



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of August 26, 2020
School Committee Meeting
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.
Meeting adjourned: 9:50 p.m.
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard (arrived at 7:05 p.m.), Steve Bois, Dawn Byers, Hillary Kniffen and David Forth, Jr.
Members absent: None
Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Director of Business and Finance

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Call to Order

Chair Hayes announced this evening's meeting is being recorded and broadcast live via WHCA-TV and on line.

Chair Hayes took the meeting out of order.

Student Athletics, Athletic Director Bob Rodgers

Athletic Director, Bob Rodgers, presented information on the high school athletic season and recommendations of the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) Board and guidance from the state on modified sports seasons for school year 2020-21. The Board adopted a new fall season start date of September 18, 2020. The only exception is that football and cheer will be held during a modified ("sandwich" or "floating") season scheduled for February 22 through April 25, 2021.

Mr. Rodgers reported the Patriot League athletic directors met to create a plan to adjust the scheduling of games/meets within the division with two exceptions playing against Notre Dame and North Quincy. The altered scheduling will also allow for appropriate contact tracing if necessary. There will be no state tournaments in the fall. The season will conclude on November 20, 2020.

Mr. Rodgers discussed current transportation limits of 24 students to a bus under COVID-19 restrictions and a consideration of waivers which he plans to bring back to the School Committee at a subsequent meeting. Alternate transportation ideas may include parent transport and other forthcoming solutions.

Mr. Rodgers stated user fees will not be increased and he has developed a plan should the season be postponed, cancelled or amended in any way. Structured refunds will be in place. If a season is shut down at four weeks, a 50% refund will be issued. Any later than four weeks, there is no refund.

Mr. Rodgers reported he has worked with the Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA) to discuss how stipends may be impacted by the modified season. The development of weekly stipends has been discussed.

Student practices will be held five days per week. There is some leniency on missing practice due to students in different cohorts and transportation issues and absences will be excused. All social distancing protocols will be followed. Mr. Rodgers added that some sports will be allowed not to wear masks during longer runs in their sport (soccer, cross country, etc.). One spectator per student will be allowed at games. The fall, winter, modified and spring season dates were released by MIAA. Mr. Rodgers noted that all are subject to change and may evolve over time. Mr. Rodgers reported the rules around “coaching out of season” were also relaxed and coaches may have contact with the student athletes they coach for exercise and workouts, but may not coach the sport.

Superintendent’s Report

Request for Joint Meeting – Town Select Boards, September 15, 2020

The superintendent reported the Select boards in both towns have requested a joint meeting with Whitman-Hanson School committee on Tuesday September 15, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the assessment issue. The meeting will be virtually held via ZOOM video conferencing.

Superintendent’s End of Cycle Evaluation 2019-20 SY (recommend postponement)

Chair Hayes stated the Superintendent’s end of cycle evaluation will be passed over until the next meeting. Not all evaluations have been submitted.

Reopening Schools

The Superintendent reported another parent update was sent out today with new information as many parents may be anxious about reopening schools.

The first day for teachers to report is Thursday, August 27, 2020.

The first day for all students PK-12 is Tuesday, September 15, 2020.

Mr. Szymaniak briefed the Committee on the intense work over the last two weeks to accomplish what needs to get done in the Central Administration Offices. The school budget was recently approved on August 17 and Central Office staff has been working constantly to manage employees in recalling the those who received reduction in force letters, posting and filling vacated positions (retirements/resignations/etc.), managing employees under COVID-related issues, and other human resources functions, as the Committee knows, without a dedicated HR Department, a position cut in 2017. Also the Operations and Facilities Departments, have been working diligently in preparing schools for the new school year and setting up classrooms under the COVID and social distancing mandates. The buildings are not quite ‘school’ ready yet. The Superintendent anticipates hosting a walkthrough with the Committee on September 9 or 10.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the iWave units will be installed in every ventilation system by September 15. The Technology Department is tirelessly managing Chromebooks recovery/clean/class usage. Mr. Szymaniak reported 75 of the lent Chromebooks have not been returned. Also, there is a national shortage of Chromebook devices so limited quantities will be available to families. The superintendent asked parents and guardians to utilize devices they may already have at home, iPad, iPhone and other PED’s.

