

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, October 22, 2020
Final Minutes

Present: Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Steve Sullivan, Jen Malcolm-Brown, members; Dan Hayes, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Dan at 7:00 P.M.

Dan noted the procedure for participating in public hearing: those wishing to speak will raise their hand, virtually or visually, to enter the speaking order.

B. Public Hearings:

(Members of the public are identified here as “Public.”) Dan invited members of the public to share their feelings, concerns, questions, and thoughts.

Public identified herself as a parent of a student at school as well as an educator. It has been a really hard first few months of school for her child; in particular, the remote learning model seems impossible for a 5-year-old even as their teacher is doing an excellent job. It seems to be undermining her child’s sense of the school as a positive place they would want to be involved in.

Public identified herself as the parent of a Preschooler. SES is absolutely amazing and they’re in love with the school, but she worries that her child is not able to get the full benefit of in-person support they need.

A teacher at SES read from a letter signed by 21 SES teachers that advocates against moving into a hybrid phase due to the serious safety concerns posed by COVID. They recognize that the lack of child care is a serious strain on parents now, but making the change from remote to hybrid now would disrupt the established routine of remote learning, which does maintain connections among students and teachers as well as provides high-quality learning opportunities, though it is not a perfect learning modality.

A member of the Shutesbury PTO, also a parent of SES students, praised SES for how staff have been able to respond positively to the constraints of the pandemic. She decided that her children would stay home and do remote learning regardless of the school’s plans. Her family is in a position in which they thought they could weather the pandemic in isolation and just participate in remote learning. Amherst just decided to return to a remote leaning model starting next Monday, so why are we thinking of proceeding to the hybrid phase? We will continue with remote learning for our family.

Norene Pease, Chair of the Board of Health, spoke next. She empathized with everyone’s needs, especially students who have special needs. She asked Arleen Read, another member of the BOH, to speak next.

Arleen spoke about the need to interpret the public health data out there in the right way, as well to be able to make decisions quickly. None of the BOH have experience interpreting this kind of data, so it will take some time as well as guidance from various sources. She thinks she has found the way to use the public health data accurately for Shutesbury. Right now, the infection rates in Franklin and Hampshire Counties are well below the thresholds laid out in the metrics from the state. The BOH plans to communicate with SES frequently about where we stand with these metrics. Guidance from the state indicates that 3-week

changes in rates should be used when making decisions to alter Reopening Plans, not 1-week changes. Hampshire County's data includes that from Amherst, whose post-secondary population adds a weight to the rates that doesn't necessarily impact SES or any other elementary school in the area. Jackie said that we used the same metrics as all the other schools in Franklin and Hampshire Counties, but Amherst uses some different metrics. It's her understanding that Amherst is going back to remote learning because of upticks in surrounding counties. Because we're a small town, we're either classified as gray (<5 cases) or red (>5 cases). We can't simply follow what Amherst does because they have different elements in their Reopening Plan. Steve confirmed that Amherst decisions are guided by the cases in the surrounding counties as well, which is not how we calculate our metrics.

Dan thanked the BOH for all their help and communication on this serious issue. Jackie echoed her gratitude for their support and receptivity. Dan also thanked the teachers who expressed their view in the letter and promised that SSC would consider all these perspectives; this is the time to work together, not adversarially. Norene added that the BOH will be available to make decisions and communicate those to SES if the data changes abruptly. She affirmed their commitment to communicate on a daily business with school leadership.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: None.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

Payroll

#307: \$72,542.58

#308: \$70,063.34

#3006: \$11,611.74

#3007: \$44,150.56

#3008: \$1,140.80

#3009: \$8,858.55

STEVE MOVED TO APPROVE THE WARRANTS AS REPORTED. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

E. Approval of Minutes from September 17, 2020:

STEVE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 17, 2020. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. 2020 Reopening: Metrics for the Return to School:

Dan noted that we are not voting on a return to school tonight, but are discussing plans and seeking public input. (See Public Hearings above for these comments).

Jackie then shared data gathered in a survey sent out to SES families, which all but one family responded to. There's essentially a 60/40 split in favor of a hybrid model, although only a very few respondents are

confident in their choice. There is a stark difference between our survey and those sent out to other U#28 towns, where the hybrid model is more heavily favored. She's not sure how to interpret this difference; perhaps SES families are surprised by the quality of the virtual learning model. As for staff, the clear majority favor remote learning over the hybrid model. Jackie discussed our substantial handbook for hybrid learning, which details every procedure. We're the only school she knows of that has separate entrances and exits for each class, and each class will have its own bathroom (props to our custodian-mapmaker for his awesome maps). We are spacing desks six feet apart and are planning to limit rooms to 10 students apiece. The SES Air Ventilation Report prepared by Jamrog indicates that every classroom meets or exceeds the recommended cycles/hour rate.

Jackie concluded by saying that we don't quite know what we would do if teachers have to teach both in person and remotely to different portions of their classes; we'd have to get creative, but we don't have a solid plan right now. Dan thanked Jackie and all the parents, teachers, and families who participated in the survey.

Steve asked Jackie how she came up with the 10-student limit per room; Jackie said that as a teacher, that's what would feel best to her. She also wanted to come up with a plan that would make parents feel their kids would be safe. It doesn't have to be 10; it can be changed. But she thinks it's appreciated by a lot of people. Steve agreed that you can't put the onus on teachers of simultaneously teaching hybrid and remote, but how do we balance the 60/40 split? The communication he's getting from Amherst families is that they're all stressed out over the change back to remote learning, which was already hard on them from this spring. That stress and anticipated stress might explain why there's a much stronger preference for hybrid in Amherst.

Public asked why we're starting with half-days in the hybrid model. Also, while her children are doing well with their IEP accommodations, their moods are plummeting because their social needs are not getting met. Jackie explained the half-days were proposed to avoid lunch and eating and so forth, as well as to give some time to students to get acclimated to the new protocols (including mask tolerance in students). We also don't know how we'll have the kids eat. Jackie said we're trying to figure out how to increase the connections among students and staff safely with social events.

Public asked if SES has considered phasing in different grades at different times, as other schools have. Jackie said that SSC can consider whatever model they want, so that kind of phase-in model could certainly be put forward, deliberated over, and voted on.

Steve noted that if we do anything during the school day, we are obligated to offer transportation. If we do something after school hours, we don't have to offer transportation, however. Jackie is aware of this and said we're paying for buses now even though we're not using them. Steve said we should be using them; we're certainly paying them enough.

Dan thanked everyone for their questions and contributions.

G. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. FY21 Academic Calendar - Amended - Discussion and Vote:

Jackie explained we're just changing some days in the calendar for PD reasons. Steve pointed out that even though SSC changed Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day on the calendar years ago, it keeps showing up as Columbus Day on the U#28 calendar.

LAUREN MOVED TO AMEND THE FY21 ACADEMIC CALENDAR. JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

2. Capital Expenditures / Plan - Review / Discuss Needs / Plan:

To general amusement, Dan asked Bruce if we know where we are with the roof. Bruce explained that he's doing another MSCBA application this year. Jackie said she doesn't want to discuss any other capital planning needs until the roof is fixed; we're going on Year 7 of the problem, and the damage is moving into new areas in the school. SSC discussed how best to convey the urgency of the roof situation in a strongly-worded motion. Steve noted that the roof started to leak in 2006, so it's been 14 years, not 7. We actually need to add \$5K to finish the doors because we were mistaken about how much could be encumbered from an appropriation for the floors. Jackie knows there are other problems with the school (the parking lot is awful, the paint job is wearing away all around the building, leaking from the roof is adding mold to the paint, etc.), but she can take care of all that later if she can just get the ROOF fixed! It's out of our hands, unfortunately.

LAUREN MOVED TO MOVE FORWARD A CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PLAN WITH THE

CRITICAL NEED OF FIXING OUR **ROOF** **BY**

SEPTEMBER 2021!!!! JEN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

STEVE MOVED TO ELECT DAN THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE MASC CONFERENCE. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report: No report.

2. Director of Finance and Operations - FY20 End of Year Report - Affirmation: Bruce reported that he's submitted the FY20 End of Year Report for SSC to sign to affirm it. He's working on the draft budget now. Central Office staff is targeting November 10 as moving day.

3. Principal's Report: Jackie said there's not much more to be said. The teachers are amazing with remote learning. We're trying to get the community involved; we worked out a safe library access protocol, our food service pickup is going well, and teachers have some materials pickup to have a little bit of in-person time. We're trying to put together all the voices and opinions at the moment, and it's very hard every day. Dan appreciates that Jackie is trying to build toward a consensus, and appreciates all the work staff are doing.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report: Steve reported that tomorrow is the last in-student day for Pre-K, K, and 1st Grade as well as high-needs students throughout the district; they'll be on a two-week vacation starting Monday. RSC is in Executive Session right now voting on whether to reopen negotiations with the teachers' union, and the committee has just been flooded with public comments from stressed-out families. Amherst sports teams have only been able to play about half their games because of the uptick. There was a drive-through drama event that was going strong. Morse Hill has taken a large number of students from Amherst and Pelham even though we didn't authorize them to operate as a school. Dan said they're operating as a learning center with Home Schoolers and Steve said they're still gathering in numbers. He gave a high-five to SES because we have the exact same number of students at Pelham, but Pelham has lost so many School Choice students they don't know if they can continue to operate. Kudos to Grace too!

5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel: Lauren reported we had a Budget & Personnel meeting. Central Office has worked very hard to reduce costs and have put out a thoughtful budget, so we appreciate that. As a teacher and a parent, Lauren said this situation is so hard. No matter what we decide, it's going to be hard. But to staff as well as families: we hear you and we're thinking about you.

6. CES Report: No report.

I. Policy Review:

First Reading On:

IHBHE - Remote Learning
JLCB - Immunization of Students
EBC-S - Policy on COVID-Related Issues

J. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, November 19, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, November 19, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory Policy Committee – Monday, November 16, 2020 - 6:15 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Monday, November 16, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.
- Budget and Personnel Committee – November 16, 2020 - 5:30 p.m.
- Future agenda items –

K. Executive Session to Discuss Strategy With Respect to Collective Bargaining:

JEN MOVED TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS STRATEGY WITH RESPECT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, NOT TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION AFTERWARD. LAUREN SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE. UNANIMOUS.

L. New Business:

1. Settlement Agreement for the Collective Bargaining Agreement; Teachers and Support Staff - Discussion and Vote:

M. Adjournment