPDATE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT CLOSING IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS), INCLUDING UPDATE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION DURING CLOSURE AND UPDATE ON REMOTE LEARNING TASK FORCE**

Mr. Lummis provided the following update on the Public Schools of Brookline closing in response COVID-19.

*We continue to make progress step by step, day by day, and week by week. I am confident that our teachers, our teacher teams, and our school leaders are working together to get better at remote support, community building, and teaching. All of this continues to be a work in progress and our principals, vice principals, and coordinators are reporting that folks are making progress every day.*

*In the past week we have seen more collaboration between specials teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers in support of our students. For example:*

- *Reading specialists, math specialists, and English language teachers are now ramping up small group work with students. In addition, they have been supporting general education teachers by creating videos with them and for them, and have been participating in morning meetings.*
- *We launched Enrichment, Challenge & Support, and [Music](#) resource websites that are available to teachers and to families as additional supplementary*

*learning opportunities beyond what music or classroom teachers are already providing.*

- *Special education paraprofessionals are helping by connecting with students in community meetings, recording directions on assignments, and also connecting with students in groups and one on one.*
- *Literacy coaches are also video recording mini-lessons that other teachers can use.*
- *Principals, Ed Tech specialists, Scott Moore, and colleagues are supporting teachers who aren't yet comfortable with the technology by helping them get online and by recording videos with them or having virtual class sessions with them so that they become more comfortable with technology.*

### ***Supporting Students Who Aren't Engaging***

*As you know in our guidance to all staff, we provided guidelines about steps to take when they see students who they are not engaging. We are now doing this in a variety of ways across our schools including:*

- *At BHS – they have shifted COVID Struggling Students tracking so they know which students may be disengaging because of health related matters.*
- *K-5 classes are typically monitoring engagement for themselves as they are the primary connection to students and their families. Teachers will make individual outreach first.*
- *Middle grade level teams are typically keeping track at a grade level team meeting and documenting engagement, participation, and/or assignment completion*
- *Typically each grade level team meets with their admin team weekly and reports out on any students who are not connecting or engaging. Guidance Counselor, VP, or principal would then reach out to these families and can pull in social workers or the School Support Team*

### ***Ongoing Areas of Improvement***

*There are a few areas we have to continue to focus on that I am highlighting tonight:*

1. *Clarity and Coordination*
2. *Becoming more systematic and less dependent on individual or team heroics*
3. *Middle grades engagement*

#### ***1. Clarity & Coordination***

*There is generally very strong collaboration on teacher teams – grade level teams at PK-8, subject area teams at 6-8, and department or course level collaboration at BHS. We need to move toward better coordination on two levels:*

- a) *Coordination of all the different pieces and people that are in play now - small group support, specials instruction (meaning art, music, PE/Health/Wellness and also World Language), special education, English learner education.*
- b) *Coordination for students/families – which stems from coordination of staff support, teaching – How do we help students (and parents/guardians) know*

*where to go to get the information about learning, schedule, class meetings, assignments, etc. in an organized way rather than trying to piece together multiple websites, emails, etc.*

*Our best examples of coordinating for K-8 students are the [weekly learning plans](#) that have daily schedules for the content, lessons, and engagement in each subject area and then link directly to the lessons and learning opportunities in art, music, health and wellness, and world language.*

*Another way that schools have been helping students and families stay organized is with their school-based Remote Learning hubs that link to each of their grade levels or classrooms where students go to get the information they need for their class. 8 of our 9 schools have these fully operational and the 9<sup>th</sup> one is working on it now.*

2. *Becoming More Systematic*

*We need to continue to think about the long term and how we keep from burning our people out. One way to prevent burnout is to not have every teacher or teacher team make everything up from scratch.*

- a. *This begins with the work underway on identifying common learning expectations by grade and subject area for K-8. The coordinators have been developing these based on our essential learning standards and any common curriculum we have in place. The Working Group led by Dr. Nicole Gittens has been reviewing these and providing feedback. We expect to have a majority of these finished by the end of the week, after which we will share them with teachers.*
- b. *We are also moving towards developing model or sample lessons, lesson templates, resource repositories by grade and other barriers to implementation the working group is addressing.*

3. *Engaging Middle Grades Students*

*One of the biggest challenges our teachers are facing is connecting with and engaging with middle grades students. This includes getting students on the virtual classes or community check-ins as well as work completion. Our schools which are tracking engagement in the middle grades report between 30% and 50% participation and work completion. In addition to ongoing outreach, principals and teachers have started being clearer about which work and activities are required and which are optional or for an additional challenge.*

*In a moment you'll get an update from Deputy Superintendent Casey Ngo-Miller who will provide an update on Special Education supports and Related Services followed by an update from Dr. Nicole Gittens on the work of the Curriculum Coordinators and the Working Group that has been meeting this week.*

