

Andover School Committee
Minutes of Thursday, December 3, 2020
Virtual Meeting

Participants from the School Committee: Shannon Scully, Susan McCready, Tracey Spruce, Paul Murphy, and Lauren Conoscenti,

Also participating: Superintendent Shelley Berman, Assistant Superintendents Sandra Trach and Sara Stetson, COO Stephen Nembirkow, Director of Communications Nicole Kieser, Director of Innovation Stephen Chinosi, Transportation Director Cindy Button, Police Chief Keefe and AHS Student Liaison, **Jeffrey Connors**.

I. Regular Meeting

Call to Order/Moment of Silence

Chairperson Scully called to order the Andover School Committee Meeting at 6:00 PM and the Committee immediately voted to meet into Executive Session. The Regular School Committee Meeting will be broadcast by Andover TV and on Comcast Channel 99, Verizon Channel 43 or streamed: www.andovertv.org. Public Participation via email: scremote@andoverma.us

II. Executive Session:

Susan McCready moved to meet in executive session pursuant G.L. chapter 30A, section 21(a) for the following purposes: Purpose (3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with unionized personnel, namely AEA Unit A, AEA Secretaries and Andover Assistants because an open session may have a detrimental effect on the litigating and bargaining position of the Committee. The Committee will reconvene in regular session at approximately 7PM. The motion was seconded by Lauren Conoscenti. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

III. Regular Meeting resumed at 7:00 PM

The Chair reconvened the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The meeting began with a Moment of Silence. Tonight, is the first night Public Input will be available via live video as well as via email.

A. Recognitions/Communications

Kerry Costello, AHS Advisor to Student Government, introduced Jeffrey Connors. Jeffrey is a junior at AHS and will act as the student government alternate representative to the School Committee. The Committee welcomed Jeffrey.

Paul Murphy reported that the next SEPAC meeting will be held on Thursday, December 10th information is available at www.andoversepac.org.

Shannon Scully announced that the next School Committee Informal Session will be held on Saturday Dec. 12 from 9:00-10:30 A.M. A link will be available on the website to register through Zoom. There will be School Committee Meetings next week. On Tuesday,

December 8th they will hold a workshop on the West Elementary/Shawsheen School Financing Plan. The School Committee will participate in the Triboard Meeting on December 9, at 7:00 PM to discuss the CIP, the Pension Obligation Bond, and Financing the West Elementary/Shawsheen School Building Project. On Thursday, December 10th at 7:00 PM the Committee will interview the two finalists for the interim superintendent position.

Shannon reported on the interview process and recognized all those who were involved in the search. Once selected, the interim superintendent will serve for approximately six months until a new superintendent is on board. The first finalist candidate to be interviewed is Kathleen Alward Smith, and the second finalist candidate to be interviewed is Dr. Claudia Bach, former Andover Superintendent from 1998-2010. We are excited to have these two finalists. Information on the candidates will be posted on the APS website.

Jeffrey Connors acknowledged that on Wednesday, AHS implemented a 15-minute break in between classes allowing the students an opportunity for a period of rest time. They also held a virtual PEP rally at AHS prior to the Thanksgiving break.

B. Public Input

Elizabeth Morgan, 89 Chestnut Street, is asking for help with the hybrid learning classes. Some teams in Middle School are receiving more synchronous learning at home, and some teams are getting zero. This is not an equitable situation and she wants to know what they can do as parents.

Carey Fuller, 4 Tallyho Lane, has been emailing the Committee about equality for Cohort A and B students. She suggests they shift the Friday Professional Days to Wednesday (Remote Day), so that Cohort B students are not affected.

Lauren Anderson, 12 Iron Gate Dr. asked if there has there been any discussion on returning to full-day learning especially for elementary students. Other communities have begun these discussions. At what point is this going to be done.

C. Response to Public Input

Dr. Berman suggested that Ms. Morgan speak with the school principal. We are working on a memo for staff to outline the consistency we expect from teachers. In terms of when we are going to back to full in-person, given that we are in the midst of a significant surge of the virus, it is pre-mature to ask that question. The CDC just asked Massachusetts to pull back on the re-opening efforts.

