

# MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, September 21, 2020

Via WebEx Meeting Number: 146 666 1267

Meeting Password: 5gMMfH7r7YD

**CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Piascyk, Chair called the meeting to order (7:02 PM).

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Mr. Dan Cowan, Lor Ferrante-Fernandes, Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; Mr. Jeff Hughes, Dr. David Ross, Ms. Joyce Shavers, Vice Chair; Dr. Michael Strambler and Dr. Jeffrey Townsend.

**STAFF:** Ms. Christine Syriac, Interim Superintendent; Cheryl Mammen, Special Services Director; Al Pullo, Director of Business Operations/Services; Analisa Sherman, Principal; Doreen Merrill, Assistant Principal; and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:** Beth Heller, First Selectman; Sandy Stein, BOS; Joi Prud'homme, PTO; Linda Acheson, Melissa Caporossi, Nicole Chick, Jeanne Ciarleglio, Kristin DeManche, Maria DePalma, Carson Echeverry, Carrie Fanelli, Stephanie Goldberg, Liz Heagney, Kristen Horvath, Emily Jacober, Jeanine Lempke, Monique MacDonald, Kathy Marlor, Katie McCollom, Aimee Meacham, Jean Molot, Jennifer Naylor, Lori Patrick, Christine Renzoni, Nicole Rizzo, Tim Rourke, Meghan Saunders, Jackie Scalia, Nancy Smerekanicz, Heather Trofimchik, Mary Vincitorio, Michelle Waldron, Sarah Wislocki, Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Jennifer Cooper, Shari Foldy, Laura Sexton, Karen Zelem, CSEA; and Vito Esparo, Facilities Manager; Marsha Ackerman, Erin Angelucci, Lauren Betlinski, Vicky Burford, Linda Christy, Jay Dahya, Kit Dunbar, Lauren Esposito, Aisling Fagan, Sheri and Michael Fitzgerald, Pua Ford, Jill Franco, Robin Froehle, Michele Goglia, Joan Grogan, Kelly Halstead, Rebecca Holcombe, Tom Handler, Ruchi Jain, Stacey Katz, Kristy Laydon, Erin Oleskey, Whitney Randall, Jane Roddy, Bettina Thiel, Alison Valsamis, community.

**CORRESPONDENCE** – Ms. Genovese noted that the Board received a letter regarding the certified leave requests granted at the August special meeting and three parent letters regarding distance learning, class sizes and the lack of specials.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Sheri Fitzgerald – read the same letter previously provided to Board members regarding distance learning, class sizes and the lack of specials.

Marsha Ackerman –expressed dismay at the quality of distance learning being offered, the lack of planning, class sizes and the inequity that exists as remote learners are receiving a substandard education in comparison to their peers.

Alison Valsamis – cited technology issues, device incompatibility, the lack of proper installation and access to certain apps, class sizes and the overall lack of planning surrounding the remote learning program.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

### **MOTION #1 – CONSENT AGENDA**

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Ms. Shavers

Second by Mr. Cowan

**UNANIMOUS**

## **REPORTS**

**Board Committees** – Chair Piascyk presented committee memberships for the 2020/21 school year.

**PTO Update** – Ms. Prud'homme noted that staff was provided a box lunch for one of the PD days with virtual teachers receiving gift cards; class pictures will be held outside, PTO meetings will be held virtually and the annual Thanksgiving Food baskets will not be conducted with donations only include gift cards.

Wellness /Tools for Schools Report – Mr. Pullo, Ms. Sherman and Ms. Merrill provided an update on the various committee work conducted in the 2019/20 school year. Mr. Esparro provided an overview of the various projects completed by the custodial staff throughout the building.

