

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

George Scobie
Jessie Harrington
Gail Holloway joined at 6:40 p.m.
Dottie Kauffman
Meghan McCrillis

Casey Handfield Aaron Zheng - absent
Beth Chamberland Jasmyn Gates
Cecelia Wirzbicki

CALL TO ORDER:

At 6:33 p.m., Mr. Scobie called the meeting to order. Attendance was taken.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS:

SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS:

Dr. Handfield wished everyone a Happy New Year then shared that Donald E. Johnson, 89, of Auburn passed away on Wednesday, December 9, 2020 at Lifecare Center of Auburn following a period of declining health. Don served for many years as the head custodian at the Julia Bancroft School. He leaves his wife of 67 years, Ruth, his daughter, Kathryn Brunelle, and her husband and a grandson, Timothy Brunelle. Dr. Handfield asked that everyone join him in a moment of silence in Don's memory.

"Donors Choose"

Dr. Handfield reported that Mr. Davis, Athletic Director, recently informed him that the (Facebook) community helped to raise over \$600 through a post by Nicole LePrevost, Coach of the Unified Basketball team, on the Town of Auburn's Facebook page. Community members used "Donors Choose" to support the unified athletic program which will help pay for rubber basketball and sports dots that they will use to run some of their unified season "virtually"! Ms. LePrevost reported that "We are so thankful to them." On behalf of the Unified Athletes, Dr. Handfield thanked the Facebook community too! He noted that it was a terrific thing that they did and congratulated Ms. LePrevost for finding a unique way to help the unified athletes.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES INTRODUCTION / REPORT

Aaron Zheng and Jasmyn Gates

Aaron was unable to attend the meeting. Jasmyn reported that things are still going well but she noted that she does think it is more difficult, from a student's perspective, to find motivation to get up and stay on track and then come home and do their final class at home. She noted that teachers have been very understanding and offering a little bit of leeway in getting things turned in. Everyone's a little tired of what's going on but what other option do we have? Jasmyn also noted that attendance was starting to get rough at the end of the year but she feels that this week students are pushing themselves to stick at it.

She did report that there was a hiccup with a new filter that was recently added to the iPads causing a problem with photographs or clip art and pictures, this over the last month or so.

MINUTES: 11/24/2020 and 12/9/2020 for Approval

Mrs. Harrington made a motion to approve the minutes of both the November 24th and December 9th meetings; Mrs. Holloway 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

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

COVID Update

Dr. Handfield noted that, as the Committee is aware, after Thanksgiving we had a large rise in COVID positive cases and quarantined faculty, staff and students, placing a strain on our ability to keep buildings open and remote programs going. Dr. Handfield and Dr. Chamberland were in buildings assisting with coverage. They were hoping to get to the holiday break but that did not happen. Even with moving our remote period up to December 21st, we had to close two schools on Friday, December 18th due to lack of available staffing. We are reviewing ZippSlip data this week and have every intention of resuming in-person, hybrid instruction on January 11th. The same three considerations are in effect regarding closure: (a) we do not have the staff to open safely, (b) we have an event that we cannot adequately trace, and/or (c) something catastrophic happens out of our control. We will continue to send letters as appropriate. We also have our dashboard up on our website. Dr. Handfield stated that he would continue to do his best to give the school community as much notice as possible if a closure in a building or buildings must occur.

He provided the COVID positive numbers thus far this week: Twenty on Monday, zero on Tuesday and 3 that day, Wednesday. His hope was that we continue in the right direction.

Dr. Handfield also shared that when faculty, staff, and students return next week, they will see the AtmosAir Units in their classrooms. Merv-13 filters are also installed. He noted that these were the Cadillac of air filters! He thanked Mr. Fahey and the custodial staff for their work in getting these into buildings, noting that our faculty, staff and students will enjoy an additional layer of security during the most difficult time of the COVID crisis. He added that the timing was perfect, albeit a bit later than we would have liked.

Mrs. Kauffman asked if it would be possible to get a letter from the Director of Health, Darlene Coyle, about how much worse things are in Auburn than the rest of the state? Dr. Handfield stated that Department of Health agrees that our kids should be in school and that transmission is not happening in schools. They are really pleased with the way we are handling things.

Grant from Walmart

Dr. Handfield shared with the Committee that Sarah Lemovitz, Preschool Nurse, once again wrote a grant to support student health and nursing offices in the Auburn Public Schools through the Walmart Community Grants Team. Her grant was approved and she will receive a check in the amount of \$2000.00. He thanked Sarah for going above and beyond and noted that it was his recommendation that the Committee accept this award with gratitude.