D. Education

1. Update on Hybrid and Remote Learning.

Sandy Trach said they are taking a closer look at common expectations in blended learning by grade level and grade span in Pre-K through Grade 12 with web applications, and how frequently synchronous instruction occurs. This information will be outlined in a memorandum that will soon be available to parents. They are looking at general categories,

Schoology, Common Core tools used in Pre-K-12 to access learning, live synchronous opportunities, common expectations around attendance, grading, differentiated instruction and feedback. Also, they will be looking at accommodations and modifications for students so that students have an equitable learning experience.

The requests to switch from hybrid to remote/remote to hybrid are being looked at on a case-by-case. Elementary parents will be notified tomorrow and Middle School families will be notified by next Wednesday on the status of their requests. Wednesday, December 9th is a remote day and also an Early Release Day. Teachers will have professional development in the afternoon focused on curriculum.

Director of Nursing, Rita Casper said changes have been made to the COVID Dashboard which will be updated each day. Information is also available on the DESE website and the Town of Andover website. Currently, there are 35 active cases in the School Department (not the same as the Town), and they are seeing about 1-2 cases a day. There is a higher percentage of cases at AHS, and we are closely monitoring cases across the District. There has been very little in-school transmission. It is important that everyone get their flu shots so that the symptoms of COVID are not confused with symptoms of the flu. She encourages everyone to monitor and watch the social distancing and to wear masks, and staying vigilant over the next few months. They are also monitoring the number of individuals who have had a flu vaccine. It is a State mandate that every student receive the flu shot by December 31, 2020. We are about 40% compliant at this time.

AHS Athletic Director Bill Martin provided information on the Winter Sports schedules. The season starts on Monday, December 14th and includes Girls and Boys Basketball, Boys and Girls Ice Hockey, Boys' Swim & Dive, Boys and Girls Skiing, and Gymnastics. The indoor track season was moved to the Fall 2 season starting at the end of February. After April vacation, cheering and wrestling will begin. The first games of the winter season will begin the week of January 11th for six weeks. The Swim Team will be competing virtually, there will be no locker rooms available at any of the facilities, and spectators will not be allowed at competitions. It is important to keep social distancing and to follow the safety guidelines. They are working diligently to ensure that all safety precautions are met. They are limiting the number of individuals at competitions and will live stream events.

Question from Frank McCall: We are at a 40% compliant rate for flu vaccines, does the School Committee have a policy in place for monitoring compliance. Rita Casper responded that we are doing everything we can possibly do to get parents to provide information. It is a mandate from the State, but a local decision on what we will do if we don't have full compliance. Our goal is to continue to work with parents for full compliance. Reminders are being sent out. Parents do have the ability to opt out by medical or religious exemptions.

The APS policy is that immunizations are required and that parents are to provide documentation. To opt out of immunizations a written statement from a physician is

required. The flu vaccine is a new requirement and Dr. Berman feels that we see many more emails received from parents on January 4, 2021 with the vaccine certification information.

Tracey Spruce: In response to the question on full in-person school for lower grades said the State guidelines have not changed and one of the biggest challenges we have is that while DESE said kids could be 3' apart in classrooms with masks, they must be 6' apart with masks on busses and 6' apart for lunch and snacks. It would be financially prohibitive to add more busses, and there is lack of space in our schools for additional spacing. Rita Casper reported on the new CDC Guidelines.

2. Calendar Adjustment for Equity of In-person Learning Days

Asst. Superintendent, Sandy Trach, spoke about the proposal to adjust the calendar dates for the second half of the school year as a way to balance out in person learning days. She reported that the district has received public requests to shift Professional Development Days from Fridays to Wednesdays as much as possible. Teachers currently utilize Wednesday afternoons for common planning time and professional development. The memo provided to the School Committee shows different shifts that would occur for Cohort A and Cohort B.

Shannon Scully said it is a great analysis and brings more equity. If the learning model shifted, would there be an intention to re-visit again, or would the decision made tonight be held firm to. Sandy replied that every time days shift, it has a ripple effect. Should the School Committee approve this proposal, it is her recommendation it stay that way.

