

Regular Meeting Minutes (Virtual) Fairfield BoE, May 12, 2020

NOTICE: A full meeting recording can be obtained from Fairfield Public Schools. Please call 203-255-8371 for more information and/or see the FPS website (under Board Meeting Minutes) for a link to FAIRTV.

Voting Summary

The Board of Education Virtual Meeting was brought to order at 7:32pm on May 12, 2020. Present were Board members Chair Vitale, Vice-Chair Aysseh (arrived 7:36PM), Secretary Gerber, Mrs. Rotelli, Mrs. Jacobsen, Ms. Pytko, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly, Mr. Peterson, Ms. Leeper; Superintendent Cummings, Executive Directors, and Headmasters Greg Hatzis and Paul Cavanna; Warde student representatives Ms. Solari and Mr. Murphy and Ludlowe student representatives Ms. Denny and Ms. Phillips.

Approval of Minutes:

Mrs. Gerber moved, Mr. Peterson seconded that the Board of Education approve the BoE Regular Meeting Minutes dated 3-10-2020 and the Special Meeting Minutes dated 3-10-2020 and 4-21-2020.

Motion Passed: 8-0-1

Favor: Mrs. Jacobsen, Ms. Pytko, Mrs. Gerber, Mrs. Vitale, Mr. Aysseh, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly, Mr. Peterson, Ms. Leeper
Abstain: Mrs. Rotelli

Adjournment

Mrs. Gerber moved, Mr. Peterson seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Meeting adjourned at 9:42PM

Detailed Minutes

Student Reports

Chair Vitale welcomed the Board, staff and students to the virtual meeting and said she was very pleased the students were able to attend.

Ms. Denny and Ms. Phillips reported for FLHS: Students have been adapting to new learning methods; the May college commitment day was celebrated with Instagram postings; signs for graduating seniors have been placed on their lawns; James Flink was announced as the Valedictorian; James Flink and Hannah Johansson were announced as CIAC Scholar Athletes; AP exams are wrapping up this week and AP teachers are using College Board resources that allow for classroom-style online discussion; and students are thankful for all the teacher support they have received with distance learning. Ms. Denny said she will be attending University of Virginia and Ms. Phillips said she will attend Smith College next fall.

Ms. Solari reported for FWHS: Congratulations were bestowed on CIAC Scholar Athletes Claire Cherniske and Gregory Vogt; seniors appreciated the graduation lawn signs delivered by the PTA; students are adapting well to virtual learning especially with the more interactive Google meet; high school counselors will be offering juniors an online writing session; a virtual senior homeroom door decorating contest will be held next week; thanks to all who submitted pictures for the teacher appreciation video; the Music Department created an uplifting video 'Don't Stop Believing' which was very well received. Ms. Solari said she will attend University of Wisconsin next fall.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked the students to encourage their peers to provide feedback before graduation.

Mrs. Vitale congratulated the students, thanked them for their reports and wished them well.

Budget Update:

Mrs. Vitale reported that the Board of Finance (BoF) voted to further reduce the BoE budget. To recap the cuts: \$325K from pension savings; \$468K from transportation savings this year; and \$1.5M reduced in the operating accounts. This totals \$2.29M, and is in addition to the \$1.4M already reduced by the Board of Selectmen. A non-lapsing account will be used for surplus funds from this year to cover unanticipated expenses due to COVID-19, and to offset the budget reduction.

Mr. Cummings said considerations for the net reduction of \$600K will be brought to the Board following the RTM vote on June 1. Details of the non-lapsing account will need to be defined further and the Board will review what will go into that account.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly:

- How will cuts be reconciled in the budget? Mrs. Munsell said the non-lapsing account will be separate, similar to grants. The cuts will be subtracted from the budget, and work is underway on how best to account for that.
- When did we find out about the additional savings in pension, was the new table available in February? Mr. Cummings said the savings were communicated only yesterday. Mrs. Munsell added that the budgeting for pension happens in October with the understanding that there may be spring adjustments.
- Why is the district still holding on to support expenses and school equipment, as listed on the summary sheet? Mrs. Munsell said it is difficult to expend funds on equipment under the current situation. A lot of information is needed from the schools, and these funds need to be carried over and reviewed properly.
- Will utilities change in June if the buildings are opened? Mrs. Munsell said no, summer school starts in July.

Mr. Cummings said the district is not currently paying for software that was freely distributed at the onset of distance learning, but vendors will most likely charge for the same services next year. Elementary online books could be used now and are a current need.

Mrs. Vitale suggested moving ahead with purchasing elementary online books; the BoF did support the non-lapsing account for educational purposes.

Mrs. Rotelli: Do we know the ESY locations? Mr. Mancusi said ESY is a fluid situation and the district is waiting for further guidance. If social distancing must be implemented, more space will be needed. Warde and McKinley are the current locations, but the programs may have to be expanded to RLMS and HH. ECC will be in session both at Warde and Stratfield.

