

**NEWBURYPORT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE SPECIAL BUSINESS MEETING
Tuesday, March 9, 2021
Nock Middle School, 70 Low Street, Newburyport, MA**

Meeting Convened at 6:33 PM

Mayor Donna Holaday / Brian Callahan Presided

Present: Mayor Donna Holaday, Brian Callahan, Steve Cole, David Hochheiser, Bruce Menin, Sheila Spalding, and Sean Reardon

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Mayor Donna Holaday called the Business Meeting of the Newburyport School Committee to order at 6:33 PM. Roll Call found all members present. All those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

At this point Vice-Chairman **Bruce Menin** assumed chairmanship of the Business Meeting.

Remembrance

Sean Reardon requested a moment of silence in memory of Eliot Bosinger, a long-time teacher and cross country coach at Newburyport High school for thirty-two years.

Transition to Full In-person Learning Presentation (Superintendent Sean Gallagher)

At the start of the presentation, a 5-minute recess was taken to resolve problems with Zoom & Channel 9.

- The Medical Advisory team continues to meet on a weekly basis to analyze cases/trends and review mitigation strategies.
- District wide pooled testing will begin March 15th and will run to the end of the school year. The state will sponsor funding until April 18th; thereafter, the ESSER grant and COVID funding will help sustain the program. Superintendent Gallagher thanked the nursing staff, as well as various other school and city staff that worked tirelessly to get this program up and running, as well as their work trying to establish a vaccination process.
- Total community COVID cases and trends between December 10, 2020 – March 3, 2021 were reviewed. The lower numbers, weekly data, vaccines and surveillance testing puts the schools in a good place to bring more students back.
- Cohort grouping strategies will continue to be used at each school.
- Mayor Holaday explained the importance of creating a regional vaccination site with eight surrounding communities. Glitches with the initial links have been corrected. They are committed to prioritizing vaccinations for teachers.
- Eighty-five percent of families surveyed will send children to school in-person if social distancing is reduced to no less than a 3-foot distance.
- Superintendent Gallagher explained that learning model changes are based on a combination of local metrics, continued mitigation strategies (i.e. surveillance testing), upcoming vaccinations, as well as DESE guidance and regulations. With all these things in place, the district is in a good place to phase in full in-person learning.

- On March 9, 2021 DESE released the following guidelines for full in-person instruction:
 - Elementary School (grades K-5) Monday, April 5, 2021
 - Middle School (grades 6-8) Wednesday, April 28, 2021
 - High School (grades 9-12) will announce in April (2 weeks in advance of date)
- Superintendent Gallagher explained that a phased-in approach will be followed to bring more students back to in-person learning at each school. This phased-in approach will allow them to concentrate on one school at a time as they return. He reviewed and explained each of the six phases. Remote Academy and Remote Learning will still be available for those students not comfortable returning for in-person learning. In addition, live streaming will still be available at the high school.
- Calendar impacts were reviewed, primarily that after April vacation all schools will have 5-days of in-person learning with Wednesdays as an early release day. Bagged lunches will be served before students leave on Wednesday.

Bruce Menin commented that he really liked the Wednesday ERD. He also asked if the Superintendent would talk about some of the supports available next year that may be in the budget. Answer: The Superintendent reviewed some of the issues as students return and supports they will need, as well as new positions that will be needed (i.e. behavior specialist). More explanation will be made at the March 15th school committee meeting.

Sheila Spalding appreciates the plan and asked if students will take work home on Wednesdays or if it will be a true 1/2 day. Answer: True 1/2 day, not a remote day. There may be some practice assignments that need to go home.

Sheila Spalding asked if kids will have specials. Answer: Yes, as usual.

Steve Cole asked if there are any thoughts about people that do not want to do pool testing. Answer: Over 896 people have signed up to participated.

Mayor Holaday asked if there were any concerns about having sufficient staffing. Answer: We are in good shape.

Mayor Holaday asked if the high school is able to maintain 3' distance in the classroom. Answer: Yes, and 6' distancing will be maintained in certain areas, such as the cafeteria.

Mayor Holaday asked if more lunches were added. Answer: This is still being addressed at some schools. Some cohorts will take turns (some in recess/some eating). There may be more at the high school.

Mayor Holaday asked about transportation. Answer: Updated regulations say we can have two in a seat. Many parents are still choosing to drive. We are comfortable with current busing routes.

Sheila Spalding asked if parents can opt back in to transportation. Answer: Not sure at this time. We can accommodate those that have already have it now.

Sean Reardon asked if we are still down a nurse. Answer: Yes, a new nurse will start at end of month.

Sean Reardon asked if the Nock has already identified their high needs students. Answer: Yes.

David Hochheiser asked who parents should call if they have questions. Answer: Special Ed or the principal.

David Hochheiser is happy with the approach and the vaccinations coming. It is hard to imagine a 3' distance in the hallways at the high school.

David Hochheiser asked if music and chorus are cancelled. Answer: Recently received notice that students will be able to sing again, and we are waiting for additional guidance as to how that is going to look.

David Hochheiser asked if anything has been said about MCAS testing. Answer: Postponed at this time; an update will be provided at the March 15th meeting.

CALENDAR CHANGES

On a motion by **Brian Callahan** and seconded by **Sheila Spalding** it was

VOTED to give the Superintendent latitude to have a professional day if needed after the teacher’s second shot.

David Hochheiser asked if teacher’s can use a sick a day if needed: Answer: Yes.

Roll Call Vote

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|----------------------------|------------|
| Mayor Donna Holaday | Yes |
| Brian Callahan | Yes |
| Steve Cole | Yes |
| David Hochheiser | Yes |
| Bruce Menin | Yes |
| Sheila Spalding | Yes |
| Sean Reardon | Yes |

Motion Passed Unanimously

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chris Burke, 9 Menut Circle: Prioritizing teachers for vaccine is very important. Teacher morale is low. How do you reassure parents, faculty and staff that they are safe when coming to work without a vaccine, especially if a student comes to school and exposes a dozen individuals?

Nicole Ananian, 240 High Street: Will there be any notifications to families on travel protocols in anticipation of April vacation week? (i.e. travel guidelines and returning afterwards)

Haley Knutsen, 7 Columbus Way: At what point will Wednesday afternoon be brought back in? She is grateful kids are coming back, but was expecting a return full time five days per week, rather than Wednesday just a part day. Would you address this?

Donna Rimer, 2 Morin Road: Will close contacts be redefined with the change in distancing and will we get communication for plans for students who are quarantined? And, how they will attend school if there is not remote school anymore?

Josh Baumfield, 75 High Street: Thank you for presentation. He shared COVID related data to make people feel more comfortable. He read several data statistics. He feels it is safer for kids in school.

Lynn Schow, 75 High Street: She appreciates the presentation and is grateful to Commissioner Riley to get the kids back in person learning. Science doesn’t support keeping kids out of school. Wants to hear what is in the best interest of the students.

Amy LeBlanc, 18 Woodman Way: Would it make more sense to have Friday’s as possible ½ days rather than Wednesday. Kids losing more academic time if losing 2 days.

Preston Carey, 59 Jefferson Street: Thank you for creating as best a year as you could. You are creating anxiety transitioning to something new; doesn't get 6-8 weeks of change. He has three kids in the district.

Kara McCloud, 7 Newhall Lane: Positive shout out to teachers and administration who have worked their tails off all year. They deserve more respect than they have received. She applauds all of you, thank you for getting our children back to school.

Matthew Kane, 63 Curzon Mill Road: Thank you for everybody's hard work. He appreciates what Josh had to say. His only comment is it is hard to hear some of this and hard to see what's on the screen. Does it make sense to phase in the high school first, more important. Second, is there a point where this meeting returns to a public meeting? It is really important.

Dave Hochheiser asked if the presentation. Answer: Yes.

Bruce Menin asked if Policy can look at the State mandates on public comment to find out what is permissible. Answer: Yes.

Brian Callahan: if in person,

Mayor Holaday stated that State and CDC guidelines for large meetings must still be followed and we will continue to limit people at these meetings. She commented that the cable channel and Zoom have been great for families and participation in meetings has been higher than ever.

Bruce Menin commented that people should look at CDC or State websites for guidance on travel regulations.

David Hochheiser suggested a survey about what has gone well.

ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion by **Mayor Holaday** and seconded by **Sean Reardon** it was

VOTED To adjourn the business meeting of the Newburyport School Committee at 7:52PM.

Motion Passed Unanimously

Roll Call Vote

| | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Mayor Donna Holaday | Yes |
| Brian Callahan | Yes |
| Steve Cole | Yes |
| David Hochheiser | Yes |
| Bruce Menin | Yes |
| Sheila Spalding | Yes |
| Sean Reardon | Yes |