

Andover School Committee
Minutes of April 30, 2020

Virtual Meeting Broadcast by Andover TV and on Comcast Channel 99, Verizon Channel 43 or via streamed: www.andovertv.org **Public Participation via email: scremote@andoverma.us**
Alison Phelan and Shelley Berman will be screening the emails for anyone who wants to comment or submit a question

Participants from the School Committee: Chairman Joel Blumstein, Tracey Spruce, Susan McCready, Paul Murphy and Shannon Scully.

Others participating: Superintendent Berman, Asst. Superintendents Paul Szymanski, Sandra Trach and Sara Stetson, and Director of Communications Nicole Kieser

I. Call to Order

Chairman Blumstein called the Andover School Committee called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

II. Chief Operating Officer Interview 6:00-7:00 PM

Dr. Berman provided a brief description of the hiring process for the COO position and an introduction to Stephen Nembirkow, candidate for the Chief Operating Officer position. There were thirteen applicants who went through initial screening. Three candidates emerged who went through a more in-depth process, including assignment of complex simulations. Mr. Nembirkow came through with flying colors and strong recommendations from the reference checks.

Mr. Nembirkow brings over 20 years of experience. He is a licensed attorney in Massachusetts but has dedicated his career to the public sector including education. Currently, Steve is the District Business Administrator for Greenfield Public Schools. He previously held the position of Director of Human Resources and Finance in Chicopee, Massachusetts, and was the Director of Business and Finance for the Mohawk Trail Regional School.

Questions from the School Committee

Tracey Spruce: Please describe your management style.

Mr. Nembirkow replied that managing HR and the financial team require two very different skill sets. Managing the financial team includes building relationships and treating people fairly and with respect. Human Resources is a delicate area because you have to be crystal clear in your direction and conversations and to interact with others fairly.

Susan McCready: Community Relations and the Budget. As part of being the Finance Director, you are an advocate for the budget. Everyone has a different view of what they want from the school system. What would your approach be?

Mr. Nembirkow said as part of being the finance director you are an advocate for the budget. He would reach out to various groups, PACs and PTO's in the community and explain the budget process so they can determine what they want the budget to include. During the budget season, he gives presentations on the budget in various scenarios in a way that people can understand and by publicly providing factual information.

Paul Murphy: What do your first 100 days look like?

Mr. Nembirkow said he expects to spend time with Paul Szymanski to learn the pitfalls and issues with the budget. Then it is a matter of getting to know the stakeholders in the School District and Town, gathering information, and build relationships. The first 100 days will most likely be centered around the fiscal challenges we are facing.

Joel Blumstein: How do you keep up with the changing financial tools and with technology?

Mr. Nembirkow loves technology but sometimes it has a way of backfiring on you. As far as technology goes, he has a sense of the big picture but in all his jobs, he has always had to delve into the minutia of analysis as well as trying to make life easier through technology. He has taught himself Power BI, Microsoft's Business Intelligence Software, and enrolled in online courses for data science. This is a job where you have the management pieces and the analytical side that requires a fair foundation in data and data technology, and good technology in the compiling piece. He uses data to gather information to make decisions; spending less time compiling data and more time analyzing data.

Shannon Scully: Explain some of the creativity you have brought into your previous positions.

Mr. Nembirkow said that there is more than one way of getting things done. He explained how he helped bring Out-of-District special ed students in-house and saved thousands of dollars. He has been successful using collective bargaining techniques, and worked closely with the Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum to purchase a new math series for elementary schools. He worked with a private finance company to finance the cost over 3 years, paid in 3 installments over 3 different budget cycles. He advocated strongly for a Capital Lease Program for technology, with a cycle that is constantly refreshing devices by using an analysis to determine the return on investment and how to fit it into the budget.

Tracey Spruce: How would you reduce grievances?

Mr. Nembirkow talked about how he developed a relationship with the Grievance Chair and they would have a dialogue to address problems before grievances were filed. He has been successful in this area by being receptive, listening and building relationships.

Susan McCready: What is your experience with MSBA and School Construction Projects.

Mr. Nembirkow stated that over the years he was involved in 7-8 building renovations, including new roofs, windows repairs, construction of two elementary schools, and bids on furniture.

Shannon Scully: The breadth of the job is tremendous, which one is your wheelhouse?

Mr. Nembirkow replied that his experience with security is not as in-depth as it is with the other areas of the position.

The Committee thanked Mr. Nembirkow and said that they really enjoyed hearing from him.

Discussion by the School Committee

The School Committee was impressed and found Mr. Nembirkow to be very knowledgeable, with extensive experience and they like his problem-solving approach.

Steve is a strong candidate, very affable, with a nice style and they are quite impressed,

especially with the way he makes connections with the community and looks at all sides of

an issue. The Screening Committee has brought forward a good candidate for the position and it is the School Committee's job to support him.