Superintendent Report –Interim Superintendent, Christine Syriac and Nursing Supervisor Stacey Katz reviewed possible scenarios should there be a confirmed case of Covid and/or the closure of school becomes necessary. In all situations, the metrics from the State Department of Public Health will be the guidance. Specific definitions include:

*Case – a person tests positive for Covid.*

*Contact – exposed to a case and/or spending 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of a positive case or a direct exposure (coughing or sneezing in your face) whether or not you have a mask on.*

*Contact Tracer – individuals who interview all cases, and/or receive referrals to /from QVHD.*

In-person learning will continue for as long as it is safe to do so. Depending upon whether the exposure occurred at BRS, it may be necessary to close the building or a portion of the building for one or two days or possibly longer. Parents and staff are urged to be vigilant in apprising the school of any developments, testing, self-screening and/or quarantining if necessary. Should there be a moderate outbreak (10-25 new cases) we would move to Hybrid with only ½ of the student population in the building at a time. Anything above 25 new cases would necessitate building closure and moving to complete remote learning. Should closure become necessary, the decision will be made on a case-by-case basis. Teachers are fully prepared to switch to remote immediately. In all situations, BOWA Superintendents will continue to work collaboratively on the local level as well as with QVHD, community, media etc.

It was questioned whether Beecher could accommodate all students in the building or what the maximum approximation number would be and whether shifting to a hybrid model should be the direction of the Board. Given the mandates for social distancing, cohorting and spacing configurations, it is highly unlikely that Beecher could accommodate the entire student population for in-person instruction. If a short-term closure becomes necessary, students would remain with the teacher they are currently assigned to. If the state determines that a long-term closure of a month or more is necessary, students would revert back to their original homeroom assigned teacher. It was suggested that links be posted on the web site for tracking Covid as well as the regulations and guidance mandated by the CSDE.

Since there is a large amount of community concern and there is a lag time between exposure and symptoms, it is crucial that the threshold of risk be clearly articulated and understood. Discussion ensued for whether the Board of Education had the authority shut down the school absent of specific direction from the state. Since parents have the right to send their children to school as well as keeping their children home, is the decision a local one. It was noted that QVHD would be the first decision level in determining whether we would shift to all remote as that would entail about 25 confirmed cases per 100,000 people given current metrics. It was questioned who the experts would be and what data evidence was necessary to base decisions on. Sentiment existed that this level of decision was beyond the scope and role of the Board of Education. There was general consensus that the Board would have an in-depth discussion on this topic at a special meeting.

It was noted that the financial impact on the budget in the hiring of additional staff to accommodate cohorting and social distance mandates will be significant. There are other districts across the state that chose not to hire additional staff and teachers are teaching in-person and remotely by following the in-person schedule. BRS teachers are not comfortable teaching in-person and remote simultaneously so eight additional teachers have been hired temporarily until the Thanksgiving break. Currently, approximately 201 students out of 820 are opting for remote instruction and are receiving instruction from eight staff members who requested and were granted accommodations to deliver remote learning.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution, nor is there one plan that will make everyone happy. It is a given that numbers will continue to fluctuate and learning needs to be seamless regardless of whether students are switching from in-person to remote or vice versa. Administration is currently exploring the pros and cons of restructuring the instruction delivery model to move all students back to their original assigned teacher after the Thanksgiving break. We do not want to create new problems while trying to solve current ones. Our curriculum structure is workshop, which involves students working closely together, in small groups. We have shifted our teaching model entirely with everything except recess. Lessons are taught independent of each other, specials have been extended to an hour and now occur in the classroom as does lunch. Belief existed for finding creative fiscally sound solutions that achieved synchronized live streaming learning, adapting pedagogics to remote learning and/or hybrid and eliminating large remote class sizes.

It was agreed this would be a topic at a special meeting as well. The Board requested documentation from other districts depicting successes, challenges, financial implications, additional supports and options that allow for building a different instruction model that does not include additional teaching positions. While our in-person instruction model has a long running history, our distance learning has been a crash course and we need to focus on being a unified community where our children are receiving the best education possible.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – Capital Budget will be presented at the October 19 meeting.

