

MENDON-UPTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Special School Committee Meeting

Nipmuc High School, Professional Development Room

Monday, August 23, 2021

Committee Present:

Sean Nicholson, Vikki Ludwigson, Kerry Laurence, Phil DeZutter, Dorothy Scally, Erick Brown

Administration Present:

Maureen Cohen, Interim Superintendent of Schools

Jay Byer, Business/Finance

Jennifer D'Angelo

John Clements, Co-Principal, Nipmuc Regional High School

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m. by Kerry Laurence.
Pledge of Alliance was recited

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Approval of to Amend Agenda

MOTION: On a motion of Phil DeZutter, seconded by Vikki Ludwigson, to amend the agenda to include approval of the August 16 minutes.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Approval of the Amended Agenda

MOTION: On a motion of Phil DeZutter, seconded by Vikki Ludwigson, to approve the amended agenda.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Approval of the Open Session Minutes from August 16, 2021

MOTION: On a motion of Phil DeZutter, seconded by Vikki Ludwigson, to approve Open Session minutes from August 16, 2021

VOTED: Unanimously approved

II. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

Chairperson Kerry Laurence reminded the audience of 2 policies of the School Committee:

- recording of events where speakers need to advise the Committee members if the meeting is being recorded; She reminded everyone the meetings are recorded and played back on YouTube
- Public comment period is 15 minutes portion of agenda. Thus, each person will be allowed 3 minutes to speak and longer statements can be submitted in writing

Daigle – member of community, 4 children. Thank the board for their commitment. However, he disagrees with School Committee. Stats show differences and divides. This is an opportunity to bring community together. He has an empathy for fears but he also has fear of child trafficking. We need to prepare the children for future and show acceptance. Let's not debate and let people be who they are.

Kindle (present at last week meeting) - Position to make masks optional and let decision be up to the parents. Data was exchanged and misinformation on both sides. Quoted a mask study. Data: how many cases; how many have recovered; how many have died. Majority are recovering. MA there are zero deaths up to age 14. Most deaths are over 75+. Current case count is 20k and number of deaths. Discussed causes of deaths not from COVID with comparisons to flu. COVID is real but news media is showing as a deathly pandemic; but data is different. Don't let freedom die.

Statement read from McInerney – Doctor at Milford Hospital. Opinions are his and not the hospitals. History of mask wearing in hospitals. At the beginning, mixed messages from politicians. Description of the size masks – N95 mask is useful to protect. He believes the masks are not protecting against the droplets. Stated data from Sweden children. It is dangerous for children to be wearing masks due physical and mental health. Delta variant is present but despite the 'screams' from the media it is impacting the elderly and not school children. Government with an agenda will dictate to wear a mask for rest of our lives. Suicide is more of a danger.

Remote participant, Gina - commented viral particle size can vary and the viral load is severity of illness. Students did not get sick while wearing masks. If there is transmission, thus shutting down schools, what is the plan with the students learning from home.

Dr. Cohen stated DESE came out with COVID protocols. The protocols will be shared with District once the district has all the answers. Charts will be available to determine what needs to happen vs vaccinated or not vaccinated if someone is exposed. Dr Cohen also commented she is happy to see the engagement from the community and thank you for your participation. If there is further information to share, please submit to the School Committee

III. INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

School Calendar

Dr. Cohen stated the School Calendar needs some updates due to the teachers' contract. There are 2 additional professional development days for ongoing development instead of isolated pockets. These additional days will give teachers and staff the ability to collaborate. She is recommending the following dates:

- December 10th – ½ day with PD in afternoon
- February 18th prior to school vacation which could be helpful parents going on vacation.

Approval of to add the Additional Profession Days to School Calendar

MOTION: On a motion of Vikki Ludwigson, seconded by Dorothy Scally to update the School Calendar to add December 10th and February 18th as professional development days.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Back to School Communications

Dr. Cohen stated the district will see increased communications about back to school this coming week. Communications include the following:

- Nipmuc Freshmen and New Student Orientation tomorrow at 10:30 am
- Nipmuc Fall Sports Team Meetings Monday (tonight) at 6:30pm
- Popsicles in the Park on Friday, August 27 at 5 for incoming Pre-K-1st grade and 6pm for incoming 2nd-4th grade students at the playground at Memorial Park on Taft Ave in Mendon
- Memorial Kindergarten play date at Memorial ES August 28th at 10am
- Clough Kindergarten Meet and Greet Tuesday, August 24 at 5:30pm

- Miscoe Hill Grade 5 Parent Info Night and Student Popsicle Social August 26th at 6:30pm

Dr. Cohen also commented the district has a new Facebook page to increase communications and notifications to the district will be posted on that page. Also, each school has newsletters that will be sent to the families with school based FAQs.