Lauren Conoscenti moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the proposed calendar date changes for the 2020-2021 school year as discussed. Motion seconded by Tracey Spruce. Roll call: S. McCready-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, P. Murphy-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

3. NWEA Presentation (MAP Assessment)

Hannah Tolla presented the NWEA MAP test results. The presentation of the results is available on the APS website. Ms. Tolla has met with school principals to look at the data and to work on supporting data team usage for instruction and interventions. It is important that the Community and the Committee understand what we are observing and what the impact has been as a result of the changes in the school environment. NWEA offers a report on student projected performance in math for students who are expected to take the MCAS test. Our students are on track to perform relatively the same this spring as they were last fall. Our students may have a drop-in proficiency level compared to last year. The achievement percentiles correspond with MCAS levels.

About 120 teachers and administrators have been trained on data use and formed an NWEA Steering Committee. In the future, they plan to send home an individualized student report to parents.

Sandy Trach said NWEA is a very important assessment used to set learning goals and offers important information on how students are doing individually, and with their peers. Each school is starting to employ tracking data and making very close and instructional decisions. We are optimistic about sending out a parent/guardian report on the next assessment which parents will find very informative. The literacy investments have continued to pay dividends, and now need to turn an even closer eye to mathematics.

Our students are holding the same level of performance in grades 3-8 as they did last year, and is an important statement and a credit to the Literacy commitment of the District. We don't know about the K-2 students who may be having difficulty with the hybrid and remote learning. We will have to be careful how we monitor their reading. Dr. Berman will address the need to invest in smaller class size, invest in math, and individual attention for our primary grade students. Lauren Conoscenti had questions on the longer historical trend on the testing results.

E. New Business

1. Discussion on School Resource Officer (SRO)

APD Chief, Patrick Keefe and AHS Principal, Caitlin Brown, joined the meeting to discuss with the Committee the role of the SRO.

Tracey Spruce said our School Committee Policy makes the District a party to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Police Department complying with a State law that requires school Districts to have an SRO subject to available funding and allows for a waiver from the SRO requirement. The new police reform bill, currently awaiting approval by the Governor, does not require a waiver and Districts can opt out. Tracey raised this topic last summer in the hopes that the district could discuss this role in the context of the recently adopted APS Educational Equity Policy and the nationwide conversations and demonstrations last year against the murders of black and brown people by law enforcement personnel. SROs in schools raise questions of intent vs impact. The intent is to foster a sense of safety and security and to promote positive relationships between students and police officers. The impact, as it has been reported to Tracey anecdotally, is to undermine the sense of safety for black and brown students at AHS because they grew up with a very different history and experience with law enforcement, and this is creating stress for them at school. Tracey's hope is to have a productive, respectful community conversation about our SRO Program, specifically obtaining an understanding of the program's goals, how achievement of the goals is measured, whether we are consistently achieving those goals, whether they outweigh the potential harm that they might inflict on our students of color, and explore if the program goals can be achieved through alternative means.

Dr. Berman started the conversation with a statement on how the SRO goals and dialogue differ today versus 2 years ago with the knowledge that the conversation has shifted with conditions of equity. The purpose of the program at AHS is broad: building relationships between police and students, to promote safety for all students and building relationships,

and to maintain safety as a school community. He welcomed Chief Keefe and AHS Principal Caitlin Brown who provided information on their experience.

Chief Keefe said that as a Town, the priority was school safety. Priorities were identified as were the safety plans of the schools and the SRO was very involved in the safety protocols and updates to the schools especially with technology. Greater Lawrence Vocational has had an SRO since 2007 and AHS since 2012. The SRO has 4 areas of focus: law enforcement, informal counselor, educators, and emergency managers. The SRO connects with youth on needed services the schools may not be able to provide, and act as emergency managers which is a vital piece of the school system. If there is an issue in Andover, Chief Keefe would like to work to fix that issue. Having an armed police officer makes it safer when someone comes into a school with a weapon. Moving forward, we need to concentrate on what is happening in Andover and he is more than happy to help.

Caitlin Brown reported that the SRO provides safety and protections to the school and provides strong relationships with students, supporting them, and helping them with things that happen at home. The goal is for every student to walk into AHS and feel safe and secure in the school community.

