

School Committee Meeting 11.2.20  
FINAL Minutes

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

Called to order at 7:05pm by Dan Hayes

Public Hearings:

Josef Trapani - Remote learning is best it can be but there are many studies that show that K-12 students should be in person when safe. Not great for our eyes or our posture. Lots of reasons why it would be great to return. Week on and week off possibility. Love to see something so that kids can be back in the classroom.

Ajay Khashu - 3 children, youngest in 6th grade. Really good start to the school year. Staff, leadership and teacher are doing a phenomenal job. Making the best of a bad situation. Love for his child to get some type of hybrid learning but will support whatever the leadership decides. Can share some readings with testing program in NYC public schools that could be informative. By last count about ½ of NYC have opted into hybrid learning and up to 20% of school population gets tested once per month. Useful article published Oct. 19 in NY Times. AT that point 16,000 tests and had 20 positives for staff and 8 for students. Very low positivity rate. Data supports that schools are not, to date, super spreader transmission centers. Data available, schools are among institutions doing the best jobs about reopening responsibly. If this committee decides that hybrid learning can open for Shutesbury, he has confidence that we can do it safely. Posting link in chat: From Ajay Khashu to Everyone: (7:11 PM)

Here is the link on NYC School

Testing: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/19/nyregion/schools-coronavirus.html>

Lisa Sanders - Written a few times to school committee. There is no no-risk solution. In making a decision should look at evidence of real risks of COVID and real risks for having a remote only option. That is doing very real damage, use evidence to look at both risks - not just COVID. As Joe spoke about increasing the disparities, all of you will be making best decisions for families. Some may choose remote only and that's the best for your family. Families that need in-person will find that somewhere. Paying for private school, they will find it somewhere else leaving others in our community without ability to make that choice. Children will be worse off if the other families leave and take away from our community.

Nina Emery - Spoke at last meeting and corresponded with many of you. I hope that tonight the committee votes against moving toward a hybrid model. Parents need to be able to make the best decision for their kid. There are some reasons that might keep us from a hybrid model that won't change. Issue about teaching both hybrid and remote, or worry about having to return to remote in the future. If those are the reasons, we need to know to plan for our family. Barb Fukushima is doing an incredible job, and my son is doing fairly well due to energy from parents

able to help. Help to have clarity in motivations of decision making to know what's possible going forward.

Grace Griecci - Preschool Teacher. Wanted to go over a few points. Group of teachers wrote another letter to School Committee. Biggest motivating factor is safety - cold and flu season concerns. In person could be best way to go but it's not going to be what it used to be - stress in social distancing, children will be sitting at desks or outside. Thirdly might be possible to offer academics in remote way and social gatherings outside when cases are predicted to go up.

Katie Harrington - School Nurse. Just wanted to give input. As a parent and staff member, SES remote learning is outstanding. I understand all sides. Since March 11 have had to make plan to return along with DPH, BOH, administrators. In the 9 months I've followed schools all over state and country and world - what's working and not working. Currently meet with Franklin County BOH and other nurses. Transmission is rare in schools, as Gov Baker said today. Plan from Jackie that you'll see is safe plan and above what other schools are doing. Will it work? We can't predict. How it won't work? Relies primarily on parents and staff not coming to school if they're sick. We'll be sending a big packet with info and protocols. There's a responsibility to the community to stay home when you're sick. When that happens, transmission won't happen in schools. If parents are wondering about the procedures, I have that done and can send out but I didn't want to overwhelm anyone. Will share if you'd like to see.

Dan Hayes - On behalf of school committee we appreciate all info shared tonight and letters sent to school committee and school. We've been abreast of plans from Principal Mendonsa and I feel comfortable with consensus building and valuable info that has been shared. Jen M-B please share and post on screen.