Mrs. Holloway made a motion to accept the award of \$2,000 from Walmart to support student health and the nursing offices of the Auburn Public Schools; 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

Donation to Food Services

Dr. Handfield shared that Mrs. Janice King notified him that Ms. Donna Bacon has once again donated \$50 to the food Service gift account which is earmarked for funding students' lunch debt. A thank you letter to her from Mrs. King was included in the School Committee packet and it was his recommendation that the Committee approve this donation with gratitude for Donna's continued generosity.

Mrs. Holloway made a motion to accept with gratitude the donation of \$50 towards the Food Service Gift Account from Ms. Donna Bacon; Mrs. Harrington 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

Donation of Augmented Reality Sandbox

Dr. Handfield shared that the Ruffli Family, on behalf of Cisco Systems, and due to corporate downsizing, had donated an Augmented Reality Sandbox to the District. This will be initially housed at Auburn Middle School.

Dr. Handfield explained that the Augmented Reality Sandbox is the result of an NSF-funded project on informal science education for freshwater lake and watershed science developed by the UC Davis' W.M. Keck Center for Active Visualization in the Earth Sciences (KeckCAVES), together with the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, Lawrence Hall of Science, and ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center.

The project combines 3D visualization applications with a hands-on sandbox exhibit to teach earth science concepts. The augmented reality (AR) sandbox allows users to create topography models by shaping real sand, which is then augmented in real time by an elevation color map, topographic contour lines, and simulated water. The system teaches geographic, geologic, and hydrologic concepts such as how to read a topography map, the meaning of contour lines, watersheds, catchment areas, levees, etc. He shared a short video on an AR sandbox being used.

Mrs. Harrington made a motion to accept the Augmented Reality Sandbox from the Ruffli family with thanks; 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

SWCEC Annual Report, Financial Statement FY 21 and Quarterly Report for the Period July 1, 2020 through October 1, 2020

For information purposes, Dr. Handfield presented the Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative's FY 2020 Annual Report, the FY 2020 Approved Financial Statements and the FY 21 first quarter report for the period of July 1 through October 1, 2020. He noted that these documents do not need a vote to approve, but as a member district it is required that they are shared with the Committee and accepted by them.

Mrs. Holloway made a motion to accept the SWCEC's FY 20 Annual Report; the FY 2020 Approved Financial Statements and the FY 21 first quarter report; Mrs. Harrington 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

Clarification Regarding BOH and APS

Dr. Handfield explained that at the beginning of December, AHS Principal, Mr. Delongchamp, notified the high school community that athletics for the winter season had regrettably been cancelled. In his notice to the AHS community he stated, "Regrettably we must inform you that we will not be participating in a winter sports season (Basketball and Hockey) this school year. After many discussions and meetings with our School Committee, Dr. Handfield, and our Board of Health, it was apparent that there are far too many risks in participation." In speaking with the Town Administration, it was brought to Dr. Handfield's attention that the chairman of the Board of Health took exception to this statement as it implied from his perspective that the Board of Health felt there should not be winter athletics this year. Dr. Handfield clarified that this is not accurate. When the APS desires to do something that could impact the health of our school and/or town community, we seek advice and guidance from the Town Director of Health and Inspectional Services, Darlene Coyle. Her office has, and continues to remain neutral, in any and all matters, but rather seeks to work with the schools to see if something can be done safely. He apologized for the misunderstanding this may have caused among some members of the community.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

FY '22 Draft Budget

Dr. Handfield noted that as stated at our meeting of December 9, 2020, this year's budget presentation was going to take place in two parts. On December 9th, the Committee heard from the principals and department heads regarding accomplishments and expected accomplishments in FY'21 and FY'22. He provided a PowerPoint presentation of the rest of the items that comprise the FY'22 budget and requested that the Committee make a motion to send a DRAFT FY'22 number forward to Town Administration at this evening's meeting.