The building principals have also been working all summer long to put plans together for operation for school and scheduling (including hall passing time, mask and bathroom breaks, where students and staff will eat lunch). Teachers are also preparing for virtual learning under professional development supervised by Assistant Superintendent George Ferro. The District will no longer use Zoom for video and remote learning. Instead the district will use Google Classroom/Google Suite.

Thanks to parents and the community, the school district and education got support at the annual town meetings. Mr. Szymaniak reported in trying to maintain similar schedules in the same household, the cohorts are built by

families and household units. Survey results of over 3,000 parents were particularly useful. Nearly 400 students will be fully remote and were pulled from the cohorts. If parents still require a change, they should contact the school building main office/principal to correct as changes significantly impact transportation and student cohort numbers. Mr. Szymaniak reported the Transportation Department has also worked extensively to accomplish what needs to be done.

Mr. Szymaniak reported on other challenges facing the District. Families are changing their original choice for full day kindergarten to half day, which impacts several areas. On Friday, August 28, the morning and afternoon sessions will be determined. Also, the remote learning platform has changed as a result of the parent surveys. After a review of TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School (TECCA) Academy state run platform and based upon the parent survey information, the district will not need to pay for a DESE Learning Management System (LMS) for Parent Choice Remote learners. The district is now able to provide K-8 remote instruction with a Whitman-Hanson teacher. This is what the majority of the community asked for and the Superintendent was able to accomplish this for at home learning students.

A survey was also sent to staff to identify employees who may have concerns with returning to the buildings and the district was able to develop a remote program. Mr. Szymaniak summarized the remote learning program for K-5 students, middle school and high school students. Elementary remote learners will have class from 8:00 a.m. -1:00 p.m. Middle school remote learners will start class at 7:45 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m. High school remote learners will follow the high school schedule times of 7:05 a.m. -1:40 p.m. All students have additional work beyond the school day hours, as the expectation of the Commissioner of Education. Also at the high school level, live streaming is being developed. Edgenuity virtual learning at both the high school and middle school levels will be offered.

Other information in the parent letter included open houses, food services and the flu vaccine mandate. The elementary and middle school principals will be in contact with families about open houses. The district may not host in-person open houses at this time. Food Services utilizes an app that allows parents and students to pre-order meals. There are also options available if students are unable to order on line as well as grab and go options. Where students will have lunch is determined by building. For example, high school students will eat in student dining and the cafeteria, practicing social distancing. A plan is being developed for curbside pickup locations. The YMCA is developing new offsite programs in Brockton, East Bridgewater and Halifax in alignment with hybrid and distance learning models, including full-day options in addition to before and after care at the elementary level. The new immunization requirement, beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, an annual influenza vaccine will be required for ALL students.

Updates on Plans for Hybrid and Remote models

Mr. Szymaniak reported on class sizes under the hybrid models. High school classes may be 12-15 per class. Elementary will be 9-12 per class. Staff on leave (included COVID-related) are being replaced by long term substitutes. The district is prepared to move to strictly remote learning should there be spike in Coronavirus cases within the metrics of the white, green, yellow and red models. A virtual meeting is schedule with the Boards of Health in both towns for open communication and to be cognizant of the two towns status at all times. The district is also working with the town fire departments and fire drill exit procedures under COVID will be reviewed next week.

Teachers will be training over the next few days on COVID-related items, such as PPE and how to teach in hybrid and remote environments. Mr. Ferro spoke to his encouraging theme of Ubuntu with principals. “Ubuntu” is a South African word that signifies a human quality that includes the essential human virtues of compassion and humanity. Mr. Ferro talked of looking at the situation from a compassionate and human aspect, and understanding that some things will be okay.

The different learning models (Parent Remote Choice, Hybrid and Full in Person) were discussed in additional detail. Mr. Ferro answered a number of comprehensive questions of the Committee. Students on IEPs in any of the models will continue receive services. Wednesdays will be half day district wide and virtual half day for

remote and hybrid cohorts. Teachers will have instructional aide support in all learning platforms. Mr. Ferro reported that live stream was not available at the middle school level. Developing an updated FAQ was discussed.