## PLAN DISPLAYED

Dan Hayes - Recommendation read. So that's the plan. The handbook outlines more specifics - entrance/exits into building, bathrooms, walking pattern. A lot of efforts and mitigation in regards to the handbook. I'll invite each of the school committee members to share thoughts or ask questions. And I'll start. My personal feeling is that it's a difficult decision for everybody. I respect the position of the teachers considering health concerns. I also see the anxiety and stress of parents. Looking at research, my primary concern is students and student learning coupled with efforts made to mitigate transfer of the virus. I think the plan is very thorough and I also know that Principal Mendonsa and leadership team will monitor it. This is a roadmap and it will get us from here to there and when we hit bumps along the way we will get through it. Ajay mentioned support and we need to support each other. Another word I heard is sides, and we are one community trying to figure this out. Looking at info from state, DESE - but there are so many variables that we don't know. Learning along the way and value relationships in school community and that is treasured and we continue to support each other. When there are differences we need to address in a collegial and cordial way. The plan is excellent and we need to monitor the plan as we go, adjust as necessary, work as community and begin with this model and reevaluate and determine if we can bring additional grades in.

Stephen Sullivan - My question is if we've got K-2 in that corner of the building what is wrong with bringing the 16 families of 6th grade and the 7 in 5th grade - can we make a combined 5/6 class again since they are on the opposite side of the building? Jan. 21 feels way too late. Could be March or April before we bring 3/4 and 5/6 back. I would like to see 6th grade back in there. There are 16 families who want to come back. Working on this with the regional comm since June and we were so concerned with teachers that we forgot about students.

Dan Hayes - We're trying to approach in cautious, methodical way. Also very fluid. Can certainly monitor to see how plan is working. Can look at introducing additional grades when admin and teachers think we could. Just getting things rolling but I see the point, Steve. Look at everybody's concerns and needs. Don't want to lose focus on students.

Jen Malcolm-Brown - I first want to thank Jackie and Jen and all of the staff at SES. I know what care and heart all members put into decisions. Thinking of all options and I appreciate that. Steve I hear your point. Young people get the best care when their teachers are well. I want to make sure we're doing both of those - families getting care they need to feel supported and teachers feeling like they have what they need.

April Cannon - Question about plan recommended. In Noho the decision was made to go hybrid and the way that rolled out is that remote choosers don't have resources. Just want to make sure we think about that. Majority of K families selected in person, 1st and 2nd have more remote. Speaking for remote families I don't want us to upend remote experiences. Students will have opportunities for video lessons? Paras will connect with students while other in person class is outside?

Jackie Mendonsa - We don't have it all figured out but I envision mini lesson being recorded and teachers have said they will be outside. So the para will help manage students at home while others are outside. More remote learning in afternoon because all students are at home in the afternoon.

JCulkeen - More planning would be happening when we know what families and staff will be returning or not.

April Cannon - Equal access to education so can only learn remotely when teacher is with them up through 3rd grade. Can't walk away and expect learning to continue.

JCulkeen - Wonderfully creative staff at SES will move toward creative solutions. Thanks for being part of an amazing team.

Jen Malcolm-Brown - With Dec. 7 I'm imagining it gives time after the holiday when families might be gathering. We don't have info about what Dec. 7 would look like. What are the guiding factors that would help us understand if that date would move or not? Guidance from DESE?

Jackie Mendonsa - if it was in the hands of DESE and the state we would all be in person full day.

JCulkeen - We get metrics from DESE mostly after the fact. We've been working closely with local BOH, FRCOG, school union nurses have been amazing. We'd look at DESE to determine trajectory of virus as of Dec. 7. If metrics change or lessen in any way we'd return then. We'd meet with BOH and get that info out to families as soon as possible.

Ajay Khashu - Wondering if there's any appetite in the committee for a date sooner than in late January to revisit the issue of transition to hybrid for older students. That's a long way off - more than 2 months. Just wanted to throw it out there. Might be comforting for some families to learn that there might be an opp to revisit that sooner than late Jan.

Lauren TP - I am really uncomfortable with holding off that discussion. I would want an ongoing discussion. I'm not sure how best to approach it. Checkpoints along the way. Uncomfortable with waiting that long.

Katie Fiander - I agree with all of those things. Important that the conversation is ongoing and sooner.

Dan Hayes - Remove date and say 'ongoing on frequent basis'?

Lauren TP - I know Jackie put a lot of thought into this plan, I don't want to push sending all kids back to school before you're ready. Concerns of safety. Don't want to push too quickly but want to make sure it's an ongoing discussion.

