

***MENDON-UPTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT***

School Committee Meeting  
Virtual Meeting  
Monday, June 1, 2020

Committee Present:

Leigh Martin, Sean Nicholson, Phil DeZutter, Vikki Ludwigson, Kerry Laurence, Dorothy Scally

Administration Present:

Joseph Maruszczak, Superintendent of Schools  
Maureen Cohen, Assistant Superintendent  
Dennis Todd, Director of Student Support Services  
Jay Byer, Director of Business & Finance  
Mary Anne Moran, Co-Principal, Nipmuc Regional High School  
Paul Marshall, Assistant Principal, Miscoe Hill Middle School  
Debra Swain, Principal, Memorial Elementary School  
Janice Gallagher, Principal, Clough Elementary School  
David Quinn, Director of Technology Integration

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Sean Nicholson.  
Pledge of Alliance was recited

Chair Nicholson read the following statement: *Consistent with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law MGL Ch. 30A, S. 20 and Regulation 940 CMR 29.10, which allows for remote participation in certain circumstances under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law Regulations, the Mendon-Upton Regional School Committee will be conducting this meeting remotely. In this particular case, all six members of the Committee are participating remotely and virtually through videoconferencing. This is consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 10, 2020, which eased the requirements of having a meeting in a physical space open to the public and having a quorum of the Committee physically present. Any and all votes will be conducted by roll-call votes. Per usual, this meeting will also be livestreamed and recorded.*

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES**

Approval of Agenda

MOTION: On a motion of Leigh Martin, seconded by Kerry Laurence, to approve the agenda.

VOTED:

Phil DeZutter, yes  
Sean Nicholson, yes  
Leigh Martin, yes  
Vikki Ludwigson, yes  
Kerry Laurence, yes  
Dorothy Scally, yes

Approval of Open Session Minutes of May 11, 2020

MOTION: On a motion of Vikki Ludwigson, seconded by Leigh Martin, to approve the Open Session May 11, 2020

VOTED:

Phil DeZutter, yes  
Sean Nicholson, yes  
Leigh Martin, yes  
Vikki Ludwigson, yes  
Kerry Laurence, yes  
Dorothy Scally, yes

Approval of Executive Session Minutes of May 11, 2020

MOTION: On a motion of Kerry Laurence, seconded by Leigh Martin, to approve the Executive Session May 11, 2020

VOTED:

Phil DeZutter, yes  
Sean Nicholson, yes  
Leigh Martin, yes  
Vikki Ludwigson, yes  
Kerry Laurence, yes  
Dorothy Scally, yes

**II. COMMUNITY COMMENTS - NA**

**III. SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS**

*DESE Guidance on High School Graduation Ceremonies*

Dr. Maruszczak referenced the guidance issued by DESE and the plans made for Class of 2020 graduation is consistent with the policies. Graduations can begin on July 19 as long as current trends continue. Nipmuc's ceremony will have social distancing and be held on the front athletic field. Graduates will be 6 feet apart and seating around the field will be distanced and for immediate family only. The event will probably be streamlined. Administration will be looking at the trends and getting feedback from local Board of Health as the date approaches. Feedback from Seniors is to have some type of senior week and Dr. Maruszczak is pleased the in-person graduation is a viable option at this point.

*MCAS/Competency Determination for High School Students*

Dr. Maruszczak informed the School Committee DESE is focused on High School MCAS for next year due to requirement for graduation. For members of the Class of 2020, DESE is waiving the requirement and the district can make the determination. It was noted all class members of 2020 had passed the MCAS requirement. However, for the current freshman class, the biology MCAS will not be required in future years and as long as the students pass biology, they will be able to graduate. The current 10<sup>th</sup> grade could be taking MCAS in the fall depending on school reopening.

*Provision of 1/12 Budget*

Dr. Maruszczak stated paperwork is filed with the State for the 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget. Most school districts will be using this for budget process. MURSD is familiar with this type of budgeting. Jay Byer has submitted excel sheet to the State by level funding the revenue from FY20. If both member towns approve budget, then the 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget will not be needed. State aid is being level funded from FY20 but is unknown if that will be the final amount. Thus, once State aid is approved at some point, the District will need to look at the budget.

### *Planning for PPE*

Within the next couple of weeks, plans will be distributed for re-entry in the Fall. Ed Davis (former BPD Commissioner) has been appointed as the point person. It is being stressed for school district to purchase PPE since students will need to have masks, sanitizer, thermal scanners, no touch scanners among other items. There are concerns about supply chain and would like to move forward as soon as possible with the purchase so there will be no delay in the fall. Dr. Maruszczak had a productive conversation with Derek Brindisi (Upton Town Manager) to compile the list of needed supplies that could be funded by each Town's CARES Act. This will be an in-depth conversation over the next couple of months and he will keep the School Committee updated.

