

CITY OF HOLYOKE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MONDAY, October 18, 2021  
TIME: 6:03

**CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

School Committee Vice Chair Mildred Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and announced that pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, s. 20, attendees are hereby informed that 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.

**Present:** Acting Mayor Murphy, Mildred Lefebvre, Devin Sheehan (remote) , Erin Brunelle, Rebecca Birks, Irene Feliciano Sims, John G. Whelihan, William Collamore, and Superintendent/Receiver Mr. Anthony Soto.

**STUDENT SHOWCASE**

Holyoke High School Theater Company, theater and media arts teacher and director of the Holyoke High School theater company. This year, we are producing student written work only this year. During the pandemic we really focused a lot on playwriting and developing our skills as playwrights. This year Holyoke High Senior Alysha Izquierdo has been a part of the production since she was a freshman. The low budget High School Play is Alysha's senior capstone. She started in the spring with the first draft, and the first act of her play and then over the summer on zoom we worked together. She worked with me probably 10 to 15 hours a week.

**Luis Melendez, Junior, HHS**, this is my third year in the Holyoke High School Theater Company. The auditions for the play that's being produced this year. I auditioned with a friend, and we were both off script. I thought it went well, but it helped me learn to work with others and it helped me be a better actor. This is my first year getting picked for an actual role through auditions. I worked on five projects including The Haunted House, Clue on Stage, and Competition play tracks and the virtual duet play. I think people are going to like low budget high school play because it's comedy but it has different personalities and it's more modern, so you get to see personalities that you wouldn't see in a normal like high school. It has a lot of humor and characters that students can connect with.

**Naveah Lopez, Junior, HHS**, has been in the theater company for three years now. I've been heavily involved as much as possible, but it has been hard while not being in person. My freshman year I was part of The Haunted House which was my first acting experience. I was stage crew and liked helping in the background for Clue, which was also during my freshman year. I was the waitress in Tracks which was our competition play and it was a completely brand new experience for me but it was like an amazing experience. For my sophomore year I was in a virtual monologue competition as well as a ritual like duet acting competition where I wrote both of the scripts for that so writing a script and then acting

it is also a different experience. that I really enjoyed and then now this year I'm playing Sam in Low Budget High School Play which was also the first time that I've ever been picked first for a role. It was a victory on my end because I put in the work and I'm finally seeing the payoff so because this was my first audition in almost two years it was really nerve-wracking and exciting but I feel like I advanced enough since freshman year that I could really see a difference and I could really see the work paying off. The play is different having a student writer and a student director because while we're going through the process of preparing for the show we're also going through the process of changing things within the script and within the actual play and we're providing feedback and we're showing the director and writer something she might want to change.

I'm forever grateful for this opportunity

**Alysha Izquierdo, Senior, HHS, Director of Low Budget High School Play.** In the beginning of the summer I started working with Ms. Brunelle, to continue writing a play that I had started for a project last year. I got the idea of doing this project because I feel like we always struggle trying to like figure out what plays we want to do throughout the year so I thought why not write one of our own so that we don't have to spend money. The play is about these five teenagers who go to a school that isn't funding their theater production or their theater company and so they're doing everything themselves they're coming up with props and costumes themselves. Throughout the play you get to see them work together to try and figure out like different ways to get through the things that are happening. All the characters are very diverse. I wouldn't say they're very stereotypical but they all play a different part in the play.

There is Terence who is the head of tech crew, Javier who is the director of the play, Victoria who does costume and makeup, Sam who is playing the lead role Julia, and JD who's playing lethal romeo, and they're trying to put together. The whole show takes place a couple hours before their first opening play so this is the first time they're performing. When you're watching play you just see a lot of stuff that's going on backstage and a lot of the conversations that they're having. There's a few parts where we even have videotapes that are pre set because that is what we do. This play is similar to a short film which is something new to us.

A lot of the customs that we're having are clothes that the cast are bringing in themselves. You're only going to see three people wearing wearing costumes. The custodian, wearing his janitor suit and a hazard suit and JD with his romeo costume, and Sam with her Juliet costume. The play is very simplistic, and a lot of the stuff are easy things that you can find around your house. The play is called Low Budget High School Play so we kept it as low budget as possible. This makes it easier for us because the theatre company is funded by our own fundraising.