Jackie Mendonsa - What can't happen is that we don't have a date. I have some teachers that aren't going to stay and I need time to post and interview new teachers. If people wanted to meet on Jan. 7 and then said, "Next week we're bringing the kids back" - that can't happen. We need time for planning and time for them to tell me if they are not coming back. I wanted to have trial time with K-2 to figure some things out - how will we have a solid remote program and solid in person program, and we can't hire a full remote teacher, how are we making it equitable, who's leaving, who's coming, who's willing to be here, who's not. I will say publicly that I feel that the plan is going to be safe - with separate bathrooms, etc.... It's not just bringing the kids back. It's who's teaching them. Need appropriate amount of time to plan for that. If the committee wants to change the date please make sure there's significant time to let me do the things I need to do to make it happen.

Dan - School committee meeting with you [Principal Mendonsa] is about info, to support you. I don't want you to think it's micro managing, purely informational. Important to meet with you to see how things go. Possibly meet Dec. 17 and see how plan is going, complications, etc... whether you feel ready to have other students come back in. How would you feel about the date to review?

Jackie Mendonsa - Review is fine. Close to vacation. If committee decides they want to bring students back it would be hard for me to rehire a teacher over break and have them ready to come back. I will need at least two school weeks in order to figure stuff out.

JCulkeen - I can concur with Jackie regarding other schools switching modes and needed info. I would want lead time in one phase or another. Small schools require lead time to look at staffing issues.

Dan Hayes - Looking at calendar, is there date sooner than 21st with enough lead time?

Lauren TP - Meeting on Jan. 21 to look at data to determine if other grades will gradually brought back. Can we change purpose of meeting? I defer to Jackie but could that be when decision is made.

Jackie - I said K-2 could come back Jan. 7. Lead time of 2 weeks until 21st. Maybe you could change the language to say that you'd vote on 21st to return on a specific date? It's your choice. If you want to meet on the 14th I'll have 2 weeks of data to report on.

Corinne Andrews - Is it okay to speak now?

Dan Hayes - Meetings are held openly so go ahead.

Corinne Andrews - Thank you, Jackie. I empathize with people suggesting things and offering other things that make them a deciding factor. Respect and love for you as you've been amazing through all of this. You've been amazing, teachers have been incredible, appreciation of teachers and you, gushing.... What can I do as a parent? Group of parents to volunteer every Wednesday to have kids outside to have outside science time or movement time. If there's a need to have parents help in that way, sign me up and I can help organize parents.

Jackie - Thank you! Teachers have been planning outdoor, social activities. If it's a thing I need to think about equity and manage transportation. Not that I don't think we could do it. We are small enough to try to get that going particularly for some grade levels. Other families have also offered. Many parents are hoping to have something like that for kids.

Dan - Thank you Corinne, always good to get a little gush in there. Thing that's holding us back is that date. Let's focus on that. Throwing this out there - could we set a date for bringing back other grades and monitor along the way to see how it's going? In terms of prep for teachers?

Jackie - I'm going to stand by my recommendation but all I'm asking is a two week lead time.

Dan - K - 2 are coming back after the holidays....

Jackie - Remote until the 7th.

Dan - Could we plan on the 14th? Monitoring along the way?

Jen MB - Jackie's request is 2 weeks post break. Does that give us the leeway?

Dan - That would give us one week in school and then a holiday?

Jen Culkeen - 18th is MLK day

Dan - Jennifer, do you have a suggestion with the goal to bring the other students back?

Jen Culkeen - Winter holiday break adds another layer of complexity. As Jackie said if you all have another date you feel comfortable with, we will make it work.

Dan - When do the students return?

Jen - Remote on Jan. 4, back in person on Jan. 7.

Katie - Seems too soon with the time Jackie needs. I would suggest Jan. 21, with a meeting before to see how progress is going. With a meeting on Jan. 7?

Jackie - I'm happy to meet whenever.

Dan - Meeting so we can help you, but I think setting a date when the rest of the grades can come in is important. Although it's a long time away.