## **IV. OLD BUSINESS**

### *MURSD Golden Apple Award Discussion*

Dr. Maruszczak added this item to the agenda. It has been discussed in the past to the Golden Apple award once a year with an increase in the number of awards. With 3 weeks left in the year, Dr. Maruszczak is advocating to continue with the plans for the Golden Apple in order to recognize staff members for their efforts. Kerry Laurence is the Chair of the Committee. Dr. Maruszczak will send the nominations out and asked for them to be returned in a week so the awards could be announced at the June 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. It was noted it would be nice to recognize staff members.

## **V. NEW BUSINESS**

### *FY21 Budget Reductions and Reduction in Force in Light of Revenue Uncertainty*

Dr. Maruszczak presented a presentation on the FY21 budget. Highlights of the presentation follows:

- MURSD district is not alone in this crisis
- News video showed to give school committee context on what is happening across the Commonwealth. It was noted the loss of revenue will result in teacher layoffs.
- Original certified budget amount of \$39,961,160 (6.99% increase over FY20) on March 9 and included strategic investments; would have required a prop 2 1/2 in both towns totaling 2.5M combined; in response to COVID, recertified the budget to \$37,137,486 (1.97% increase over FY20)
- Recertified is level services – keeping staff and services
- \$1,823,674 less than the original budget
- Savings included removing investments, savings on transportation and other
- The recertified budget assumed level state funding. The district was anticipating an increase of \$116k based on Governor's proposal.
- Mendon is still looking at an override of \$271,802
- Tremendous uncertainty in the budget to due local funding (-63%) and state funding (-37%) is unknown and there has been zero guidance.
- COVID is not only a health crisis, it is also an economic crisis.
- Worst case scenario is loss of revenue: 10% decrease in State Funding = \$1,244,876; 10% decrease in Regional Transportation reimbursement = \$114,585; Mendon override failure = \$527,595 for a total of \$1,887,056 decrease in revenue.
- Due to the uncertainty, District needs to plan for all scenarios. This includes making budget cuts to the operational budget. A total of \$350K were cut. Materials, supplies, PD, stipends, athletics supplies and transportation. Huge amount of budget is salaries, benefits and fixed cost so difficult to find cuts.
- Thus, staff cuts may be needed across all job areas.
- Per teacher contract, notification is needed on or before June 1 (today)

- Most cuts were based on seniority and non-professional status teachers (3 years or less of service).
- Bumping process would have been implemented to fill critical areas
- 28 positions were identified and this could devastate the district.
- Reemphasized this is the worst-case scenario and there is a chance it may not happen. Due to the uncertainty with the pandemic, there is much that is unknown. Best case scenario is level fund State aid for FY20, the district would remain whole. This scenario is not unreasonable and based on great recession of 08/09, the State continued its commitment to Chapter 70 funding.
- Cuts at HP Clough Elementary School: 1.0 FTE 4th Grade Teacher, 3.0 FTE Special Education Teachers, 1.0 FTE Reading Specialist, 1.0 FTE Music Teacher
- Cuts at Memorial Elementary School: 1.0 FTE 1st Grade Teacher (SI), 2.0 FTE Special Education Teachers, 1.0 FTE Reading Specialist, 2.0 FTE ABA Technicians, Non-replacement of 2.0 FTE Classroom Teachers
- Cuts at Miscoe Hill Middle School: 1.0 FTE 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher, 1.0 FTE 8th Grade Science Teacher, 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher, 1.0 FTE Speech Language Pathologist, 1.4 FTE World Language Teachers, 2.0 FTE Music Teachers, Non-replacement of 2.0 FTE Teachers (Technology & Special Education)
- Cuts at Nipmuc Regional High School: 3.0 FTE English Teachers, 1.0 FTE Math Teacher, 1.0 FTE Science Teacher, 1.0 FTE Career, Community & Innovation Coordinator, 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher, Non-replacement of 2.0 FTE Teachers (Science and Special Education) and 1.0 FTE Admin Ass't
- Cuts at District-Wide: 1.0 FTE Technology Integration Administrator, 1.0 FTE Technology Technician, 1.0 FTE ELL Teacher
- Cuts mean increased class size especially for grades 3,4, 7,8 (about 30) and the high school
- Support struggling learners and diminishing inclusion and RTL support greatly impacted by the cuts
- Nipmuc students will have one less class and institute study halls in lieu of extra elective
- Less electives at Miscoe and Nipmuc as well as art, music and foreign language
- Extra co- curricular activities minimized and sports decreased
- Again, worst case scenario but if need to cut \$2M out of the budget, they are needed. It will be painful and devastate the district and all recent progress will be lost
- This is the time our students will need the support and structure that our professional staff give them
- Timeline: Mendon override is next week at Town Election and Town Meeting and this represents 30% of the uncertainty.
- State budget will be late July or later.
- Critical need to vote on 6/9 and 6/29 and correspond with State and Congressional legislators to remind them of the strong historical commitment to Chapter 70.
- Congressional House approve \$3T HEROS Act that would backfill state and local budgets (\$1T)
- SC and District must develop contingency plans on next steps
- Every tool should be used, our community values the quality of education that our children receive.
- Phil DeZutter: if the override fails, SC could consider having a joint Town Meeting as a tool to bring the issue to the broader community as a last resort if Mendon cannot rework their Town budget.
- Vikki Ludwigson: if override passes however State funding is cut, is there an opportunity to ask the Town. It definitely could be a conversation with the Town due to the extraordinary circumstances.
- Sean Nicholson: stunning that budget could be unknown until July and thousands of teachers could be laid off.