Sandy Trach said Steve seems to be very knowledgeable, experienced, versatile, and has a comfort in the areas he spoke about. He has a really nice leadership style, and an honest approach about what he is about to step into with the 2021 budget.

Candace Hall found Steve to be very knowledgeable with a relational leadership style which is important. She has enormous respect for how he has dealt with employees, how he sees them as a long-term investment, and willing to coach them along. He will work very well on the School and Town side.

Shelley appreciated the interview, he is very affable and honest. He seems like a team player.

This is one of the limited number of positions that the School Committee has to approve and approval is typically based on the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Shannon Scully moved that the Andover School Committee vote to authorize the Superintendent of Schools to offer Stephen Nembirkow the position of Chief Operation Officer. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, S. Scully-Y, S. McCready-Y, T. Spruce-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

III. Regular Meeting of the School Committee Resumed at 7:00 P.M.

The regular meeting began with a Moment of Silence. Chairman Blumstein asked that we think about how we and others are dealing with the COVID-19 situation.

A. Recognitions & Communications

1. Recognition of Melanie Cutler receiving EPA Educator Award

Melanie Cutler, AHS Science Teacher, is one of seven teachers nationwide receiving the Presidential EPA Educator Award recognizing outstanding environmental teachers. Melanie has been an extraordinary teacher inspiring student, a contributor to the entire community, and a hands-on project manager. She created the sustainable garden benefitting the whole community and is Chair of the Green Advisory Board with a lifelong commitment to the environment. The award comes with a \$2,500 stipend for Melanie and the District to spend on environmental education.

2. Introduction of Cindy Button as new APS Transportation Manager

Paul Szymanski reported that after many weeks of reviewing applications and conducting Zoom interviews, the members of the Transportation Screening Committee concluded that Cindy Button's background well suits her for the position of Transportation Manager. She successfully transformed from rank and file to supervisor and oversees routing covering a vast territory. Cindy holds various pupil transportation certifications, and possess excellent budget and operational background. They are excited to welcome Cindy to the team.

3. Superintendent: Update on APS District Closure

Dr. Berman said Phase II of remote learning will end tomorrow and Phase III will begin on Monday. The Commissioner issued very clear guidance that we are moving forward with enabling students to do the best they can to move onto the next grade. We have already designed our program, and in essence DESE said this is the opportunity to implement online and remote learning in a way that is as close to doing school as one can get. The three-hour per day recommendation will continue.

Next week is Teacher Appreciation Week. Many of our teachers have stepped up to the plate and done a lot of work to move online in a remote context and have done some wonderful things to brighten the children's day. We have to understand and temper our expectations to some degree, as they too have to take the time to balance work and home. The teachers deserve tremendous credit for facing this challenge.

Shelley has spoken with the Town Manager about setting up a task force to look at the opening up of the schools effectively for the next school year.

Sandy Trach provided information on curriculum and instruction. The May 8th Early Release Day was moved up to this week. Principals are holding faculty meetings to implement the Phase III instruction, feedback, and grading procedures. A family letter will be sent home for each prospective level of the school system. Program coordinators, principals, assistant principals, and teachers worked together to identify Phase III standards, pace and sequence. Sandy has been talking with administrators about ways to support our students this summer and anticipating a Title I Summer School.

Sara Stetson reported on Special Education. They have continued to provide professional development and resources to staff especially on Universal Design concepts for remote learning so that as many children as possible have the best possible accessibility to the lessons and tools they are using. The entire Pre-School Team participated in an experience on how to use their Digital Lesson Platform to incorporate whole teams of integrated specialists. Adapted PE lessons were added to the Bridge Program as well as a parent training program on ABA strategies. All Dept. Coordinators and ETF's were trained on how to conduct remote IEP meetings. Social workers have been including SEI lessons as part of the weekly plans that go home and they are providing tele-therapy for specific language as well. The Mental Health Team is working on developing a parent support series.

Steve Chinosi: They will continue to host professional development opportunities for faculty and parents going into Phase III. They partnered with MIT's Office for Learning for guidance around this shift (mechanical/technical into a pedagogy shift). They will continue distributing Chromebooks to students and supporting families with internet access. Thank you to ACE for their support in this area. Steve also thanked Joanne Najarian for her support in explaining the complexities across the District.

Paul Szymanski reported that Food Services provided their highest number of student meals last week. The lunch program will continue to run through the school year and possibly to

the end of September. Custodial Operations: Effective Monday, May 4th custodians are to return to their schools to begin summer cleaning activities. They are also working on a plan to return student items and having teachers access their classrooms. The biggest challenge will be how to meet the social distancing and safety guidelines.

