

Lenox Public Schools
School Committee
Via Remote Access
December 7, 2020 @ 6:30pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84932239116?pwd=U0Y0WGNOZG03MThuNl03dS8rNzZmdz09>

Passcode: 656062 Webinar ID: 849 3223 9116

MEMBERS PRESENT: Robert Vaughan, Robert Munch, Christine Mauro, Anne Marie O'Brien, Frances Sorrentino

MEMBERS ABSENT: David Rimmmler

ALSO PRESENT: William Cameron, Melissa Falkowski

- I. CALL TO ORDER. RV Chair; 6:34 pm.** RV outlined Revised Meeting Protocols. Chat feature will not be used, please use the raise hand feature to indicate your desire to speak, provide first and last name, and speakers will be limited to 3 minutes.

II. HEARING OF VISITORS

Public comment.

- Veronica Fenton -- how are we serving marginalized populations;
- Jenny Zimmerman -- special services are not working for students with IEPs;
- Robert Alderton requesting a quick decision for winter sports;
- Lisa Nelson -- what are metrics for reopening in January and how will that work;
- Noah Kirby -- encouraging allowing specific winter sport(s) to take place;
- Oren Cass inquired regarding the process for reopening,
- Molly Rivest would like to see increased publicity for School Committee meetings.

- III. CORRESPONDENCE.** RV: Received emails this week. One from Benjamin Heim, an Eleventh Grader and member of the Active Minds club, which focuses on student mental health, who would like to have a representative of the group attend a Strategic Planning meeting. RV recommended BH attend the next meeting on Thursday. Also received an email from Noah Kirby, as did all members of the School Committee, and Noah will speak later to share his comments. And an email from Lisa Nelson, with questions similar to her comments in Public Comment section.

IV. BOARD REPORT

- School Committee Meeting Minutes – November 19, 2020

MOTION by ME and seconded by AO to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2020 School Committee meeting.

FS: aye

CM: aye

ME: aye

AO: aye

RM: aye

RV: aye

Approved 6-o. One absent.

- Update on Superintendent Search. RV: Human Resources subcommittee met Friday afternoon to review the 14 candidates who have applied at this point, and selected some of them for interviews to be held following the break in early January. Assembling the interview team now with representation from various groups. Only four will ask questions. Others will observe and participate in discussions regarding which candidates go forward.

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

WC asked that the speakers during Public Comment who are concerned about services and remote learning reach out to him regarding the issues they are encountering. Re: reopening, we expect to resume hybrid instruction on January 19. Will engage parent community prior to that date in similar manner to the Zoom meetings that were held prior to the beginning of the hybrid model. If the situation changes/ things come up before that time, it may alter the plan. The intention is to return to Hybrid on January 19, 2021.

- FY21 Budget Update – Melissa Falkowski. MF referenced the Financial Report through November 30, 2020 that was sent to School Committee members prior to the meeting. MF outlined the expenses that have been included in the CARES grant, and highlighted key areas of spending within the current budget, and those with notable variances.
- Capital Projects update. MF: Capital budget funding for FY21 was removed. Had hoped not to need Capital budget funds for FY22, but do need to cover health and safety. Estimate \$150,000- \$175,000 request for Capital Funds from the town.
- FY22 Budget forecast. WC: No dollar figure to come to the School Committee at this time. Received a request from Town Administrators to develop preliminary budgets based on three different assumptions of funding. 1. Level services -- accommodates inflation in current services, 2. Level funded (reduction in some line items due to inflation in others), and 3. A 5% reduction of a level funded budget. Assembling budget numbers accordingly to be able to present the budget to the School Committee in a timely manner. School Committee will determine which of the three budgets to present for approval at the Town Meeting.
- School Choice vote. Towns are obligated to accept School Choice students unless they vote not to do so. Vote tonight would signal the continued acceptance of Choice students to Lenox.

MOTION by ME and seconded by CM that Lenox Public Schools continue to participate in School Choice.

FS: aye

CM: aye

ME: aye

AO: aye

RM: aye

RV: aye

Approved 6-o. One absent.

- Close Contact COVID Protocol revision. New version includes updated definition of 'Close Contacts', and the guideline updates for quarantine for close contacts. RV agrees no vote needed for administrative updates, but appreciates updates being communicated to the School Committee.
- Correction of calculation in report to School Committee on 11/19/20. WC informed the Committee regarding a correction of and apology for a miscalculation in his remarks during previous School Committee meeting. Paragraph 10 of material provided to School Committee, info provided by UNICEF, that 8.5% of cases worldwide were in children. Gave an example of that number in Lenox multiplying 8.5% by total school population, thereby

inflating the number of cases that would represent. Thank you to Dr. Nelson for catching that error.

- E-mail from Kimball Farms. A thank you from KF Activities Director for the Thanksgiving gifts from Morris students, families and staff.
- Update on Athletics. Mike Knybel: MIAA has postponed winter sports to January. Our hearts ache for these athletes. We still face the same problems we faced during fall sports. There are discrepancies between Bousquet's protocols and Lenox Public Schools' protocols; temperature threshold is much higher, they are not opening bathrooms but providing portapotties, so hygiene becomes a concern, and the Alpine team is a co-op with other school(s). Nordic home course is not opening, races would be at other schools. David Pugh: AD's see the value of athletics and other extracurricular activities for students. County ADs hope to have some sort of shortened winter season beginning in mid-January. Will be determined at a later date. Appreciate Mr. Alderton's concern to have a quick decision. Could start out as a club sport, and switch to school team once/if approved. Out of season coaching is allowed when/if schools are not participating in that sport. Re: skiing, the event itself not a concern, but getting the students there equitably and safely, keeping athletes distances when not competing is a concern. Brian Cogswell confirmed possibility to look at some sports at a later date. Robert Alderton: We should look at this from a mental health perspective. January is not going to be safer, if that's the reason for delaying. Noah Kirby: Three issues: transportation, equity, and remote learning status meaning no sports. Transportation is not required, have parents drop off and wait in parking lot to pick up. Regarding equity, each sport should stand on its own. Skiing cannot be delayed due to the need for snow. Currently unprecedented times, some rules being disregarding, why not this one. RV: There is a School Committee meeting on January 4, we could wait to make a decision then regarding starting January 19 or make that decision tonight. What does the School Committee want to do? We need to have a motion on the table to be able to discuss and vote.

MOTION by RM and seconded by ME to reopen skiing as a winter sport effective as soon as possible.

Discussion. RV: Can push golf, cross country running and soccer to another season. Cannot reschedule skiing, due to snow; perhaps we should allow skiing. With a number of limitations. RM: Thanked NK for email and complimented his presentation. Important for mental health in the dark days of this season. Benefit to be outdoors and getting benefit of exercise. WC: One issue to be considered—morning cohorts are at a disadvantage to get to practice in the afternoon, as well as School Choice students. DP: Working so hard to keep cohorts separate and schools safe for staff and students. How can we mix the two cohorts for sports without regard for these safety efforts? Discussion by School Committee members regarding importance of an early decision so that clubs can be formed to allow our athletes to participate outside of the school teams. DP: Question is, is it better to host and have control, or not host and have no control? Jedd Hall: I commend the AD, admins, School Committee, etc. on the handling of this difficult decision. Lenox is doing it right and keeping kids safe. No cases during the Lenox club soccer season. If you can run an MIAA sanctioned competition, please do so. If not, let us know so we can organize as a club. RM: Feeling mental health aspect might be the most important piece here. Get the kids outside. Have more control over how they are interacting, they are mingling cohorts outside of school anyway. Let the parents decide. DP: Need to put safety first over mental health. Need to be alive to worry about mental health.

FS: nay

CM: nay

AO: nay

RM: aye

ME: nay

RV: nay

Motion defeated 1-5. One absent.

Discussion regarding terms of the vote, will this be reconsidered for a later start date to winter sports? In order for that to happen, it must be added to the agenda of a future meeting for reconsideration. ME requests the topic be on the agenda for the January 4 meeting for a January 19 (or later) start date.

Additional **Public Comment** for topics not addressed during meeting:

VF: Concern around county regarding welfare of students and families. Has Lenox Public Schools' enrollment been reduced this school year? Do we know where these students are and that they have resources for education? RV suggests we track those students who did not return from last year, to determine where they are now. WC: Enrollment is down, but much less than surrounding districts. Participation rate percentages at both schools are in the high 90s.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Update on Lower Grades Reopening Task Force. RV: Oren Cass and RV as Co-chairs. Molly Rivest as recording secretary. Robust one-hour discussion, regarding challenges to full time instruction, approaches by other districts, difficulty of managing remote students and planning for next meeting, on December 9. OC suggested metrics of MOA are not likely reachable and should be revised. Should we be looking to revise them? ME: Agree that the metrics from this summer are not reachable. MOA is a bargaining agreement. WC: Noted that JLMC understands it is an advisory body. The School Committee will have the opportunity to discuss this again well in advance of the January 19 reopening date. Metrics are guidelines. Wording does not compel any particular decision or direction. RV: Will have additional information to make a decision at the time of the next School Committee meeting. ME: Are the metrics of the MOA advisory or are they to be held to? RM: Metrics are a list of things to evaluate when making decisions. JLMC to make recommendations to School Committee.

VIII. SUBCOMMITTEES

- Human Resources. Has been meeting regarding many topics this year. Most recently regarding the Superintendent Search.
- Finance. Met with members of the Town Finance Committee Michael Feder and Christine Cass, as well as WC and MF. In discussion with Town Manager also regarding budget preparation for the three scenarios mentioned previously. Did not use Capital Funds for FY21, and returned \$330K to the town at the end of FY20.
- Teaching and Learning
- School Culture and Community Relations
- Governance and Leadership
- Strategic Planning. Moving along, have a meeting scheduled next week. Did not meet last week because of the conferences.

RM: Conferences last week as you mentioned, impressed with every teacher, they asked terrific questions to gauge welfare of students. Thanks to the faculty for their concern.

ME: Echo with Bob's comments, wonderful conferences, the teachers had a lot of input and I also thank the teachers.

RV: Another real positive for our teaching staff.

MOTION by ME and seconded by RM to adjourn the meeting.

FS: aye

CM: aye

AO: aye

RM: aye

ME: aye

RV: aye

Approved 6-o.

Meeting adjourned 9:06 pm.

IX. DOCUMENTS IN PACKET

- School Committee Meeting Minutes – November 19, 2020
- Close Contact COVID Protocol
- E-mail from Kimball Farms

X. DOCUMENTS REFERENCED AT MEETING:

- Email from Benjamin Heim
- Email from Noah Kirby
- Email from Lisa Nelson
- July 1 to November 30, 2020 Financial Report

Submitted by: *Amy Noble Novitzky*