With the Chair offering the Committee's thanks to the Leadership Team for putting this together from them, Mrs. Kauffman made a motion to approve the FY'22 DRAFT school budget number of \$27,988,540.45 and to forward

this DRAFT number to Town Administration to comply with Town Charter requirements; Mrs. Holloway 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

NEW BUSINESS:

Approval of School Choice for the 2021-2022 School Year

Dr. Handfield noted that per Massachusetts General Law, Massachusetts school districts are required to vote on continuance of school choice in their district. He stated that school choice has been an important aspect of our school budget for the last decade. We have also enjoyed welcoming wonderful students and families to the District through the School Choice program. As we are preparing the FY'22 budget, it was his recommendation that we continue the school choice program. The numbers of students to be accepted into the District will be determined as we get closer to March and demographics are finalized for next year.

Dr. McCrillis made a motion to continue the school choice program in the Auburn Public Schools and to allow the Superintendent to decide what the number of students into the District will be after reviewing demographic data more closely; Mrs. Holloway 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

TEACHING/LEARNING REPORT:

Family and Staff Surveys

Dr. Chamberland shared that the family surveys show a vast majority of families are pleased with their child's learning experience. The survey results indicated 83% or more of our families are satisfied with in-person learning and the learning platforms are well organized and easy to navigate. 87% or more notes that the teacher provides regular feedback to their child and 91% indicate their child has access to extra help when needed. Over 80% note that we have just the right amount of safety measures and 98% find the communication from schools somewhat or extremely helpful.

Staff across the District similarly reflects a vast majority of staff are satisfied with the learning and safety climate in schools. Over 80% of staff members feel that the learning environment for students is effective and they are able to engage students in the learning with 85% of staff reporting the remote learning tools available to them are effective. 97% of staff report being somewhat or extremely satisfied with the support received from school leadership and 84% being very satisfied with the communications received from both the school and District. Teachers' primary request for professional development was in the area of social-emotional learning while support staff primary request was in the area of use of technology.

Dr. Chamberland noted that in general everyone is happy with how things are going, it's well in the positive range but everyone wants it to be more normal, of course!

Attendance Data on the COVID 19 Dashboard

Dr. Chamberland shared that in our continued efforts to be transparent related to the impact of COVID 19 on our schools, we have added a second page to the COVID 19 Dashboard for the Committee's review. This data is organized by cohort.

Structured Learning Time Survey from DESE

Dr. Chamberland shared that DESE continues to provide school districts with guidance related to the structure of learning environments this school year. Several weeks ago, all districts were required to complete a survey for DESE related to the amount of in-person or synchronous learning time that was available to students within the District. For survey purposes, data was provided for grades 1, 4, 7 and 10. We were also required to identify a predominant learning model for the District, in our case that would be hybrid as all students have the opportunity to attend in-person if they choose. Since the gathering of this data, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has issued new regulations for the provision of in-person or synchronous learning that go into effect on January 19, 2020. These regulations apply to students in grades 1-12. As a predominantly hybrid district, we are required to provide 35 hours of in-person or synchronous learning over a two week period to our students. We are also

required to have at least one live daily check in with students. The report received from DESE, which was included in the members' packets, indicates that we have met this requirement.

BUSINESS/FINANCIAL REPORT:

CIP Amendments

Mrs. Wirzbicki shared that on December 10, 2020, Superintendent Handfield, Mr. Fahey and she met with Town Manager Jacobson and CFO Kazanovicz to discuss the School Department's Capital Improvement Plan. We discussed the possibility of switching out some of the projects slated for FY22 that could be pushed out a year to make room for some of the air quality improvements listed for FY2026. Mr. Fahey and I reviewed the 5-year Capital Plan as previously approved and made some changes to reflect the addition of air quality improvement projects to be completed in FY22. The revised FY22 CIP document is included in the packet and requires a vote of approval from the Committee.

Mrs. Kauffman made a motion to approve the Revised FY22 CIP as presented by the Facilities Director and Business Manager; Mrs. Holloway 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

A question was posed regarding the proposed Flooring updates at AHS. This was the carpeting in the main hallways which after 15 years of constant use needs to be replaced.

Year to Date Budget Report as of December 22, 2020

Mrs. Wirzbicki provided a year to date budget report.

Budget Transfers

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

Mrs. Kauffman made a motion to approve the transfers between the series as presented; 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

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to discuss, at 8:19 p.m., Mrs. Kauffman made a motion 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 of 11/24 and 12/9/2020;
AtmosAir™ Lab Study Report;
Thank you to Donna Bacon;
SWCEC Annual Report/Financial Statements/First Quarter Report;
Supt. Budget PPT;
DESE SLT Results;
COVID Charts;
FY22 CIP Amendment;
Year to Date Budget Report;
Budget Transfers.