Local Data Update

Dr. Cohen asked Ms. Trish Parent, Public Health Nurse for Upton to present local data of COVID-19 to the School Committee.

Ms. Parent reached out to Town of Mendon since they were unable to come. She stated this is her 40th anniversary as a nurse and for 27 years she has been public health nurse.

Ms. Parent stated the cooperation between the district and the Town was great last year. She also stated everyone opinions matter. However, public health needs to take the individual out of the picture because public health is everyone's health. The community has tools – vaccinations, masks and washing hands to assist to slow the spread of the virus. Ms. Parent would like to get everyone back to school and work.

Thus, common sense approach is to look at what is happening in the community. There has been an uptick of cases over the last 3 weeks. July 30 – August 21 – 24 cases with close contact tracing. 16 of the cases are confirmed (PCR). 8 probable cases – rapid test. Breakdown of ages discussed. Ms. Parent stated data is posted every Thursday from the State. 11 positive cases out of 440 is equal to a 2.5% positivity rate; 8 had 329 tests out of 2.3% positivity rate. Thus, the positivity rate is increasing. It was noted not as many people are getting tested. Documented study – Delta variant can transmit to other people. Worcester County was high transmission but Mendon Upton did not see that transmission rate. 3 weeks ago, 90% of the cases were due to travel. Last 2 weeks, this trend has changed. Individual addresses with positive cases. Ms. Parent also noted Upton at beginning of COVID, did really well and then we had many cases in the community.

Ms. Parent discussed vaccination rates 12 – 15 fully vaccinated are at 55% on 8/12/21; 75% for 16 - 19. She is hoping with the recent FDA approval will increase the vaccination rates. Vaccines keeps public out of the hospitals but there are cases where deaths occur. Masks are not for individual's health but for everyone's health in the community. School Committee work is to keep all students safe. Cases are up ticking and she expects the cases to continue to increase. Estimating 40% of the cases eligible for vaccines are vaccinated, thus breakthrough cases. It was noted again Ms. Parent has been in public health for 27 years and 40 years as a nurse.

IV. ADMINISTRATOR COMMENTS

PreK Tuition Rates, Jennifer D'Angelo, Director of Student Support Services

Ms. D'Angelo presented and overview of the Pre-K programming:

- 2 programs one at each school, 4 day & 5 day
- Last year Memorial – 34 total; Clough – 24 total
- Students' evaluations are conducted
- Current enrollment 29 Memorial (at capacity); 25 at Clough
- This enrollment level allows admittance of 3 years old if learners are identified during the year
- Activities include curriculum sharing, common play, SEL development, academic awareness which is continued into the K curriculum
- Curriculum was reviewed and purchased last year through grant programs and enhances the kindergarten curriculum.

- For the past 15 years, the current rates are \$303 (4 days) / \$378 (5 days).
- Ms. D'Angelo is proposing to increase the rates to \$340 (4 days) / \$435 (5 days).
- It was noted there is a waitlist for the non-disabled students.

School Committed commented it was a good program

Approval of to increase the Rates of Pre-K in the District

MOTION: On a motion of Phil DeZutter, seconded by Erick Brown to increase the Pre-K rates to \$340 (4 days) / \$435 (5 days).

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Jay Byer, Director of Finance and Operations

Jay stated updated revision of Solar proposals were sent to the School Committee members. This represents locking in the rates for the last 12 years at the rate for year 10 instead of year 12. The result in savings is \$300,000. However, it does negate the donation of the dishwasher for Miscoe. Owner of Dighton and Carport solar sites were available to answer questions (remote).

During the discussion, the following was noted:

- Output is 300 watts at the carports.
- 16.1 cent rate for the last 12 years. National Grid is 18 cents. Carports are not a net metering site.
- Smart meter payment goes to contractor. District pays the flat rate and the contractor gets the credits from the State.
- At end of year 20, contract ends in 2036. No longer get the credits from Dighton site. Projected at \$1.3M total benefit at 20 years and \$1.9M with 12-year extension. Annual savings 35%
- Contractor owns all the maintenance and it is done routinely and as needed

Jay Byer recommends the School Committee should move forward with the extension

Approval of to Extend the Solar Contracts until 2036.

MOTION: On a motion of Sean Nicholson, seconded by Phil DeZutter to extend the Solar Contracts until 2036.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Jay Byer also stated he is working on closing out FY2021. He believes the budget is in decent shape and will be helpful for FY2022 budget.

V. SCHOOL COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Policy Subcommittee - EBCFA Face Coverings, JF School Admissions

Vikki Ludwigson stated the Policy Subcommittee met prior to this meeting. She stated 2 policies were reviewed.

For EBCFA, Face Coverings, the subcommittee looked at local data, vaccination data and cases in the community, the updated policy from MASC and the press release from DESE to grant authority to mandate masks. It was noted current policy exempt grades 1 and below. The Policy Subcommittee recommends maintaining the existing policy but remove the line to exempt grade 1

Approval of EBCFA, Face Covering Policy.

MOTION: On a motion of Sean Nicholson, seconded by Phil DeZutter approval EBCFA, Face Coverings Policy

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Vikki Ludwigson stated the JF School Admission Policy needed to be updated to reflect changes made in the Spring to other policies. The update is two parts: 1) Cross reference the three updated policies and 2) Update language to ensure immediate enrollment for the three groups (Homeless, Foster Care and Military).

Approval of JF School Admission Policy Language Changes

MOTION: On a motion of Sean Nicholson, seconded by Phil DeZutter approval of JF, School Admission Policy language changes.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Athletic Fees

Chris Schmidt, Athletic Director, presented the need to adjust athletic fees to the School Committee. Mr. Schmidt commented \$54,000 was cut from the level service athletic program due to the budget issues. He was able to save \$20,000 by not replacing the scoreboards (noted these scoreboards are 25 years old and technology is outdated) since they work. Mr. Schmidt also eliminated a stipend for an assistant indoor track coach.

Thus, the budget is at \$30,000 shortfall. Mr. Schmidt recommends the following to make up the shortfall in the budget:

- \$75 increase across the board in all sports except for Unified Basketball (since not as many games.)
- Tiered system:
 - Football: \$350
 - All sports: \$325
 - Cheerleading: \$300
 - Unified Basketball: \$150
- Co-op sports are not affected by this (ice hockey and swimming) due to being controlled by home school.

School Committed asked how do these fees compare to other Towns? Mr. Schmidt commented this puts MURSD at a higher side by about \$25. He noted other comparable districts have increased fees due to budget constraints as well.

Approval of Increase of Athletic Fees

MOTION: On a motion of Sean Nicholson, seconded by Dorothy Scally to increase the Athletic fees to: Football: \$350, All sports: \$325, Cheerleading: \$300. Unified Basketball: \$150

VOTED: Unanimously approved

Ratification of MOA: Paraprofessionals/ABA Techs and Administrative Assistants
Discussion regarding the contracts for the Paraprofessionals/ABA Techs and Administrative Assistants.

Approval to Ratify the MOAs for Paraprofessionals/ABA Techs and Administrative Assistants

MOTION: On a motion of Vikki Ludwigson, seconded by Dorothy Scally, to ratify the MOAs Paraprofessionals/ABA Techs and Administrative Assistants.

VOTED: Unanimously approved

VII. Other Matters Not Anticipated by The Committee Within 48 Hours of the Posted Meeting

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

Chairperson Kerry Laurence stated she received a request to bargain Health and Safety Protocols. It was noted Dr. Cohen has been meeting with them and working on the draft MOA to bring forward to School Committee.

IX. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Presentation/approval of 2021-2022 District Action Plans
- Ratification of MOA for remaining bargaining units
- Approaches to increase transparency in communications and decisions

X. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: On motion of Vikki Ludwigson, seconded by Dorothy Scally to adjourn
VOTED: Unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.
Minutes by Kelly McElreath