The show on November 18th, 19th, and 20th @ 7 p.m at the Holyoke High School auditorium.

**Jacqueline Jourdain- M.A.S.S Certificate-** Not present due to Volleyball Game, Ms. Jourdain will be present for the November Meeting.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT- NO PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. Lefebvre clarifies the regulation which states which states that whatever you speak upon in public comment must be on the agenda. Moving forward, we will ensure the agenda is according to the specifics we are speaking about. If there is a topic that someone wishes to include in the meeting, it must be submitted 15 days prior to the meeting and Miss. Garcia, at [sagarcia@hps.holyoke.ma.us](mailto:sagarcia@hps.holyoke.ma.us). If a person wants to submit public comment, then public comment must be submitted the Friday prior to the meeting at 3PM, to Miss. Garcia, and what you are speaking about is no longer than two minutes.

Mrs. Birks, In addition, the reason why that's an order is because, when people speak at public comment, if you are not on the agenda it does not give the district or the committee the capability to respond, or ask questions, or respond to accusations.

## **COMMUNICATION AND REPORTS**

Student Representative Shyanne Hall, Junior, Holyoke High School Dean Campus

I play soccer and basketball and I wanted to join the school committee and be able to talk to you and share my opinion, and information about my school. I'm also in part of the student government and I'm president of student government of my class. I talked to so many so many of my classmates and my teachers and so I get a lot of opinions wanted to share them.

Right now students received funding from an equipment sales, that will now go to the various vocational programs, and student clubs like student government, Dean ambassadors, and our career readiness program that helps students with resumes.

## **Superintendent Reports**

### **Covid 19**

As of Oct. 14, the state reported that the City of Holyoke had a 32.3/100,000 average daily incidence rate.

- Holyoke has the second highest daily incidence rate within Hampden County
- 5,591 tests performed in the prior two weeks
- 4.42% positivity rate
- 184 positive cases city-wide over the prior two weeks
- There have been 6,761 positive cases in Holyoke

District-wide Metrics as of Oct. 13, 2021

- Days of School: 35
- Total cases since the start of school: 221 (203 students and 18 staff)
- Total cases past 2 weeks (Sept. 29-Oct. 13): 35 (33 students and 2 staff)
- Number of cases resulting in potential spread to HPS student/staff: 25 (23 students and 2 staff)

When a student test positive or a staff member tests positive, as a potential spread, and identify who the closed contacts were and if any of those closed contacts test positive, we consider that potential spread even with mask on. We can't say with 100 certainty that there was spread so we see increase in COVID cases in our student population but overall our staff numbers remain very low and that's likely because of the vaccine. We have allocated funding and are in the process of hiring 2 full time nurses to assist with contact tracing for the district. And we continue to stress the importance of distancing and proper mask wearing to reduce the chances of in school transmission.

Mayor Murphy, we are now number two in hampden county. The city has gone down to about 32 cases per 100 000. Our vaccination rate went up a half a percent, from 53.5 to 54. Our first vaccinations are at 61.1.

### **DEAN PROPERTY TRANSFER**

Thanks the school committee members that met with the city engineer and counselor Bartley to gain a better understanding of the use of the property. The city has recently done some clean up to the area. This may not come to fruition in terms of potentially building one or two homes, but that depends on the developer. This property is a residential zone, and not an industrial building, this could potentially change down the line, but there is no intention at this time. There is a recommendation that the shops at Dean help in terms of actually working on the homes, but that is at the discretion of of the developer. If this is done properly students will have a clear walk up and down St. Vincent.

Driveways are dependent on the location of A, B or C as shown in the appendix attached. A and B will have a drive way on Northampton and C would have it on St. Vincent. The storm drains in that area would be the responsibility of the city. Revert clause: If in 5 years, the development does not happen, the clause will be in effect and revert back to the school. If this passes, the city engineer would work with the planning department, we would be sending out information request for proposals from various developers. All developers would have to go through our planning process, the city engineer, making sure that all easements are met, that all the zoning requirements are met and would also have a revert clause for 2 years and would be returned to the city.