Dr. Berman spoke about the MOA with the AEA. The Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC) has been discussing some of the issues that have arisen during this time. One of which is a common misconception that we can dispense with teacher evaluations and give everybody a pass for the year. We have a legal obligation to complete evaluations for teachers which is guided by the Legislature. The only control we have is flexibility in the dates. The Legislature has not changed its standards nor has the Commissioner his expectations.

Based upon emails Trace Spruce has received, as we go into Phase III she suggested they think about the structure and steps the district can take to see that all students are having the most consistent learning experience.

Susan McCready: There has been discussion on teacher evaluations. Could we send along the feedback of the legalities on evaluations shared by Liz Valerio. Shelley said there will be a communication sent out to all teachers; but it would be beneficial to see the results of the JLMC meeting tomorrow before sending anything out.

Paul Murphy: In the absence of something happening at the State-level, he agrees we should continue with evaluations, although it seems extraordinary to be going through evaluations during these difficult times. He hopes this is a moment we take note of how our kids engage.

Both legally and as a matter of policy it seems we should be evaluating staff on the whole year, but having the flexibility that this is new terrain for all people. Reinforcing what Tracey spoke about, Joel has concerns with the inconsistency of different teachers to embrace the technology provided to them. It should be the expectation that people are going to use the technology that is available.

AHS Principal Phil Conrad met with the Senior Class Advisors on Monday and the Advisors are meeting with the Senior Board tomorrow; after which, some of the Senior Activities will be announced. They have been meeting with all their vendors to continue to make sure everything they do is within the health and safety guidelines. He appreciates all of the parents and community members who have shared information on graduation ceremonies and what other communities are doing to celebrate this milestone.

Susan McCready reported on today's West Elem School Building Committee meeting. They reviewed and approved the schematic report due to MSBA on May 6th and the second part of the Feasibility Phase which will end on June 4th. She shared information on the Flexatorium, which is not reimbursable under MSBA guidelines. The first meeting of the AHS Principal Search Team began yesterday and they will be interviewing candidates in mid-May. Thank you to Steve Chinosi and Joanne Najarian on the at-home learning workshop for parents which was excellent. We will miss Joanne, she has been a real asset to our district.

Joel Blumstein confirmed that West Elementary Building Chair, Paula Colby-Clements, will be available to provide an update on the project at the next School Committee Meeting. He would also like to have the FY-21 budget on the next agenda to discuss the Town Manager's expectation that revenues for FY-21 will fall short from between \$3.3-\$3.5M.

4. Family Survey Results: Hannah Tolla

Hannah reported that the Family Survey was open to all parents (via Blackboard) from April 11-April 24th. There were 1,211 responses with 92% reporting their families have appropriate access to materials. Four basic themes of the survey included: Social Emotional Well Being, Balancing At-Home Learning with Working from Home, At Home Learning Activities (structure, video conferencing, feedback), and Overall Support for APS Families.

Over 80% of responses showed they were concerned with their child's learning progress and there was a range in responses on how many hours per day (from 1 hour to more than 4) children were able to participate in learning activities. Balancing At-Home Learning with Working from Home: 25% replied that it was extremely challenging, 19% quite challenging, and 15% slightly challenging; 39% replied it is has been extremely helpful to have a schedule. Most Helpful Online Tools: 37% replied that Google Classroom was most helpful and 25% replied live video conferencing. Feedback students receive from teachers: 26% replied most helpful, 25% quite helpful, and 13% responded it was extremely helpful.

Responses also included: Preference for small working groups, participating in less formal activities, dialing-down the volume of communications, having one location to access student information, staggering learning sessions or recording videos to be accessed by students at an appropriate time. Many of the High School/Middle School families showed concern over grading and preparedness for college.

Joel Blumstein said the results of the survey confirms that there are a lot of different experiences happening across the spectrum. Tracey Spruce would like to move forward with acquiring a Learning Management System.

Public Input

Mary Robb: (AHS teacher) Demonstrate your appreciation for teachers by allowing them to be part of the decision-making process. Allow teachers to be part of the Task Force, urge the legislature to postpone evaluations, teachers do not have enough time during the day for professional development when they are teaching and working with their own children on home school activities, and why are we evaluating the teachers but not grading students this period.

Marge Andresen: (WMS teacher) She has been holding Google Meets with students but many prefer not to turn on video but only to participate and listen in. Asked her class about how they feel about making videos and they responded they found it terrifying.

B. Response to Public Input

Dr. Berman said it is common practice that teachers are trying to do whole classes, but it is better to video a lesson for students to view on their own, and hold discussions in one-to-

one or in small groups classes. Video lectures should be pre-recorded by teachers and video conferencing used for discussion.