*Before that, I have four quick updates from the superintendent's call with the Commissioner of Education I want to update you on.*

- *Governor Baker is expected to make an announcement next week about extending the school closure. We do not have any information on what that announcement might be.*
- *Depending on the Governor's announcement, the Commissioner of Education and DESE are expected to release further guidance on the closure.*
- *MCAS has been cancelled for grades 3-10. They are still considering specific tests at the high school level.*
- *The deadline for submitting the Student Opportunity Act plan has been extended to May 15<sup>th</sup> at the earliest.*

Ms. Ngo-Miller provided an update on Special Education during the closure. She referred to recent communications with families and staff, including the Special Education FAQ. Ms. Ngo-Miller explained the three priority areas laid out for staff earlier in the week: 1) Connection to Students; 2) Support Access to General Education Weekly Learning Plans and Activities; and Specially Designed Instruction.

Dr. Gittens provided an update on the work of the Remote Learning Working Group. The Working Group's primary task will be to review the work being done by K-8 and K-12 coordinators to identify content areas, skills, and understandings for each grade level to focus on for the rest of the year. This group will also help identify any barriers to implementation that the district's educators, staff, and school leaders may be facing.

School Committee members requested addition information on provision of services for speech and language. Ms. Ngo-Miller indicated that students are receiving services, but noted that there are factors that they are working through that impact the delivery and frequency of individualized instruction. Ms. Ngo-Miller explained ongoing planning for summer programs. Some services may need to be contracted out. Dr. Gittens noted that the Office of Teaching and Learning is investigating possible summer programming for students in general education. Members suggested scheduling a special session on Special Education in a distance environment (perhaps with specialists) that could cover what we can and cannot do (and the reasons). Members requested information on teaching and learning for English Learners.

School Committee members noted the importance of reaching out and addressing the current and future needs of students who may not be fully engaged in remote learning. Members asked about support to parents/guardians to help their children engage. Members noted that it is possible that remote learning could continue to some degree beyond the current school year. Adapting to remote learning may be more challenging for some educators than for others. Members asked about the process for 1) gathering staff feedback in a systematic way, 2) determining what practices are most effective, 3) sharing best practices and resources, and 4) making sure that educators get the support they need from the administration and from each other. Dr. Gittens discussed collaboration within and across schools.

Ms. Ditkoff reported that the Ad-Hoc Task Force on Remote Learning will be having an organizational meeting on April 21, 2020.

**3. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS OF CURRENT ISSUES**

**a. Update on FY 2020 Budget and FY 2021 Budget Development**

Mr. Lummis provided an update on the FY 2020 Budget. He explained that there is a spending freeze in place. There is a process in place for requesting emergency items. The administration is developing plans for both a return to school this spring and continuation of remote learning through the end of the school year (considered more likely).

Mr. Lummis provided an update on FY 2021 Budget Development. The State budget may not be finalized until after July 1, 2020. It is quite likely that there will be need for additional budget reductions. Projections will be updated as more information becomes available. Next steps include the following: April 17, 2020 – Town-School Partnership meeting; April 17, 2020-April 22, 2020 - Revise Open Gov Budget with recommended budget; April 23, 2020 - Public presentation of preliminary balanced budget at Finance Subcommittee meeting; April 30, 2020 - Public presentation of balanced budget at School Committee meeting; May 14, 2020 - Public comment on balanced budget; May 2020-June 2020 - further planning for COVID-19 pandemic impacts on FY 2021 budget, including development of contingency budget based on federal, state, and town financial updates and prior work done to identify cost savings.

Ms. Ditkoff commented that the Advisory Committee is preparing a document that provides important context and information about the municipal financial picture the Town and district may be facing.

**b. Discussion of whether the School Committee should hold a Public Hearing and take a Position on 2020 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

The School Committee discussed whether to hold a public hearing and take a position on 2020 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles. Mr. Lummis recommended that the School Committee consider scheduling public hearings on the following Warrant Articles: Article 5 – Unpaid Bills (may include an unpaid bill from the School Department); Article 7 – High School Appropriation (additional authorization for the High School project); and Articles 9-15 – Newbury College Land Use and Land Acquisition. The School Committee already held a public hearing on the FY 2021 Budget-Article 8.

The consensus of the School Committee was 1) that the Finance Subcommittee should consider during its April 23, 2020 meeting whether the School Committee should schedule a public hearing and provide a statement to Town Meeting on Article 5 and Article 8; 2) that the Capital Improvements Subcommittee should consider during its May 6, 2020 meeting whether the School Committee should schedule a public hearing and provide a statement to Town Meeting on Articles 7 and 9-15; and 3) that any School

Committee public hearings on Town Meeting Warrant Articles be scheduled for the May 14, 2020 School Committee meeting.