The Superintendent presented information about the most recent Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) release which included a recommendation from Commission Riley. The Commissioner recommended districts accommodate children of teachers who attend school four days a week.

“Children of Teachers

Recognizing the critical need districts are facing to staff their schools this fall, and to provide support to teachers, I am making the following recommendations:

- (i) Our guidance has previously indicated that districts that have adopted a hybrid or remote learning model should prioritize high-needs students for full-time, in-person learning. I recommend these districts also further prioritize children of teachers for full-time, in-person instruction when feasible. Since the models will vary by district, districts will decide locally what constitutes full-time instruction for these students.*
- (ii) I am also recommending that districts that are providing remote instruction allow teachers who are reporting to their schools to provide instruction to bring their own children to school with them for child care purposes, if feasible.”*

The Superintendent asked for the Committee’s guidance on the recommendation. The Superintendent reported he has prepared a survey to determine the interest of teachers in the community. This would allow children of teachers to come to our schools for child care. The Committee questioned the capacity of the district to handle this type of task. There was a brief discussion of the number of available Chromebooks. Mr. Ferro reported 700 Chromebooks were ordered and only 300 released by customs. He also discussed the guest account and increasing the number of license fees. Mr. Ferro reported that the Commissioner is still planning to have MCAS in computer form, as stated in a DESE conference call earlier in the day.

The Committee inquired whether the Whitman-Hanson teaching staff may be able to bring their children to school too. The Superintendent stated it would depend on the capacity constraints of handling the number of children whose parents are teachers in other districts. Liability for bringing non-residents students in school buildings was also discussed. The Superintendent will survey both parents that are teachers in other districts and Whitman-Hanson teaching staff and report the findings to the Committee at the next meeting.

Budget Report – John Tuffy

Mr. Tuffy presented the YTD July 2020 Expenditures and Revenue Reports. Mr. Tuffy reported not much happened fiscally; one-time expenses and supplies made up most of the purchasing. The budget comparison this year versus last year is askew as the district was not on a 1/12th budget last year. Mr. Tuffy discussed the variances in the current budget. Once the district is finished hiring and getting teachers and resources back, he will go back and look at the budget. Money from the ESSER Grants will support purchases. Plymouth County COVID relief funds are set aside but there are restrictions in the program. The district will submit requests for reimbursement. The \$400,000 is set aside but not available to the district at this time. The funding is also subject to 9c cuts. The Superintendent will write to the Secretary of Administration and Finance (A&F) to request release of the funds. A copy will be sent to Senator Brady and State Representatives Sullivan and Cutler. The funds are targeted to supply Chromebooks for distance learners. Mr. Tuffy reported the district is scheduled to close out the fiscal year on September 10. Line item transfers will be presented at a subsequent meeting.

DESE Advisory for Regional School Districts 8/17/2020

Mr. Tuffy highlighted the memo from the Superintendent related to Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services (DOR/DLS) released updated information on Chapter 70 funding. Mr. Tuffy explained two things that happened. The DOR/DLS released information on Chapter 70 funding and the current figure is \$190,000 less than the district anticipated. This is not the final figure. On August 18, DESE released guidance for regional school districts via an Advisory Memorandum regarding FY2021 Regional School Districts Budgets. The advisory outlines the options that the School Committee has in dealing with changes in projected revenue and

assessments that have been voted by Town Meeting. The District's updated minimum local contribution is \$20,355,354 or \$89,902 less than the original estimated minimum local contribution. Hanson's minimum contribution has increased by \$7,310; Whitman's minimum contribution has decreased by \$97,212. The change in minimum contribution would increase Hanson's assessment by \$21,653 and decrease Whitman's assessment by \$21,653. It was recommended the Committee take no action until the state votes their final budget.

Unfinished Business

Policy Proposal – EBCFA Face Coverings (student and staff mask wearing)

Chair Hayes read the proposed Face Coverings policy aloud.