There has to be a retaining wall down at the bottom the hill, and it is the city's responsibility. To confirm this, we will connect with the city law department.

**Mr. Whelihan-** There was a meeting a couple weeks ago between the city engineer, Councilor Bartley, Mr. Courchesne, Mrs. Birks about the project in in general. Some of the issues were, we didn't want commercial development. Didn't want to Dunkin Donuts because of the traffic, and the safety of the kids walking by. We were assured that it's not zoned for commercial use but for residential use. Right now the potential is between two and three houses. It's topography issues there going up the hill and then going towards going north on route 5. There's topography issues there so it's debatable whether you can get three houses and if there's going to be a cost factor.

In my opinion the schools probably there's no benefit to keeping it for the school schools right now because of the topography issue. The use going forward is probably the highest would be for single-family homes or maybe a duplex. We were sort of assured by councilor Bartley that the school committee was part of the process in terms of writing up language for a reverter, as the commerce dated five years. Mr. Bartley commented that that's probably going to be a guideline to get someone to go out the bid and get proposals. Mr. Whelihan and Mrs. Birks were assured that the school committee would be part of the process.

**Miss. Brunelle-** City engineer wrote development constraints:

- Slope- The most significant development constraint is a steep slope that drops to the Dean school parking lot along the ingleside entry side of the parcel. The top of the slope is about 75 feet from the ingleside street property line at the intersection and drops closer to the street as you head north. This makes the subject portion of the property impractical for development.
- Utility crossings- There's at least two utility crossings across the property from ingleside to the Dean campus and including a 12-inch storm drain about 100 feet north of the intersection and 8 inch sewer line about 500 feet north intersection. There also appears to be a buried gas and electric utility lines along the angle side of the property easements would need to be established for these if the property was no longer under control of a city agency.
- building setbacks any lot created at the saint vincent angle-sized intersection and it would be a corner lot a single family residence would need to be set back a minimum of 40 feet from both right-of-way lines and a minimum frontage of 100 feet would be required on both streets. This may be feasible but it would place the residents very close to the top of the steep slope. Driveway access would likely need to be from the ingleside street due to the very steep slope of the south of St. Vincent if the second lot was created to the north.
- Development potential it appears feasible that one possibly two developable lots could be created at this location, however, the lots may not be very appealing to potential developers or prospective residential buyers due to the constraints cited above. The issue of ownership and control of the parcel would need to be resolved before any sale of potential property could be considered.

Miss. Brunelle seeks information and expressed great concerns on the value of these lots right now, and how much is being charged for the parcel since there is no price establishment at this time. As well as, would like to confirm where that money goes and suggests to list the property on the open market for true market value. Miss. Brunelle would also like more information about the potential tax revenue, whose responsibility is the cost of the relocation of storm drains, utility lines, and gas lines. Miss. Brunelle does not agree with this transfer at this time.

**Mayor Murphy** - the goal is to see if there are developers that are interested. The price for what they would pay is not determined until they determine if there is interest. There are no problems on that street and on that walkway that create a danger as of right now. Mayor Murphy appreciates your real estate experience.

**Mr. Whelihan-** Expressed that this location is not a prime site. There's potential for three lots max and the buyer would have to invest money into it. He would want to keep property for potential parking but understands that the school department may not have the funds to bring it up to code, and should not keep the property.

**MOTION:** Miss. Brunelle set a motion to not approve the transfer so I have a motion to put the vote so I would make a motion to not approve this transfer of parcels to the city well hold on so it's just a motion just to put it to vote so that I think mr in motion to sell it

Ms. Birks- Explains the conversation with Mr. Bartley, and the requests of the committee of the price of how much the parcel will be sold for, 5 year retainment clause, Dean student wrote into the RFP to assist with the work, and the money back to go to the Dean student account. Mr. Bartley would like the committee involved in the RFP. As well as, once the parcel is transferred, the city would clean the area.