#### **4. SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACTIONS**

##### **a. School Choice Non-Participation (Possible Vote)**

Ms. Charlupski explained that the School Committee typically waits until after the Town Election to take this vote. This is not possible this year because the Election will not take place until June 9, 2020, and the deadline to notify the State if the district is not participating in School Choice is June 1, 2020. The School Choice Law contained in the Education Reform Act of 1993 presumes that each School Committee will admit non-resident students under the School Choice Program, unless there is a vote to the contrary taken by June 1 of each year, following a hearing on the issue. The School Committee combined the hearing for this issue with the Public Hearing on the FY 2021 Budget, held on February 6, 2020. Brookline has not participated in School Choice in the past and has cited the following reasons: the district has no excess capacity in its buildings; the School Choice reimbursement rate is substantially less than the cost of educating one of the district's students; and School Choice takes away funds from home districts.

##### **ACTION 20-35**

On a motion of Ms. Charlupski and seconded by Ms. Scotto, the School Committee VOTED (by roll call), with a vote of 7 in favor, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention (Dr. Abramowitz), not to participate in the School Choice Program for the 2020-2021 School Year.

##### **b. Possible Vote to Approve Contract Modifications for Reduced Services from Transportation Vendors**

Director of Operations Matt Gillis reported that the transportation companies contend that if they do not have funds to pay their drivers for the duration of the shutdown, the drivers will get other jobs and not return when school reopens. If this occurs, the district may not be able to provide bus service to students once school reopens. Other districts, including Belmont, Billerica, Cambridge, Newton, Medford, Somerville, and Wellesley, are providing partial payments. Mr. Gillis is recommending that the School Committee agree to amend the current contract to reduce the amount to approximately 70 percent of what would have been paid, with the district receiving a credit if the bus companies are able to secure state/federal relief funds.

##### **School Committee Member Comments/Questions:**

- A payment of 70 percent seems high. What costs would this cover? Would the drivers qualify for unemployment compensation?
- Bus companies should be encouraged to apply for Small Business Loans and any loans that are forgiven should result in a credit to the district.
- Providing this partial payment does not guarantee the bus companies will still serve the district in the future.
- Is there a way to ensure that the companies make a good faith effort to apply for all possible sources of funding, including small business loans?

- What are the implications of the proposed agreement for the next school year?
- Special Education drivers are part of the Special Education team.

Mr. Lummis commented that Superintendents across the state are looking for guidance and assistance from the state on this issue. Mr. Gillis noted that tomorrow, he will be meeting with officials from other districts and will share the School Committee's concerns and questions. Mr. Gillis will report back at the April 23, 2020 School Finance Subcommittee meeting.

## **5. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **a. Finance**

Ms. Ditkoff reported there will be a Town-School Partnership meeting on April 17, 2020. The next meeting of the Finance Subcommittee will take place on April 23, 2020. The agenda will include the following: Update on Town-School Partnership; Update on FY 2020 Budget, including Budget Impact of COVID-19 Response; Update/Discussion of FY 2021 Budget; Discussion of Possible Contract Modifications for Reduced Services from Transportation Vendors; and Discussion of whether the School Committee should Schedule a Public Hearing and Provide a Statement to Town Meeting on 2020 Annual Town Meeting Article 5 Approval of Unpaid Bills of a Prior Fiscal Year and Article 8 Annual (FY 2021) Appropriations Article.

### **b. Capital Improvements**

Ms. Charlupski and Ms. Ditkoff provided an update on building projects.

At their Board of Directors meeting on April 14, 2020, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) voted to partner with the Public Schools of Brookline to conduct a Feasibility Study for the Pierce School Building Project. Working closely with the MSBA during this phase of the project, Brookline will explore fiscally responsible and educationally appropriate solutions to the space challenges that exist at Pierce School. The vote this week does not represent approval of the building project but is a critical next step in our building project plans. The Pierce School Building Committee will be meeting on April 22, 2020. A public meeting for all interested parties, including parents, guardians, and staff from the Pierce School and members of the larger Brookline community, is set for April 28, 2020. Mr. Lummis reported on communications with staff and families.

The Driscoll project is still entirely in the planning and design phase and appears to be on schedule. The plans will be sent out for updated cost estimates by the architect, Construction Manager at Risk, and Owner's Project Manager. Site review and site work, including the Geothermal test well and additional borings on the site, are scheduled for April.

The Brookline High School project is proceeding in accordance with the new guidelines and directives related to COVID-19. Material and labor shortages will impact schedule and budget. Labor working on the job is down about 80% of what was

originally scheduled. Iron workers, operators, laborers and water proofers all still working. With school buildings closed, some update work and testing to the fire alarm system will be performed ahead of schedule.