FACE COVERINGS *File: EBCFA*

The Whitman-Hanson Regional School District is committed to providing a safe environment as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is the use of face masks or face coverings. Therefore, in accordance with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the following requirements are in place until further notice.

A face covering that covers the nose and mouth must be worn by all K-12 students and all staff and all other individuals in school buildings, on school grounds and on school transportation, even when social distancing is observed.

Individuals may be excused from the requirement for the following list of reasons, per CDC guidance:

The individual:

- *has trouble breathing;*
- *is unconscious;*
- *is incapacitated;*
- *cannot remove the mask or face covering without assistance.*

In addition, masks or face coverings will not be required for anyone who has a medical, behavioral or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering. A written note from a physician is required for a requested exemption. Parents may not excuse their child from the face mask requirement by signing a waiver.

Additionally, face masks or face coverings will not be required when appropriate social distancing is enforced:

- *during mask breaks;*
- *while eating or drinking;*
- *during physical education classes;*
- *while outside.*

Exceptions to this policy under certain circumstances, such as for students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear masks, must be approved by the building principal in consultation with the school nurse or local Board of Health. Face shields or physical barriers may provide an alternative in some instances.

A student's mask or face covering is to be provided by the student's family. Staff members are responsible for providing their own face coverings. However, the district will supply disposable face covering for individuals who arrive at a building, or board school transportation, without one.

If students are in violation of this policy, the building principal will consult with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate, or the student may be removed from the school building for in-person learning until such time as they can comply with the requirement or the requirement is lifted.

Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy.

Visitors in violation of this policy will be denied entry to the school/district facility.

This policy will remain in place until rescinded by the School Committee.

Mr. Szymaniak noted that the face covering policy template was issued by the MA Association of School Committees. The district lead nurse reviewed the policy. The only modification made to the MASC template was rather than just Grade 1 and up must wear a mask, for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District, all students

PK-12 must wear a face covering. The Superintendent will share with the boards of health as requested by the Committee.

VOTE: Mr. Scriven motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to approve Policy EBCFA Face Coverings, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business

WHEA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Mr. Szymaniak reported he has continued to work successfully with the Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA) executive board on a weekly basis. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) basically covers the working conditions under the COVID pandemic, not wages or adjustment in employee hours. The Superintendent highlighted a number of items in MOU draft. WHEA plans to bring the MOU to the full membership for consideration. The School Committee will then review and votes its ratification. WHEA executive board member, Cindy McGann, discussed the cordial and understanding working relationship the administration has with the union. She noted that the process has been very positive in this unique situation. Mr. Szymaniak will provide the MOU for the School Committee meeting on September 9. Committee questioned if this should be considered negotiations and if the School Committee was to be involved in the discussion process. Mr. Szymaniak reported in the past (side letters), the administration has done this previously and worked with the WHEA executive board to develop language and present to School Committee. This MOU specifically addresses COVID related issues, does not adjust work hours or wages and time is of the essence. Contract negotiations for the collective bargaining units will begin as the three-year contracts expire. Ms. McGann added that there is also a union privacy piece to provide the membership an opportunity to review. Mr. Szymaniak will email the document to the School Committee before the next meeting.

School Committee Engagement Focus

Mr. Szymaniak discussed committing to long range plans on how to focus engagement with the community. Mr. Szymaniak suggested following up, relating the engagement focus to the strategic plan and the Superintendent's goals. Mr. Howard suggested the engagement focus last spring and prepared an overview. A copy will be distributed to the Committee for discussion at a future meeting and possibly a full meeting as a one item agenda.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the District was awarded an FY21 Fund Code 646 21st CCLC Exemplary Programs Grant for the High School after-school program. As a result, the district can now bring back the program this school year, which was originally cut.

Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda and memo for August 26, 2020
- YTD Budget Reports July 2020
- DESE Advisory Memorandum on FY21 Regional School District Budgets dated August 17, 2020
- Memo from Superintendent re: DESE Advisory
- MASC Policy file: EBCFA Face Coverings for WHRSD