Finance Committee – Ms. Shavers noted that the budget currently has a deficit in the range of \$155,000 inclusive of additional staffing and the hiring of a search consultant for a new superintendent. In addition the Cafeteria as well as the EDay program are running deficits. It was noted that options are being explored for raising revenues through increasing building usage, PreK tuition as well as cost sharing incentives with Bethany.

Facilities Committee – Mr. Hughes noted there was no further report as a comprehensive review was provided part of the Wellness report.

Policy Committee – Ms. Genovese presented the policies currently under 30-day review for adoption.

### **MOTION #2 – POLICIES FOR ADOPTION**

Move that we adopt Policies 4118.237 Masks - Staff; 5141.8 Masks - Students; 4118.238 Self-Quarantine -Staff; 5141.81 Self Quarantine - Students and 6114.81 Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic as presented.  
Policy – Tuesday, October 13 next meeting.

Ms. Genovese  
Second by Ms. Ferrante-Fernandes

It was noted that while the mask policy would require modification again based on recent legislative action by the Governor it was important to have it adopted for both staff and students. The changes are minor, reflect the recent Governor’s mandate by adding a definitive implementation timeline. It was suggested that the policies not be adopted and be sent back to committee as Executive Orders are continuously changing and supersede anything the district adopts.

**IN FAVOR:** Ms. Ferrante-Fernandes, Ms. Genovese, Mr. Hughes, Ms. Piascyk, Dr. Ross,  
Ms. Shavers, Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend

**AGAINST:** Mr. Cowan

***MOTION PASSES 8-1-0***

It was noted that at the October 13 Policy committee meeting, the committee will review the masks policies as well as the policy related to Title IX.

CABE Liaison Report – Ms. Genovese noted several legal issues webinars in the coming weeks on assorted topics including labor relations/human resources, special education, virtual Board meetings, extra curricular activities / transportation liability as well as on Covid 19.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

It was suggested that the Board commence meeting in person for their meetings. It was noted that there is still an Executive Order in place that requires the public have the opportunity to view and participate in meetings in real time. Ms. Heller indicated that Town Attorney Gerry Weiner had rendered an opinion on this topic...

*“The only meeting of the executive board absolutely prohibited with in person meetings is dealing with municipal budgets. All other municipal in person meetings are discouraged unless there is no satisfactory way to do virtual meetings. Even if virtual meetings are possible, an in person meeting should not be held with over 25 participants. I believe it is the intent to prevent in person meetings if it is likely that more than 25 people would attend. In addition, in person meetings should be discouraged if participants would be uncomfortable in attending in person meetings. In person meetings should be avoided if at all possible. It should be noted that the mere fact that many schools are now open should not stand in the proposition that in person meeting should be permitted. It is still the governor’s policy to limit the congregation of large groups wherever possible.”*

It was also pointed out that in addition to the attendance limitation, there are numerous sanitizing protocols in place around the building during evening hours that would need to be adhered to.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – None

The Board entered Executive Session to receive an update on two potential lawsuits.

Dr. Ross left the meeting (11:14 PM).

**MOTION #3 – EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Move that we enter Executive Session (11:14 PM).

Ms. Ferrante-Fernandes  
Second by Dr. Townsend  
**UNANIMOUS**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Piascyk, Chair called the Executive Session to order (11:22 PM).

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Mr. Dan Cowan, Lor Ferrante-Fernandes, Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; Mr. Jeff Hughes, Ms. Joyce Shavers, Vice Chair; Dr. Michael Strambler and Dr. Jeffrey Townsend.

**STAFF:** Ms. Christine Syriac, Interim Superintendent; Al Pullo, Director of Business Operations/Services.

The Board received an update from Interim Superintendent Syriac on two potential litigation incidents.

**MOTION TO ADJOURN:** (11:42 PM)

Dr. Townsend  
Second by Ms. Shavers  
**UNANIMOUS**

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board