Dr. Berman pointed out that the SRO is not there for school discipline which is regulated by school administrators. We need to tap our student's opinions, have more of a conversation with both teachers and students around the issue of the value of an SRO and particularly with students of color.

Shannon Scully is trying to understand the impact to the students in the community we live in and how this role fits, and if there is potential for adjustment and making sure the student voice is considered and being heard. What is the problem and how can it be solved with the resources available to us.

Incoming email question: Joslyn Allen asked if the goals of the SRO for safety planning can be met with a police designee rather than having a full-time officer on site. Chief Keefe responded that part of the position requires police training.

Dr. Berman said we are one community and it is important for individuals to understand that the essence of the relationship is for all of us to see that the police officers are individuals. Chief Keefe said it is a complex set of relationships that serve the school and the community and involves drug detectives, canine officers, and others who go to the schools for educational programs. The majority of the Andover Officers live in Andover and the Andover Police Department is part of the community. The Department is instrumental in working to help families who need resources and assistance for drug and alcohol situations and mental health issues.

Shannon Scully thanked all who participated and provided honest input to the conversation. This is the beginning of what will be more conversations to come.

2. Extending Bus Ridership

COO, Steve Nembirkow, Transportation Director, Cindy Button and the Superintendent proposed extending transportation ridership to Grade 7 students in the District.

Susan McCready moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve extending bus ridership to Grade 7 students without a fee as proposed. Motion seconded by Lauren Conoscenti. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, T. Spruce-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

3. Steps for Review of Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

Susan McCready provided background on the Bullying Prevention Policy which has been in place since May 2010. Each school district has to have a plan in place which has to be reviewed and if necessary updated at least every two years. Andover's plan was last reviewed in 2017 so it is time to schedule an internal review. As the Hearing Officer, Sandy Trach will take charge of the review.

F. Continuing Business

1. FY22 Budget Update

Dr. Berman showed a slide presentation on the content of the budget that will be looked at more closely in January. The Town Manager has suggested a 3.7% increase in the school budget. In the last 4-5 years, school personnel have taken up about 80% of our budget. The anticipated enrollment is a key element of building the budget, and our enrollment has decreased approximately 282 students from last year, and might make a difference in the amount of state aid we receive. The Out-of-District enrollment has come down thanks to In-district programs developed. In terms of students on free & reduced lunch, we have leveled out at 10% and part of the trend we have seen over the past number of years. The ELL population is at a lower-level in part due to the COVID pandemic.

One important area has been the investment we have made for In-district Programs greatly reducing the number of Out-of-District students and expenditures. The cost as a percent of the total budget has remained between 8% and 9%, we are projecting it to be only 6%; although we do have to worry about Out-of-District Transportation.

Shelley will recommend that the Committee and District maintain the current staffing level even though the enrollment has gone down. We need every staff member we have to help close learning gaps, and to maintain smaller class sizes to close these gaps. He has been conservative in the projection of the enrollment in case some of the students return. We have put a great deal of investment into the professional development and curriculum professional development of our staff. We would incur more costs if we reduce staff and have to hire new staff back later. Having the staff gives us flexibility.

Elementary class size average in grades 1-5 is in the range of 19.1 and if the projections are correct, class size would be about the same at 19.2. We have made an investment to reduce class size in Kindergarten.

Budget Drivers Include: AEA Negotiations, Track & Step changes, legal costs for negotiations and complaint resolution, demand/need for Health & Safety Measures related to COVID, an increase in utility cost, reductions in revenue for the Athletic Program, and State aid for Kindergarten.

There is a lot of trepidation at the State House on what the local aid will be and revenues going forward.

G. Consent Agenda:

Grants/Donations to District: N/A
Minutes of November 23, 2020

Tracey Spruce moved that the Andover School Committee vote to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: S. McCready-Y, P. Murphy-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, T. Spruce-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 50.

H. Adjournment

At 10:01 P.M. Lauren Conoscenti moved to adjourn the School Committee Meeting of December 3, 2020. The motion was seconded by Paul Murphy. Roll call: T. Spruce-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, P. Murphy-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

*Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary*