

MINUTES
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Location: School Committee Room
February 24, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

In attendance:

George Scobie
Jessie Harrington
Gail Holloway arrived at 6:33 p.m.
Dottie Kauffman
Meghan McCrillis

Casey Handfield Jasmyn Gates
Beth Chamberland Aaron Zheng ... absent
Cecelia Wirzbicki
Dan Delongchamp joined at 6:34 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

At 6:30 p.m., Mr. Scobie called the meeting to order and asked if anyone else was recording the meeting; there being none, he asked that everyone join him in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS: None

SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS: None

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES INTRODUCTION / REPORT

Aaron Zheng and Jasmyn Gates

Jasmyn reported that everything was going really well especially coming back from break which was very much needed; regarding her complaint that all photos were blocked on student iPads. She spoke to Mr. Bouvier about it and he was able to fix it and everything is now back to normal which is really great. She appreciated that getting take care of. Other than that, students were falling behind sticking with COVID guidelines; however, teachers are becoming stricter again with that. Students are doing really well despite everything that is going on; they are doing their best and staying motivated and teachers are doing what they can to help that. Aaron was absent.

MINUTES: 2/3/2021 for Approval

Dr. McCrillis made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 3rd meeting; Mrs. Holloway seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

COVID Update

DR. Handfield reported that we continue to see a decrease in positive cases and close contacts since the return from holiday break. We were also notified on February 18th that the Town will no longer receive or administer vaccines. Employees will have to seek out their own vaccinations. This is a change in plans

since our last meeting and not necessarily the news that we wanted; however, we will work with it - we don't have a choice.

The District is in discussions with school personnel regarding the reevaluation of our current hybrid model, and now with news from the Commissioner of Education, there will be an accelerated student return in April. Dr. Handfield noted that it was premature for him to comment on plans right now as there are lots of moving pieces. Just as negotiations took some time for a return at the start of the year, potentially moving forward with any further in-person learning also takes time to discuss and come to agreement. We hope to have something to share with the community the first week in March.

COVID Pool Testing Initiative

Following-up on a previous conversation regarding pool testing, Dr. Handfield shared that we have decided not to move in the direction of COVID pool testing. We are comfortable with our current procedures for responding to the COVID crisis. After evaluating this initiative further with our nurses, the time and cost associated with this initiative, coupled with other logistics to make it work, we do not see any more or less of a benefit compared to what we have in place.

Fall 2/Spring Athletic Update Information

Dr. Handfield notified the Committee that we are moving forward with the "Fall 2" and spring athletic seasons. "Fall 2" includes football, cheerleading, indoor track (which will be outside), and unified basketball. We also anticipate moving ahead with the spring athletic season, but will discuss that as spring approaches. The safety plan for Fall 2 has been reviewed by the Town Director for Health and Inspectional Services. Mr. Delongchamp was present to review the safety plans for each sport and take any questions the Committee had for him.

Mr. Delongchamp thanked the Committee for the chance to sit in on their thoughtful conversation on homework and students mental health. It is an incredible challenge. Athletic Director, Brian Davis, was in attendance for moral support. Mr. Delongchamp noted that the season began on Monday, February 22nd, for football and cheerleading (which would not have a competitive cheering season), with lots of conversations having been held with Dr. Handfield and Mr. Davis to roll it out.

Unified Basketball and cheering will begin on Monday with a meeting having been held with coaches and parents outlining the schedule. Indoor track will begin on March 15th but it will be held outside!

APS Field Usage

Dr. Handfield shared that with athletics resuming outdoors, we are fielding requests from outside groups to utilize our facilities across the District. Auburn Youth Soccer and Auburn/Worcester Lacrosse (operated by Auburn), and eventually Auburn Little League and Auburn Fastpitch will be looking to access the fields. He sought a motion from the Committee to open the fields to these groups.

Dr. McCrillis made a motion to open the APS athletic fields for use contingent upon an organization's completion of all relevant paperwork, adherence to all school committee policies and approval from the Superintendent. Mrs. Holloway seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

Mr. Scobie commented on the difference of cancelling the hockey/basketball vs. holding the Fall 2 season, this because COVID positive numbers are down. We are going in a positive direction.

NEW BUSINESS:

2021-2022 School Year Calendar

Dr. Handfield shared that we are still working out the final details of the 2021-2022 school year; however, the approximate start date, vacations, and other traditional breaks will remain intact next year. We are still finalizing PD days and a couple of other details. He anticipated the calendar coming forward for the Committee's approval at the next meeting in two weeks.

FY '22 BUDGET Update

Dr. Handfield noted that preliminary numbers from the Governor's House One are out and they are kind of a surprise (but not really). We anticipated in October based on information shared through our professional organization that we would be held harmless regarding October 1 enrollment this year. However, that was not the case. We are down 90 students this year which currently impacts our projected Chapter 70 number. We have realized an additional \$78,000 in Chapter 70 aid for next fiscal year. This is not unique to Auburn, every district except select urban centers received similar Chapter 70 allotments. We built our budget based on this year's current Chapter 70 number so we are alright. Keep in mind that this is the "floor." The budget still needs to go through the House and Senate so this number could increase, but we are not planning on that.

Dr. Handfield also shared that the Board of Selectmen voted to send the School Department's draft budget to the Finance Committee at their meeting on February 22nd, which is good news.

TEACHING/LEARNING REPORT:

Intervention Survey

Dr. Chamberland reported that COVID 19, and the subsequent change in the structure of school since March of 2020, has alerted us to the possibility that we may have more students who present with learning gaps in the coming year even though we continue to provide ongoing interventions and remediation. In an effort to be proactive, Mrs. Reidy, the Director of Pupil Services and Dr. Chamberland have created an Intervention Survey. This survey has been distributed to special educators, reading specialists and principals with the goal being to ensure we have the training, materials, and programs necessary to address any identified gaps in learning for students. The information gathered will help to determine summer programming as well as ongoing interventions for students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions in order to be successful in school. We are very interested in ensuring we have a wide variety of tools with which to use to support our students. Once the results of the survey are compiled, we will create an action plan for next steps. Dr. Chamberland will keep the Committee apprised.

Massachusetts Literacy Guide

Dr. Chamberland shared that Mass Literacy, through DESE, is a statewide effort to empower educators with the evidence-based practices for literacy that all students need. Evidence-based instruction, provided within schools and classrooms that are culturally responsive and sustaining, will put our youngest students on a path toward literacy for life. Five training sessions are being offered to all educators, PreK-grade 3. It is our hope that this resource will help us to further supplement our already robust literacy programming.

Massachusetts Partnership for Youth

As noted in a previous meeting, Dr. Chamberland noted that we have recently obtained a membership with the Massachusetts Partnership for Youth. Many staff members have already taken advantage of frequently offered webinars. In addition, our membership provides us with 5 in-service professional development offerings. In collaboration with the principals, we have identified these 5 that we will pursue for this school year (Creating an Anti-Racist Classroom, Cultural Proficiency, Strategies for Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms, Anxiety and School Performance, Mindfulness in the Age of Digital Distraction).

BUSINESS/FINANCIAL REPORT:

Year to Date Budget Report

Mrs. Wirzbicki provided a year to date budget report.

Budget Transfers

Mrs. Wirzbicki provided budget transfers between the same series for your information as well as transfers between different series requiring a vote of approval.

Mrs. Harrington made a motion to approve the transfers between the series as presented; Mrs. Holloway seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.

Bus Application for 2021-2022 School Year

Mrs. Wirzbicki shared that the bus application for next school year has been shared with all families via One Call emails and will continue to be. Hard copies will be sent home with Tri II report cards at the end of March and it has been posted on the website.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

At 7:57 p.m., Mrs. Holloway made a motion to enter Executive Session per MGL Chapter 30, section 21 (a)(2) to conduct strategies for negotiations with union and non-union personnel, namely business assistants and technical support and then to adjourn for the evening; Dr. McCrillis seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken:

Roll call vote: Dr. McCrillis - Yes; Mrs. Kauffman - Yes; Mrs. Holloway - Yes; Mrs. Harrington - Yes; Mr. Scobie - Yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Ailaine Zautner
Recording Secretary

Referenced Documents:

Minutes from 2/3/21
Year to Budget Report
Transfers