

CITY OF HOLYOKE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2020  
TIME: 6:00 PM  
VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

School Committee Vice Chair Mildred Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Ms. Lefebvre announced that, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, s. 20, a video and audio recording is being made of the meeting and the meeting is being live-streamed and run live on the City's community TV channel.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Mayor Alex Morse, Mildred Lefebvre, Devin Sheehan, Erin Brunelle, Rosalee Tensley Williams, Rebecca Birks, Irene Feliciano-Sims, John G. Whelihan, William Collamore, and Dr. Alberto Vázquez Matos, Superintendent/Receiver. Absent: Nyles Courchesne.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR FORMER MAYOR MARTIN J. "MARTY" DUNN**

Mayor Morse expressed what a privilege it was to have had the opportunity to know Marty Dunn. Everyone who had that privilege knows how much Marty had touched so many lives, and the impact he has had on the community. Mayor Morse was grateful for Marty Dunn's leadership in the community, for being a mentor and for being a friend. Marty was always incredibly kind and had a strong sense of loyalty and respect for his friends and for people he supported. Marty served as Mayor of Holyoke, State Representative and as General Counsel to the State Senate. Marty Dunn never forgot where he came from and he always did everything he could to help a person in need.

**STUDENT SHOWCASE – HOLYOKE HIGH SCHOOL DEAN CAMPUS – ELECTRICAL SHOP**

Dean Campus Electrical Instructor Luis Arroyo and Senior Student Marcus Teneasaca, were present.

Mr. Arroyo is proud and privileged to serve the community and to work for the Holyoke Public Schools. He now teaches in the same shop he received his electrical certificate from twenty years ago.

Marcus Teneasaca thanked the committee for inviting him to speak. He previously attended Easthampton High School before he became interested in a vocational trade and transferred into the electrical shop at Dean. He chose electrical because he was fascinated by working with the power of electricity. He has learned how to safely handle tools and equipment, as well as many other essential skills, both basic and complex,

that will help him to achieve his future goals. He plans to become a licensed electrician and, hopefully, one day have his own business. He credited Mr. Arroyo for provided good guidance to students, including during this pandemic. He is excited for his senior year, to learn both virtually and in person.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

## **COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS**

### **Update on Start of 2020-2021 School Year**

The goal for the start of the 2020-2021 school year was to have a strong start to an unusual school year, safely, for students and staff, with quality educational programming, both in-person and remote.

The school year was started later than usual to allow for intentional and meaningful professional development, districtwide, for all staff. Sixty-four sessions were offered for staff across the district.

Teachers started the year eager to engage with their students. Students have been working virtually, and in-person, in small group and individualized instruction. Remote students enjoyed connecting with their classmates.

There are about 587 students, or 11% , in-person for some of the week on a rotating schedule. There are 215 students in-person for 4 days a week. High school students are in school for about 4.25 hours. K-8 students are in school for 5.5 hours. When students are not in school, they participate in remote learning.

Meal distribution continues at sites across the district. Fresh fruits and vegetables will continue to be distributed as well.

Ms. Brunelle expressed appreciation that Dr. Vazquez listened to the parents and staff who had concerns about bringing children back to school in September. She believes it was the right thing to do for Holyoke.

Mr. Sheehan has heard from some parents who are frustrated because with 20 children in a class, and particularly at the lower grade levels, teachers spend a good deal of time going over rules, like muting/unmuting, raising hands, etc.He asked how excused and unexcused absences are being defined during remote learning.

Excused absences are defined as due to documented illness and unexcused are those without medical documentation. There is flexibility on unexcused absences related to illness, however.

Mr. Sheehan inquired as to whether there has been an increase in parents choosing to home school their children.

There was not a huge increase in home schooling requests in Holyoke. Holyoke had about 15 new families looking to home educate as of mid-September. Families are first encouraged to try the remote learning option, if they are willing, before opting for home schooling. Most families that have inquired named safety as their main concern so remote was something many families were willing to try.

Mr. Sheehan asked if there had been an increase in parents removing students from the public schools to enroll in charter or private schools.

There has not been a significant increase of students going into non-public schools. Private school enrollments capped pretty quickly. There are waiting lists in the private schools.

Mrs. Birks expressed concern about the state metrics that measure whether a district should be in-person, hybrid and remote. DESE recently reported that 16 districts should be in-person and that was surprising to her based on their numbers. Her concern is that the district is doing everything as safely as possible.

Dr. Vazquez indicated that the recommendation is to look at multiple weeks of data to determine the most appropriate learning mode. School Department officials work closely the Health Department Director on the metrics, and break the data down to look at where cases are occurring. The conversations are in depth to be sure that school is done as safely as possible.

Learning pods were created for special education students who did not meet the requirements for in-person learning, but who needed personal contact to continue to thrive.

Mr. Sheehan asked about safety protocols for extracurriculars and athletics, and specifically, whether covid tests or particular masks were being required and asked how transportation is being provided.

Dr. Vazquez said that football conditioning will continue and if the season happens it will be during the second fall season, which will also include cheerleading and track and field. Student athletics and extracurriculars follow protocols related to masks, but covid testing is not being required. The standard physicals are still required. There is an ability to do live streaming video for games so that the community will be able to watch the games.