C. New Business

1. Memo of Agreement for North Reading Transportation contract

After some meetings, a MOA has been reached with NRT for the remainder of the school year. Nine districts joined together with Attorney Peter McNulty to negotiate a contract with NRT Bus and Trombly Motor Coach Service (TMCS). There is a key line in the agreement that NRT and TMCS will continue to pay their employees, while we are paying 78% of the contract cost during the closure period to ensure readiness of service when school resumes. The School Committee does have the discretion to determine if any payment should be made for services not rendered.

Attorney McNulty talked about the posture taken with negotiations while keeping within the guidelines of MGL, Department of Education, and Department of Revenue.

Negotiations were at times difficult but they came together with a MOA that would cover the time period from when the schools closed in March to the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Personnel costs were about reaching a fair and equitable deal for both sides. There is a provision in Section 11 of the MOA which allows the districts to verify that the bus companies are complying with the agreement.

Attorney McNulty provided a thorough explanation of the structure of the agreement and answered questions from the School Committee.

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve a Memorandum of Agreement between Andover Public Schools and NRT Bus, Inc./Trombly Motor Coach Services, Inc. for services performed on or after March 16, 2020 thru the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Motion seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, S. McCready-Y, T. Spruce-N, S. Scully-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 4-1. Tracey Spruce opposed.

2. AHS Handbook Changes

AHS Principal Phil Conrad shared information on proposed changes to the AHS Handbook. He reported that the Administrative Team, Program Coordinators and Faculty worked together to develop opportunities during Phase III to enable students to improve their grades by two grade distributions and to encourage student participation. Phil said the team looked at several models of grade distribution giving students an opportunity to grow during this difficult time. Students continued academic achievement will be seen by colleges they apply to. They are still waiting for guidance from DESE. Shelley and Phil agree that they don't think we will be forced to change our grading decision. They also looked outside of the district to mirror what other high schools are doing.

Public Comments: An AHS student does not agree with the pass/fail grading system as it does not encourage high achieving students to participate. AHS Student: How will GPA's be affected by the grade distribution. (GPA would be moved up)

Tracey Spruce supports having a system in place to reward students who continue their academic engagement at this time. Is there a way to respond to the feedback received about students not engaging in a P/F system? She wonders if there is an alternative to the increase of two grade distributions. Phil Conrad said the first two-thirds of the year will be the main basis of the grade and given more weight than the last third. They looked at other options, including grade distribution and adding points, but thought they were being more helpful, flexible, and more generous with the current proposal. However, if two grade distributions are too much for the Committee, they can go back and look at it.

Shannon will defer to the work that Phil and his team have done, but if the state decides to go in one unified direction and Andover instead continues with their plan, she is concerned if it would help us to be the point off the curve and not aligned with all of Massachusetts. Shelley said most of it will come down to local determination. The delineation in Massachusetts is that the local responsibility is very high and it will be more about guidance and overarching ideas that our ideas already fit into. Phil does not see us having to change the plan.

Joel: looking at all the comments received, he is concerned with the possible implication for students that will get a P/Incomplete due to economic conditions or health conditions and will not be able to up their grade. In terms of the recommendation to add an A+, Phil said in order to add an A+ it would skew all of the grades because we would have to change the entire grade system and it would affect all grades entered into the system for this academic school year. Joel read a comment from a junior from AHS who questions the equity of grades while some students are receiving boosts and others not. Shannon Scully moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the recommended changes to the AHS Handbook as presented with the additional change of striking the line that all live sessions will be recorded for asynchronous use and for the safety of the participants. The motion was seconded by Tracey Spruce. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, S McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

3. Decision on the last day of school: June 18, 2020

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve Thursday, June 18, 2020 as the last official day for students for the 2019-2020 school year. The motion was seconded by Shannon Scully. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

4. School Choice Vote

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote not to participate in the Massachusetts School Choice Program for the 2020-2021 school year. The reason for this action is both philosophical and programmatic as the Andover Public Schools are already enrolled to near capacity. Motion seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: S. Scully-Y, S. McCready-Y, T. Spruce-Y, P. Murphy-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

5. Policy Subcommittee: First Readings – Reschedule

6. Memo of Agreement for Teacher Evaluation

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for teacher evaluation for the 2019-2020 school year as presented. The motion was seconded by Tracey Spruce. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

D. Consent Agenda

1. Grants/Donations to Andover Public Schools/ Minutes

a. Grants: EPA Grant \$2,500

b. Minutes: March 19, 2020 and April 1, 2020

Tracey Spruce moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Susan McCready. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, and J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

E. Executive Session

Paul Murphy moved for the School Committee to move to Executive Session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 30A section 21(a) for the following purpose: Purpose 2: to conduct a strategy session in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, specifically the Chief Operating Officer and not to return to Open Session. The motion was seconded by Susan McCready. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

F. Adjourn

At 9:37 P.M. the School Committee adjourned from Regular Session and moved to Executive Session.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary