

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Wednesday, August 5, 2020
Final Minutes

Present: Dan Hayes, Steve Sullivan, Jen Malcolm-Brown, Katie Fiander, members; Lauren Thomas-Paquin, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Bruce Turner, Director of Finance & Operations; Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order by Jennifer at 6:05 P.M.

B. Reorganization of the Committee:

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE DAN FOR CHAIR. KATIE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

Dan assumed control of the meeting.

KATIE MOVED TO NOMINATE LAUREN FOR SECRETARY. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE JEN AND LAUREN FOR UNION #28 REPRESENTATIVE. KATIE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

DAN MOVED TO NOMINATE LAUREN FOR BUDGET & PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. KATIE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

KATIE MOVED TO NOMINATE STEVE FOR AMHERST REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE KATIE AND JEN FOR POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE. DAN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

LAUREN MOVED TO NOMINATE STEVE FOR CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE LIAISON. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

KATIE MOVED TO NOMINATE DAN FOR COLLABORATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

C. Public Hearings:

Dan thanked everyone for their hard work, with constant communication with state and federal agencies as well as working with all stakeholders.

D. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar: None.

E. Warrants and Gifts:

Payroll
#324 5-18-2020. \$69,351.22

#326 6-15-2020. \$70,874.17
#327 6-29-2020. \$70,874.20
#301 7-13-2020 \$64,184.51
#302 7-27-2020. \$66,425.79
#303 8-10-2020. \$69,238.46

Accounts payable
#3025 6-18-2020. \$38,671.78
#3026 6-30-2020. \$51,659.56
#3027 6-30-2020. \$16,498.95
#3001 7-02-2020. \$04,025.13

F. Approval of Minutes from June 18, 2020:

**LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 18, 2020. KATIE SECONDED.
UNANIMOUS.**

G. Unfinished Business / Updates: None.

H. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. Fall Reopening Plan - Discussion and Vote:

Jennifer referred to the draft Reopening Plan SSC has received. There are three learning models (hybrid, remote, and in-person) and SSC needs to vote on one model to adopt for the start of the school year. DESE guidelines ask for a minimum of 3 feet distance between students, with 6 feet being ideal, and Jennifer recommends 6 feet. There are two different hybrid models: phasing in groups of students, adding Grades later, and alternating cohorts on different days of the week. Both would start with a period of remote learning. Jennifer expressed concern over bringing staff and students back to school and noted that the AFT and the MTA have recommended remote learning. Both EES and LES have adopted a remote start with a hybrid phase-in later. Jennifer thinks a cohort model would involve the least exposure for everyone. DESE has made clear that we can shift models during the school year as required to respond to the trajectory of the virus.

Jen thanked administration (U#28, SES and the Leadership Team) for all the care and thoughtfulness that they put into these plans. Lauren noted that the STA would opt for remote learning, but also acknowledged all the work that went into all the plans. She praised everyone involved for being able to work closely together even across disagreements. Lauren is concerned about bringing students back as well, even though it would mean that we'd lose the school community as we've known and loved it. Jennifer noted we don't have to take any risk; we could just go with remote learning. Jackie thanked her teachers and staff for their amazingness and their ability to step up and work creatively to serve their students. There are certainly many ways to make personal connections with kids in a safe way even if we go with a remote model.

A representative of the STA explained that staff has put together a very powerful remote learning foundation for all students; it's just not safe to bring students back (we see this now with schools and summer camps that are opening). Dan said it might be a very long time before we see an effective vaccine, and the representative said the STA wants to wait until a vaccine to bring students back, but certainly wants

to wait until the uptick in MA subsides. Katie supported this and even suggested a longer time of remote learning. Jackie explained that we've thought it would be too much for students to confront with all the scary new procedures (masks, staying to certain areas, etc.) that might be yanked away when cases rise and we have to go to remote learning. Katie suggested doing the entire fall semester remotely.

Jen asked if we could change the model later; Jennifer said she hasn't gotten any clear answer yet, so her interpretation is that we have to pick a starting model, then we can pivot to other models that work for us. Jen said she's in support of whatever is the safest option for the community, but she's also cognizant of equity issues. Jennifer said we're also thinking about how to address equity, especially regarding the addition of outdoor or on-campus activities. Jackie noted that we would have to provide transportation for all students to such activities.

The STA representative pointed out that 25% of parents would not send their kids back to SES even under a hybrid model, and a certain number of these would do home school instead. If we chose remote learning, we could offer a powerful curriculum for these families instead of them turning to home schooling. A number of school districts across the state have already decided to go full remote. Jackie thinks that a very substantial portion of the curriculum should be online (at least 8 weeks); she's come to this decision after speaking to many people in the community. Jennifer has also had many sleepless nights over this decision, and there are just so many unknowns about the virus, and we'd be putting students and teachers together inside buildings, and it's not clear that we have to take this risk in the first place. We have some wonderful leadership and talent in place that could support remote learning. She hears more and more towns and cities across MA and New England are choosing to begin remotely. She recommends a remote beginning for all these reasons.

Dan said if a remote opening is what everyone agrees on, we need to nail down a definite remote period and vote on it. Jennifer said if we proceed with this, we need to help parents think about what would happen after that, what different options mean. Jackie recommends a cohort model, which would allow teachers to have face-to-face time with all kids in smaller, safer groups, with time for cleaning in between. SSC also has the authority to change the operating model. SSC members favor an initial 8-week period of remote learning, which would provide enough time to evaluate what's happening and what we might do next.