Jackie - It feels long but it's only 2 weeks when we come back after break. But it's your decision.

Dan - is it easier to start on a Monday or a Thursday?

Jakcie - Better to have them start Wednesday or Thursday and have a few days and then a weekend and then back, like how we start school at the beginning of the year.

Lauren - If we start with a phase, we need to give them the time. Have the 21st as a plan to start discussing, is very far off in the future. If it's tenable with Jackie to start then, with meetings along the way and the metrics stay the same, I think that gives the first phase time to get started.

Dan Hayes - I'm going to throw out another one. I wonder, but I'm not in the building so I don't know, if we're looking at phased in approach, could we do something bringing 3rd/4th Jan. 14 and then 5/6 Jan. 21?

Stephen - Looking at the numbers 5/6 should come back before 3/4 because 5/6 has higher numbers that want to come back.

Dan - These are target dates but if something changes we'll adjust.

Jackie - Concrete things make everything easier. Helpful so teachers can make up their mind about what to do for themselves.

Jen C. - When looking at the metrics it's usually a 2 week rolling average so if we're bringing back cohorts we might want to do a 2 week span.

Jackie - I'd still be willing to meet on the 7th.

Dan - 14th and 28th.

Jen - 2 week phases.

Katie - The 14th doesn't give you 2 weeks. Does that work for you?

Jackie - Yes, the teachers would know right now and they'd have time to think about what they need. They know now with the date so it's different.

Katie - We want you to have reasonable time and space to make a plan. I want to make sure you have what you need to do that.

Jackie - I chose that date for a reason. I would prefer to start that week, phasing people in. But if you are going to vote on the 14th and 28th I will make that work.

Katie - I think that seems reasonable.

Dan - 5/6 start on 21st?

Jackie - Or 20th on a Wednesday?

Dan - Then 3/4 would start two weeks later?

Jen Culkeen - Feb. 3. And those students would be in for 2 weeks before Feb. break.

Dan - That gives you ample time to prepare. It doesn't feel too late?

Jackie - I have all of the stakeholders in my mind. I live in the house. This is my 7th year. I know the families, making plans to find consensus and middle ground and build trust with people, but it's because I know the community. I know some won't like this, but this proposal

feels appropriate. As long as we do meet about how it's going so I can relay how it's going for my teachers, data for state and community.

Katie - Add meeting dates in to formalize the plan. 2 check in dates - 1 early on and 1 closer - as part of the proposal.

Dan - My feeling is to vote on proposal and set dates later. Or would you like to put dates in proposal? We can meet as many times as it feels comfortable.

Jen C - I have 3 other committees and everybody wants to meet as frequently as y'all want to meet. We can meet as many times as necessary. I'd rather have return dates set in stone and then doodle poll to see when we can meet. Might have to meet if cases rise and we have to go remote.

Dan - Are you okay with that Katie?

Katie - Yes.

Dan - Motion to vote on hybrid 2020 plan with amendment of removing date of 1/21/21 to reconvene school committee and replace with bringing back 5/6 on 1/20/21 and 3/4 on 2/3/21.

Jen M-B - Seconding.

Dan - Further discussion?

Steve - Thanks everyone for listening and setting a firm date for parents, families, committee, and staff instead of letting 1/21/21 date hang there. Thank you.

Dan - Great points. Thank you. All in favor?

MB - Aye

TP - Aye

Fiander - Aye

Hayes - Aye

Sullivan - Aye

Dan - Motion passes unanimously. And we have a plan. Thank you to Jackie for facing this huge challenge in unprecedented time. Lots of people reaching out with same intention of giving you thoughts, feelings, advice, data. And thanks for synthesizing all that. Hope that committee validates plan and helps with setting benchmarks and goals. Thanks everyone. We're all in it together. I appreciate everything that our amazing teachers, paraeducators and staff have been doing. As concerns come up we hope they can approach you collegially and we appreciate everyone wading through these difficult decisions.



Lauren - I know how hard it's been for me. And I want to thank Jackie for all that she's shouldering right now. We appreciate you and support you.

Dan - Ending with a little more gush. Meeting adjourned. 8:27pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jessica Carlson-Belanger