There has been some discussion among Town officials about possible work restrictions. Town Counsel has opined that this is under the purview of the state, not the town. The slowdown in construction has impacted schedule and it is highly unlikely the project will be completed by September 2021. There have been changes since the project was bid (e.g., MBTA overages, market conditions, and now, the impact of COVID-19 on schedule) that have impacted budget and may require some value engineering to reduce costs. In addition, there may be additional operating expenses if schedule delays result in extended use of Old Lincoln School for 9<sup>th</sup> graders.

Ms. Charlupski reported that the Capital Improvements Subcommittee met on April 14, 2020. In addition to the items above, the Subcommittee discussed a request for additional funding for Repairs and Maintenance. The consensus of the Subcommittee was that given the current budget constraints and uncertainty, the district is not in the position to be adding funds to Building Repairs and Maintenance. If the budget situation improves, the Schools could consider requesting a transfer or additional appropriation at the Fall Town Meeting. The Subcommittee also discussed planning for utilization of 2 Clark Road, Baldwin, and the Sperber Center for the 2020-2021 School Year.

**c. Curriculum**

Ms. Scotto reported that the Curriculum Subcommittee met on April 7, 2020. The agenda included an update and discussion of Remote Learning. Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) Co-Chairs shared their perspectives as parents. The Subcommittee discussed the structure and objectives of the Remote Learning Task Force established by the School Committee on April 6, 2020. The next meeting of the Subcommittee will take place on May 11, 2020. The agenda will include a discussion of a policy related to Site Councils.

**d. Government Relations**

Ms. Charlupski reported that the Governor signed into law a bill that will waive the MCAS standardized testing requirement for students this academic year.

**e. Policy Review**

Mr. Glover reported that the Policy Review Subcommittee met on April 13, 2020. The agenda included discussion of a draft Policy on Homeless Students and a draft Policy on Students in Foster Care. The next meeting of the Subcommittee will take place on April 21, 2020. The agenda will include discussion of the following: draft Field Trip Policy, draft Policy on Homeless Students, draft Policy on Students in Foster Care, School Council Policy, and the Policy on Public Comment at School Committee Meetings.

**f. Interim Superintendent Search Process**

Ms. Charlupski reported that the position continues to be advertised. The Interim Superintendent Preliminary Screening Committee will be meeting on April 20, 2020 to interview candidates.

**g. Additional Liaisons and Updates**

Ms. Scotto reported on a recent Brookline Education Foundation (BEF) Board meeting. The BEF has offered to provide some emergency funding. The annual Celebration of Teachers event has been canceled and the Trivia Bee has been postponed. Raffle tickets can be purchased through the BEF website. A team of runners including Coolidge Corner School Principal Jen Buller will be running the Boston Marathon in support of the BEF. Teachers may be able to postpone use of BEF grant funds.

Dr. Abramowitz reported on a recent meeting of the Commission for Diversity Inclusion and Community Relations (CDICR). The Commission would like to address some issues with the School Committee and district: possible strategies to hire and retain more educators and administrators of color; the experiences of educators and administrators of color and their working environment; and anti-Asian racism in Brookline in general and related to COVID-19. Mr. Lummis noted efforts to continue to provide and communicate avenues for staff and students to report incidents and get support. In response to a question, Dr. Gittens reported that staff have reached out to all METCO students.

Ms. Charlupski encouraged support of local organizations that will be holding virtual fundraising events this year (including the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health and Steps to Success).

Ms. Charlupski reported on today's EDCO Collaborative Board meeting. EDCO continues to face financial difficulties and may be asking districts to pay an additional assessment that could be as much as \$75,000 for Brookline. Ms. Ditkoff suggested that the district and School Committee think strategically about how to consider requests for additional funding in light of the district's current budget constraints and uncertainty.

**6. NEW BUSINESS**

Dr. Abramowitz requested an update on the status of rental agreements with extended day programs.

**7. PROPOSED EXECUTIVE SESSION**

By unanimous roll call vote at 8:45 PM, the School Committee entered into Executive Session pursuant to Massachusetts General laws chapter 30A section 21(a) for Purpose 2, to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel (non-aligned personnel), for Purpose 3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Brookline Educators Union, Units A, B, and Paraprofessionals, because the Chair declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body, and for

Purpose 7, to review and approve executive session minutes from the following meetings: February 20, 2020; February 27, 2020; March 16, 2020; March 19, 2020; March 26, 2020; and April 6, 2020. Ms. Federspiel announced that the meeting will not reconvene in open session at the end of the Executive Session. By unanimous roll call vote at 9:50 PM, the School Committee reconvened in public session for the purpose of adjournment.

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Federspiel adjourned the meeting at 9:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin E. Coyne, Executive Assistant  
Brookline School Committee