**Ms. Lefebvre-** Expressed her concerns around establishing a trusting relationship with the council as she does not believe the items being requested in the clause will be included and be in collaboration with the committee.

**Mrs. Birks-** Expressed her concern for the division of the city council and the school committee and hopes that both committees can come back together to help unite the city.

**Motion:** Ms. Brunelle made a motion that there not be a vote until the RFP is complete for this parcel. Requests, summary and meeting minutes of meeting with Councilor Bartley, Draft RFP, Evaluation of the land, and where the money goes, and the fallen trees. Seconded by MMr. Whelihan, to table until we have the requested items above stated by Ms. Brunelle. Motion carried on a roll call vote (Acting Mayor Murphy No, Mildred Lefebvre Yes, Erin Brunelle Yes, Rebecca Birks Yes, Irene Feliciano Sims Yes, John G. Whelihan, No, William Collamore Yes)

### **ENTRY PLAN UPDATE**

Superintendent Soto expressed his thanks for the community and school committee through out the beginning of his listening tour. Through out the process, it's been great to meet with families, community members, and most of all our students to get their input on the strengths and areas of improvement for the district. I want to explicitly invite everyone listening today to attend at least one of our two virtual sessions that are coming up this Wed, October 20th, from 5:30-6:45 p.m., there is a virtual meeting for parents and family members. On Tuesday, Nov. 2 from 3:30-4:30 p.m., I am hosting a virtual meeting for all staff members. Visit our website to sign up so that we can send you the zoom link information. For those who are unable to attend take my entry plan survey by Nov. 5th. To the School Committee, as I mentioned, we will spend time together on this topic at our December retreat. Some themes have already emerged, such as appreciation for our dedicated staff and our dual language program.

## Middle School Collaborative Study

**Jackie Glasheen, Executive Director of School Leadership**- Explains the purpose for sharing this information with the committee, recommendations from the middle school collaborative study team on the middle school experience, there are many things that we agreed on, and there are other things that we could not agree upon that needs to be figured out by other leaders in the city.

Suggests the committee think about a middle school student that you know who didn't get what they needed in middle school, how that experience could be different if this child was given the academic and social support they needed.

We as a district, have a responsibility to every single child in the way of public schools, our responsibility is to meet their academic and social needs and support their growth, therefore, we need middle schools that work for all current and future HPS middle school students.

The past receiver gathered input from families, staff and community members about changing to elementary schools and 2 distinct middle schools over the course of four years. The Input gathered stated there is a desire for programming and experiences tailored to either elementary school or middle school that it is too difficult to meet the needs of a four year old and a 14 year old all in one building. Many staff members recommended fewer grades in school, so they could be more student progress. And with that feed back introduced Veritas Prep and Holyoke STEM.

By opening up new middle schools, we inadvertently reduced the average size of our schools from 412 students to just 331. The average sized school in Holyoke is below national and state averages, which are more than 400 for elementary school and nearly 600 students from middle school. Pre-k Portfolio, can be found on **slide 19 of the slide deck**. Where we'd like to go by opening up new middle schools.

Inadvertently reduced the average size of our schools from 412 students to just 331 with one of our schools Lawrence only having 167 school students. Which is due to population shifts in the city. The average size school in Holyoke is below national and state averages, which are more than 400 for elementary school and nearly 600 students from middle school by having small schools our resources are constrained and we cannot offer as many opportunities for students

This mix of transitioning went from four different grade configurations in school year 15-16, to nine different configurations across 11 schools across, 10 different buildings.

A new school building we would have eight to nine elementary and middle schools with a range of 360 to 550 students per building and only two different grade configurations you're either in an elementary school or you're in a middle school,

The district hired Cambiar Education to support the work of the middle grades collaborative study team. the team consisted of 16 hps people including school leaders teachers parents and district leaders we also had someone with a counseling background, someone on the family and community engagement team and a school committee member.

**Steve Mahoney, Chief of Schools.** Explains the process and support provided by Cambiar Education through literature and a research. There was a focus on the association of middle level educators as a source for us to get a sense of the key components, beliefs, characteristics of successful middle school. The team explored and examined successful middle schools that come from communities that are just like ours.