Steve asked about how the needs of students with IEP would be met, as well as how breakfast and lunch would be served and what to do about Pre-K. Jackie said we'd continue with the successful program we had in the spring. She said that no education will be the same as face-to-face, but we did have success adapting creatively in the spring to provide the services students need. Jennifer said she's not comfortable letting 3-year-olds come to school and asking them to social distance, but we will offer educational services for 3- and 4-year-olds who need them. Jennifer said that LSC voted to suspend Preschool for a year. Jackie said we're proposing a half-day program for 4-year-olds and services for students on IEPs.

DAN MOVED TO APPROVE A REMOTE LEARNING PERIOD OF 8 WEEKS WITH PRESCHOOL AND IEP SERVICES OFFERED AS STIPULATED BY SES ADMINISTRATION. LAUREN SECONDED. ROLL CALL VOTE ALL AYES.

LAUREN MOVED TO APPROVE THE OPENING DATES RECOMMENDED BY JENNIFER: TEACHERS START 8/28, FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL 9/16. KATIE SECONDED. ROLL CALL VOTE ALL AYES.

2. Morse Hill School - Discussion and Vote:

Jennifer reported that we've gotten a proposal to open a school at Morse Hill, which falls under the purview of SSC. Under the terms stipulated by the state, SSC must determine whether the proposed school would provide a program similar in quality to SES, as well as look at the physical plant, qualifications of staff and administration, and the population the school is meant to serve. Representatives of Morse Hill School were present to report on these items: the buildings there are up to date in terms of code and passing a fire inspection. Dan and Steve questioned this, as they'd heard it has been inspected as a summer camp, but not as a school. SSC asked about entrances and windows, which are being installed. A yurt is also being upgraded. Dan noted that the physical plant has to model and be similar to that of a public school, so we need to have inspections performed under the assumption that it's going to be a school, not a summer camp. A representative pointed out that Morse Hill School is an outdoor school, not at all like a traditional public school, with the buildings only used during inclement or cold weather. Dan explained that he'd like to see school inspections before he'd feel comfortable voting yes.

Jennifer then asked about a host of curricular criteria the school must meet (CORI checks, maintaining and providing transcripts, providing adequate services for students, etc.). A representative pointed out that all these questions have been answered in the documentation they've provided. Jackie noted that the curriculum provided is not thorough enough right now to meet the Massachusetts curricular standards. A representative explained that there are two parts to the curriculum, one of which comes from a private school curriculum that does align with Massachusetts standards, and the other of which is a nature-focused curriculum; this latter is more difficult to provide in a detailed form at this point because it will be highly individualized to the students.

Dan asked whether they're following guidelines for outdoor schools. They have looked at other outdoor schools, and the majority of the time is spent outside; inside time is limited to emergency weather situations. There are very successful models out there we're looking at and learning from.

Katie asked if they could vote pending the inspections Dan mentioned; Dan said he's not comfortable going that route. We need answers to all these questions before we can feel confident we've gone through all due diligence. In particular, he's very concerned about the location not being inspected with an eye to school physical plant standards. He does want to see this school succeed, but we need to make sure we're going through full due diligence. He recommends we table the vote. Dan will pursue answers to the questions he can and share answers with everyone, and Morse Hill School will look into getting the correct inspections.

I. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report: Jennifer reported that more guidance on reopening is forthcoming from DESE. There will be a public hearing on holding schools harmless for home school students and suspending MCAS for one year, and she invited SSC members to attend and have their testimony heard on these issues. Also, she expressed her delight to be working with SSC and her Leadership Team, all incredible people.

2. Director of Finance and Operations: Bruce reported that the state has voted to level fund Chapter 70 at the 2020 level, which is exciting news. He's met with U#28 custodians today to set up protocols for cleaning and to discuss the ventilation systems and how they need to be upgraded to guard against the virus (including UV bulbs). It will be very labor intensive to sterilize and clean as much as we'll need to. We

might be getting some money from the Town (from COVID aid) to install a bottle filler in the school, which would avoid the exposure associated with a regular drinking fountain. The Town is being really supportive through all of this. He's also talked with Amherst-Pelham about how to transport students. They have a lot of guidelines for safe bus transport to go over.

3. Principal's Report: Jackie gave a shout-out to Matt and Andy, our custodians, who have been working nonstop to get the school ready. They've been just great. She thanked Debbie Lee as well, who's been working well beyond what she's supposed to be to help set up our plan. And to Jessica, keeping us all organized and communicating with scared families. SSC knows what she's been spending her time on otherwise, so she has nothing more to report.

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report: Steve reported that the RSC was supposed to meet last night, but that's been postponed until tomorrow night. The main thing we've been working on are the frameworks for support for students, and we're wrestling with the frameworks for support for teachers. We're trying to support both students and staff in U#28, so he'll be voting to go full remote tomorrow. His big concerns are IEPs, special needs, and food. He thinks the Arts District will still be doing food distribution, but he'll make sure.

5. Union #28 Report, including Budget & Personnel: No report.

6. CES Report: Dan reported that there's been a lot of chaos. We're applying for loan forgiveness for the PPP, and if we don't get that, we're looking at a million-dollar deficit. We're also moving forward with hiring a new Executive Director in-house. We're coming up with reopening plans and trying to be flexible. Jennifer expressed appreciation for how helpful Bill Diehl has been.

J. Policy Review: None.

K. Future Business:

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, September 17, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, September 17, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory Policy Committee – TBD
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – TBD
- Budget and Personnel Committee – None
- Future agenda items –

L. Adjournment at 7:45 P.M.