Ms. Lefebvre wanted information on how transportation is running and whether any of the routes had to be split to accommodate students. She also asked how high school students are being transported to school.

Dr. Vazquez indicated that many families who qualify for transportation have chosen to transport their children to and from school. He was not sure about the specific number of routes, but said he would send that information out to committee members. High school students have PVTA passes for transportation beyond those using HPS transportation.

Mr. Sheehan asked how flu shots are being managed so the district can be compliant by the end of December.

Dr. Vazquez explained that printed information is being sent out and promotional videos are being created. There are partnerships throughout the city, in collaboration with the state, to open flu clinics, including public clinics and at sites like CVS, etc. The district is trying to be proactive in educating families about the vaccine requirement.

### **Hispanic Heritage Month Proclamation**

Mildred Lefebvre read the Proclamation in English, and Dr. Vázquez read the Proclamation in Spanish.

Proclamation on National Hispanic Heritage Month in the Holyoke Public Schools, 2020  
Issued on: September 21, 2020

WHEREAS: The United States Congress approved Public Law 100-402 in 1998 to designate the month of September 15th – October 15th as “National Hispanic Heritage Month” To celebrate and honor Hispanic and Latinx Americans and their countless contributions to the history, culture, and achievements of our country.

WHEREAS: The City of Holyoke has a rich and beautiful history of Hispanic people making profound contributions across all sectors of the community, and that tradition continues today. Holyoke Public Schools proudly serves nearly 4,200 students (about 81% of our enrollment) who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x. We also are proud that our staff includes so many Hispanic and Latinx individuals leading, educating, and supporting our students throughout the school district.

WHEREAS: A commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity for all of our students, educators, staff and community is an integral part of Holyoke Public Schools’ mission to be the first educational choice for Holyoke families.

WHEREAS: Through their commitment and contributions as leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, citizens, and members of our community, Hispanic and Latinx Americans have enriched our lives, culture, and society.

NOW THEREFORE, be it proclaimed that I, Dr. Alberto Vázquez Matos, Superintendent/ Receiver of the Holyoke Public Schools and the Holyoke School Committee, by virtue of the authority vested by the state of Massachusetts, hereby

proclaim September 15 through October 15, 2020, as: *“National Hispanic Heritage Month in the Holyoke Public Schools.”*

RESOLVED: That the Holyoke Public School District hereby promotes September 15th through October 15th as Hispanic Heritage Month; and, be it finally

RESOLVED: That by adoption of this resolution, the District hereby encourages all students, faculty, administrators, families, and elected officials to remember and celebrate the contributions that Hispanic Americans have made to Massachusetts and the United States.

We call upon the entire Holyoke Public Schools community to join with us in celebrating this month.

SIGNED:

Dr. Alberto Vázquez Matos,  
Superintendent / Receiver

Mayor Alex Morse,  
Chairperson

Mildred Lefebvre,  
Vice Chair

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Selection of Voting Delegate and Alternate Delegate to MASC Annual Meeting**

The Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees will be held on November 7<sup>th</sup>, virtually, and the committee needs to elect its voting and alternate delegates to that meeting. The delegate will vote on resolutions brought to the MASC Board of Directors which become priorities for the association’s work for the coming year.

MOTION: Rosalee Tensley Williams nominated Erin Brunelle as the voting delegate and Irene Feliciano-Sims as alternate delegate to the MASC Annual Meeting, seconded by Devin Sheehan. The motion carried on a roll call vote. (Morse-yes, Lefebvre-yes, Sheehan-yes, Brunelle-yes, Tensley-Williams-yes, Birks-yes, Feliciano-Sims-yes, Whelihan-yes, Courchesne-yes.)

## **ONGOING BUSINESS**

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Sheehan announced that Holyoke’s US Census completion rate was only 62.9% and that in 2010 the completion rate was 70.5%. The US Census is key to the

community and to the state because it impacts the state for the next 10 years, including congressional representation, and census data helps the legislature to create lines for house and senate seats. The Census drives federal services and grants for the city and region. And, the city's funding levels are based on numbers reported through the Census.

Mr. Courchesne asked if the committee could get a breakdown, by ward, of Census completion? Members might be able to talk with their neighbors and friends to encourage them to complete the Census.

Mr. Sheehan suggested contacting OneHolyoke for that information. CDC also has information on Census tracks.

Ms. Lefebvre informed members that she and Dr. Vázquez had been talking about scheduling a committee retreat sometime in October. A retreat would give the committee an opportunity to meet with Dr. Vázquez to learn more about district initiatives and priorities, to spend time getting to know one another better, and to talk about how to continue to move Holyoke forward.

MOTION: Mayor Morse made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Birks, to adjourn. The motion carried on a roll call vote. (Morse-yes, Lefebvre-yes, Sheehan-yes, Brunelle-yes, Tensley-Williams-yes, Birks-yes, Feliciano-Sims-yes, Whelihan-yes, Courchesne-yes.)

The September 21, 2020 meeting of the Holyoke School Committee adjourned at 7:48 p.m.