Mr. Peterson asked for an update on Warde's air conditioning project. Mr. Papageorge said the work this summer will be preliminary. A phased approach next year will have tear-downs taking place at the end of the next school year.

Mrs. Jacobsen:

- How are we getting to the net of \$600K? Mr. Cummings reviewed the budget cuts, explaining that most cuts were offset by savings and credits, with \$600K the only unaccounted amount:
 - The BoS cut \$1.4M: \$800K attributed to health benefit savings, leaving a cut of \$600K.
 - The BoF cut \$2.29M: \$1.5M is a reduction to the BoE Budget which will be taken care of with the non-lapsing account; \$325K due to pension savings; and \$468K due to transportation savings.

- Are we certain of the pension and transportation savings? What is the timeline for contract negotiations? Mrs. Munsell and Mrs. Deasy said negotiations are underway but those are the expected numbers.

Several Board members asked about the use and purchase of elementary-level Chromebooks. Mrs. Vitale added that the list of unanticipated expenses continues to grow and the MOU will need to be finalized. Mr. Peterson added that he understands the need for Chromebooks at the elementary level but expressed his concern that outcomes aren't being examined.

Mr. Cummings said he had been anticipating the conversation regarding Chromebook use beyond distance learning. Anecdotally, Chromebooks are positively changing teaching with more staff collaboration and the ability to prepare a lesson in advance. Elementary students are currently using existing district technology stock as well as home devices. A discussion on outcomes will be addressed in a future meeting.

Mrs. Vitale said the district should consider purchasing Chromebooks once the MOU is finalized to ensure elementary students have the technology they need, and she would like to hear directly from Grade 3-5 teachers.

Mr. Peterson: Will the same model Chromebook be available for purchase? Mr. Cummings said yes; an updated HP Chromebook model will be purchased in time for the start of the new school year.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly supports the idea, recognizes the need and will be looking ahead to a policy for Chromebook use once students return to regular classrooms. There should be strict parameters for its use while in school. Ms. Pytko agreed.

Mrs. Gerber asked about the timeline of the MOU. Mrs. Vitale said the BoF is now reviewing it with the hope it will be finalized before the RTM vote on June 1. The town attorney and Mrs. Deasy will also review.

Distance Learning Update

Mrs. Vitale requested and received unanimous consent to move the graduation discussion to the first item under Distance Learning.

Mr. Hatzis said he has been working together with Mr. Cavanna on graduation plans over the past month. Consultation with other districts was part of the process, with the intent to do justice for this class and allow for the best possible send-off during this unique time. The graduation ceremony should encompass three things: (1) a personal moment such as hearing your name; (2) memorable and inspirational moments such as speeches and cap & gown pictures; and (3) a collective moment such as the procession. In order to accomplish all of those, the idea is to (1) allow cap & gown pictures at the school while practicing social distancing; (2) create a video featuring the class of 2020 with each student's picture and name; and (3) form a parade of cars with seniors and their families, driving through town, creating a real town-wide celebration. Work is currently underway with town officials to allow this to happen and are working towards the right timing and route.

Mrs. Jacobsen and Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked about the results of the graduation survey, and asked why there couldn't be a more traditional graduation scheduled later on in the summer. Mr. Hatzis said that up to 2500 people attend graduation and there are no guarantees that social distancing rules will be eased anytime soon. It would be very difficult to manage the social distancing of students who haven't seen each other in a while. If restrictions aren't eased, an in-person ceremony runs the risk of being canceled at the last minute. There may be ways to celebrate the seniors in the fall, such as an expansion of Alumni Day.

Mr. Cavanna added that seniors need and deserve closure and it was best to avoid the possibility of multiple postponements. Even if the ceremony were to be held on the football field without family attendance, the gathering cap imposed by the state is not outlined and could be an issue. Mr. Cummings said the district had reached out to town officials and Health Director Sand Cleary, and came to the understanding that an in-person

graduation was becoming increasingly remote. Because of that, a new plan for graduation was needed in a relatively short amount of time, so the decision was made to move forward.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly thanked the headmasters for the planning work and said she was saddened with the reality and wished it could be different.

Mr. Cummings said once the high school graduation is finalized, he can turn his focus to the 5th and 8th grade ceremonies. It may not be in the best interest to hold multiple car parades for the lower levels.

Mrs. Vitale sympathized with Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly's sentiment, but said the Health Department even has social distancing concerns over this plan, given the possibility of students congregating in or at each other's cars. She offered the Board's help and said 5th and 8th grade ceremonies could possibly be held in August just prior to the start of the school year.

Ms. Leeper said she can't imagine the heartbreak of the families surrounding the tradition of graduation, but added the car parade sounds like an exciting way to bring the community together and wouldn't be surprised if it became a tradition.

Mr. Hatzis said he and Mr. Cavanna will be meeting on Friday with Police and Fire, and will work backwards from the date that works best for the town. Emails to the high school community with additional information will be sent after that meeting.

Grading Update

Mr. Cummings said he has not heard many comments on the grading update. Work is underway to identify students that may need the pass/fail option.

Summer Programming Update

Mr. Mancusi said summer programming is fluid and the district expects additional guidance from the state by the end of May. In the meantime, Fairfield County districts have been meeting together to share information. The PPT guidance from the state was very helpful and allows districts to consult with parents to carry over goals and objectives until students return.

Ms. Pytko asked if more summer staff will be needed, given the 24% increase that is expected. Mr. Mancusi said he is concerned with staffing and is constantly reviewing the projections. Speech pathologists, for example, are hard positions to fill during the summer. In addition, regular education summer classes are also planned to address credit recovery. More physical space may be needed if social distancing remains in effect.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked whether September WFC enrollment is expected to increase. Mr. Mancusi said yes.

Mr. Cummings said this issue has highlighted the varying social-emotional needs of Fairfield families; it will be difficult to ascertain which supports are needed until students return to school. Fairfield Cares has provided an early indication and the WFC could grow in need.

Ms. Leeper:

- Does the district partner with DCF for at-risk students, particularly in the summer? Mr. Mancusi said DCF has been very responsive to families in crisis.
- Will the district help provide meals over the summer even though not legally required? Mr. Mancusi said staff is actively trying to identify students with food shortages to provide relief.

First Reading of Policies 3100 and 4121

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said a discussion of booster clubs and resources began 3 years ago, which led to a review of the budget policy and allocation of district resources. Language was added to Budget Policy #3100 to more align with the budget book. References to the athletic budget will be addressed in the administrative regulations and the hope is to have an athletic annual budget celebration/presentation in August.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said a simple title change was necessary in the Substitute Teacher Policy #4121.

Approval of Minutes

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Motion Passed: 8-0-1

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Abstain: Mrs. Rotelli

Superintendent Report

Mr. Cummings reported on the District Improvement Plan (DIP). It will be difficult to plan and enact a new DIP in time for July 1. Massive amounts of data have been collected but staff has not been able to gather for a proper review. Another concern is properly measuring and gauging program changes resulting from distance learning. The May 29 PD will be a time for staff to reflect on the year's accomplishments and provide time to develop school and district improvement plans. Outcomes from that PD will be reflected in the new DIP.

Mr. Cummings said the Re-opening Committee will meet tomorrow and will be conducting surveys as a way to gather feedback. Including a youth committee is a topic on the agenda so that the student voice is included. In addition, the district has been and will continue to provide translated information. Social distancing rules may be in place next fall, which may result in alternating schedules of in-class and distance learning days. Planning for multiple scenarios is necessary, with the hope that we won't have to use all of them.

Ms. Pytko: Do you believe the state will adjust school attendance rules for medically fragile students? Mr. Cummings said he expects school attendance to be an issue for both students and staff with medical issues and he is hopeful the state will provide guidance.

Mrs. Jacobsen: How can extracurricular activities and clubs be maintained going forward? Mr. Cummings said these will continue to exist and the stipend accounts will continue to be supported. It may be possible to implement a rotational approach for lab and studio time.

Ms. Leeper noted that parents of younger learners could provide some valuable feedback.

Mr. Peterson: Will school buildings be open for community use? Mr. Cummings said the buildings will be open for summer Parks/Rec camps and those may need additional space due to social distancing requirements. The immediate issue is the availability of cleaning supplies.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly appreciated the Superintendent's vision of the crisis, dating back to January. Will students be returning on June 17 to collect their supplies? Mr. Cummings said the committee will review timelines and Mr. Papageorge is working with principals to develop safety protocols.

Mr. Cummings said the Superintendent awards ceremony, normally held in May, will be postponed to the fall. It is a great way to celebrate amazing students and is a very nice event for the Board and for students.

Committee/Liaison Reports

Ms. Leeper reported for the Finance Committee: The WFC lease has been extended for one year.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly reported for the Policy Committee: Policies on distance learning will be reviewed. The school calendar policy will also be reviewed and feedback is requested prior to next Tuesday.

Mrs. Gerber reported for MHBC: Everything is on track and moving forward as expected.

Open Board Comment

Mrs. Rotelli acknowledged the great work that Mr. Mancusi and his team have done with the parent presentation line up. The presentations have been very successful and are a great way to connect and share information with parents. She hopes the presentations continue after quarantine is over.

Public Comment: No public comment was received at publiccomment@fairfieldschools.org or through the website form.

Adjournment

Mrs. Gerber motioned, Mr. Peterson seconded to adjourn the meeting.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Meeting adjourned at 9:42PM

Respectfully submitted by
Jessica Gerber
Fairfield Board of Education
Secretary