- Dr. Maruszczak: this is about survival and maintaining what we have.
- Phil DeZutter: Can we use the capital stabilization to assist with budget? Needs to be capital expenditures based on how the account was established.
- Phil DeZutter: it is important to hold the line with the Towns to assist the School if Chapter 70 is cut substantially

Questions from community included but not limited to the following:

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade ceremony: Plan is to conduct it as a virtual ceremony on June 19
- % special education cut? Difficult to determine at this point due to NPS status and the bumping process. Commitment to inclusion has been made. 20% with pink slips at this point but will be revisited
- Consider positions not in contact with students: administration team of 11 members is low due to the size of district. Co-principals results in no assistant principals resulting in 2 administrations for over 600 students. Asst Superintendent is in charge of professional development as well as manages entitlement and grants and invaluable member of the team due to her management and direct funding. It was noted there is an administration cut.
- District was slated to receive \$0 funding for Student Opportunity Act where Milford was getting \$6M. Based on the crisis, SOA would probably be not funded.
- Is Upton's budget dependent on Mendon's override? Yes, due to the proportional funding of the 2 Towns.
- Statement: Special Ed cuts is devastating and Administration cuts should be considered
- How to cut teachers if CDC is recommending reduced class sizes due to social distancing? Unknown what it is going look like in the fall.
- Special Ed cuts how will IEPs be supported? District will need to reorganize teachers based on experience and inclusion model may not be able to be fully implemented and students could be pulled out of classrooms for services.
- FY2021 does not include any expenditures for PPE that will be required. District is still looking for guidance from DESE
- How to help influence Chapter 70 funding? Dr. Maruszczak will send out communications to assist residents. Our State reps fully understand the difficulty of the district and are responsive.
- Statement: Special Ed teachers are legally attached to students and difficult to lay off
- Out of district students total 31 students. Support Services director serves as out of district coordinator and there is substantial success with these students.
- What are Towns doing to bring in more revenue? Unknown by the district and SC recommends that discussion is for Town officials
- Could Town sell assets to bring in more revenue? Needs to be addressed by Towns.
- Could there be more cuts depending on State funding? District chose the 10% cut number but it is possible Chapter 70 could be cut more.
- Inclusion is least restrictive but not legal
- How does this affect accreditation for high schools? Dr. Maruszczak has concerns about accreditation status. The agency looks at the effort made locally to fund the schools. Pandemic event will apply to many school districts across the 6 states. Nipmuc has the highest marks of quality based on the last assessment. The immediate is the local override.
- If override passes in Mendon, 8 to 9 positions would NOT be cut.
- Was the union asked for concessions to save positions? SC is doing its due diligence.
- Parents will receive email to send to state legislators to support level funding chapter 70

- Based on average home in Mendon, override will result will be \$114 increase per year (less than \$10 per month)
- Tax base in both communities is over 95% of residential. Amount of funds available due to Prop 2 1/2 is about \$500K increase to fund increases for Town and School services. There has been less and less State funding and the Towns need to pay more and it is difficult to effectively fund the school budget without an override every 4 or 5 years.
- District has started the conversation with Towns to pay for the PPE through CARES Act and Town Managers are cooperating.
- Special Ed pull out model, IEP would need to be rewritten and challenging.
- Local businesses for fundraising to close the gap in funding? District need outside the box funding but this is a substantial gap and fundraising can be difficult.
- Parents are most impactful when participating in Town Elections and Town Meetings.

## **VI. CORRESPONDENCE**

- From NEASC: Direct response to the substantial change and their continued accreditation due to the position being funded. However, since this report, the position is no longer funded so it remains to be seen what happens.

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

## **VIII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- Updates Re. Fall Re-Entry: June 22

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION: On motion of Sean Nicholson, seconded by Leigh Martin to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, section 21(a), exemption #3, to discuss strategy with respect to a Memorandum of Agreement with MURTA, because doing so in open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee. (The Committee will not return to open session.)

### VOTED:

Phil DeZutter, yes  
 Sean Nicholson, yes  
 Leigh Martin, yes  
 Vikki Ludwigson, yes  
 Kerry Laurence, yes

Meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.  
 Minutes by Kelly McElreath