- 86% Middle school programming should include an advisory period. (560 respondents)
- 83% Setting students on a path to complete MassCore is important.
- 81% Middle school programming should directly connect to the high school programming of academics or career vocational technical ed.
- 63% HPS should use previous MS building work as a starting point on a single MS building project.
- 21% think we should start new. (17% are unsure.)
- 54% Prefer different programming across schools to promote a pathway for every student vs.
- 30% prefer similar programs to ensure equity. (16% are unsure.)

Proposed Vision for HPS Middle Schools- HPS middle schools equip students with the skills and experiences to excel academically and socially in high school and beyond.

Five guiding beliefs:

1. Students and teachers are engaged in **active, purposeful learning** to drive academic growth.
2. Educators use **multiple learning and teaching approaches**.
3. Students engage in applied learning and **activities inside and outside the classroom**.
4. The school environment is **inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all**.
5. Adults **value young adolescents** and are prepared to teach them.

Leading 21 Century Skills for students to develop by the end of 8th grade include how to solve problems, make decisions, think critically, and communicate.

Four Social Emotional Recommendations-Implement an **Advisory period** to support social emotional learning, promote strong relationships and offer opportunities for exploration. **Embed social emotional learning** across the curriculum - not separate. Prioritize and protect time and space dedicated to **mental health** in schools. **Partner with community agencies** to augment services provided in schools

Equity Recommendations-

- Equity ensures **all students have a rigorous academic experience** so they can take advantage of opportunities in high school and beyond
- Support for **specialty programming and exposure to a variety of enrichment**, while recognizing that students need to make choices



- **Balance** the number and needs of special populations (e.g. SPED, EL) across schools
- Ensure **all stakeholder voices are heard** and represented

**Erin Linville Chief of Strategy and Turnaround**, explains the issue that the study is not able to resolve at this time which is the precise grade levels that should be counted as middle school given the number of students per grade in Holyoke and the capacity of the schools that we currently have we examine two options.

The options include three grades 5-8 schools or two grades 6-8 schools.

- Option one is the three grades 5-8 schools. In this option, dual language would be a small standalone middle school of about 400 students across four grades, so 100 students per grade. The other two schools would be 550 students, with about 140 students per grade. There would be 5 elementary schools in total - 1 elementary school would likely feed into the dual language middle school, and two elementary schools would feed into each of the other middle schools while still maintain choice students.
- Option 2, we have two grades 6-8 schools with 550 students per school. Since its only 3 grade spans, there would be 183 students per grade. Dual language would be a strand in one of the middle schools. We would have six elementary schools, with three elementary schools each feeding into each middle schools.

In both cases, this is larger than our current middle school size of around 330 students. **(Page 37 of slide deck)**

Explains the pros for 5-8 model

- More time w/ S&F for academic growth & relationships
- Flexible/innovative staffing Ops
- A little smaller # of students/gr. while still enough for variety of programming/electives
- Allows for 1 DL-only school
- 5 ES will all have ~4 classes/gr, resulting in similar sized ES
- No more co-located schools
- Have internal capacity while new building is built

Explains the cons for 5-8 model

- Some people view Gr. 5 as “too young” for MS
- Jump btwn Gr. 5 and Gr. 6-8 standards/curriculum
- Would likely require non-traditional staffing models
- Holyoke & MSBA may expect a gr. 6-8 model
- 3 MS makes collaboration and cohesion less straightforward
- Only 40% of students may experience a new MS bldg

Explains pros 6-8 model

- CCSS content is 1 grade band

- Tighter developmental span
- Sufficient # of students & teachers for teaming, collaboration & more electives
- Integrates DL students
- No more co-located schools
- Have internal capacity while new building is built
- 2 MS makes collaboration and cohesion more straightforward

Explains cons of 6-8 model

- Short time span in 1 school for relationship building & academic acceleration during a time of a lot of personal change for students
- Veritas Prep Holyoke - [a proven model in Springfield](#)- relies on the gr. 5-8 structure
- Only 50% of students may experience a new MS bldg
- ES varies more in size, with 3 or 4 classes per grade

Explains after all the research read, data analyzed and conversations held, the middle grades collaborative study team wasn't able to reach a consensus on the grades span. Our most significant takeaway was that it is more important that we implement a strong model. An important next step is to share the findings from our work with a lot of stakeholders and then solicit their input.

Explains the next steps for the near and mid term include:

- share this middle grades recommendation with HPS Leadership, Principals, School Committee, School Building Committee, and City Council
- Host more input sessions for staff, student, family and community to solicit feedback on recommendation
- Make important decisions on:
  - Grades 5-8 vs. Grades 6-8 model
  - Dual language model in middle school
  - Middle school building project - school location, funding commitment to enter feasibility phase, etc.
- Develop programs and models for key aspects of middle grades experience, including world/heritage language and Advisory
- Engage in a community process to develop a timeline and transition plan for fully moving to the middle school model, with or without a new middle school building
- Once the ES/MS plan is set, allow for significant time for planning and implementation at the school level: staffing, scheduling, teaming, program/academic design, operational (transportation, furniture, etc.)

**Mr. Whelihan-** Recommends we fix the middle school system and hopes the building committee gets the right feedback from the public including , students and teachers or in order to implement a system that works for the to progress to High School. o I was privileged to be the school committee member appointed to work on this group and I am eternally grateful not only for excuse me the knowledge I gained at the school committee representative but as a parent to currently to middle grade students in Holyoke public schools.

**Ms. Brunelle-** Emphasized on Superintendent Soto's statement at the school building committee, that he does want the decision to be made along with the school committee decision along with the superintendent to decide on:

- What schools come offline

- Where grade configurations end up
- Whether or not we go to a five to eight or a six to eight
- Whether or not we end up in two buildings or three

Appreciates that even under receivership, understands that this is a decision that is going to affect Holyoke families in the Holyoke community at large for decades to come.

Expressed concern in regard to the past decisions to move to a K-8 model. This caused segregation amongst our communities. It provided for lack of diversity and education.

Suggests consideration of the five to eight model, with a stand alone dual language school. The con is that dual language students would potentially get 25 percent of their education in that second language, which is 50% at the current time. Then to have the proper pathway dual language.

Right now the program is seeing a decrease in enrollment in that like third fourth grade. One reason being E.N. Whit has an English option in their building so when a student is struggling they can easily move into a mainstream classroom if space permits.

**Superintendent Soto** expressed that this is a historic moment for the Holyoke Public Schools. And wants to be clear with the community and committee and with future school committee members. This is not a decision that I as the receiver of HPS is going to make alone. This decision will be a part of the future. The decision to go to a K-8 district was one of the major reasons we ended up in receivership combined with a drain on resource allocation.

**Ms. Lefebvre** expresses concern in regard to the study team not having a group of parents that don't work for the district, aren't a district leader, aren't a teacher. With recommendations of at least 2 parents from Veritas and Peck.

Suggested an interview rather than a survey in order to connect with families rather than reading and filling out a form.

**Erin Linville** responds that the information was shared via the Holyoke Update and was not able to get a non HPS staff parent as a part of the team, but will work with the team to do better in outreaching to parents for these types of leadership roles.

**Mr. Whelihan** sought information on how the community can access the meetings.

**Ms. Brunelle** responds that the meeting is taking place on Nov. 4, 2021, at 6PM. The committee is looking for more diverse representatives and parents as well. These meetings are open to the public, and can view and gain knowledge on the process by watching the city council meeting.

**Ms. Linville** shares that the information will be via the Holyoke Update this week, which will include the zoom link and also on channel 15.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Ms. Birks-** Trunk or Treat at Holyoke High School @ 6pm on October 30th. And extends the invitation to anybody who is willing to load their car up with candies and decorate

**Mr. Whelihan-** reminder of the upcoming election of November 2nd and the Holyoke Public Schools Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony on November 6th at the Wycoff Country Club.

**Ms. Lefebvre -** ELPAC November 2nd at 5: 30. via zoom. Reach out to Stefany Garcia, for more information.

**Ms. Brunelle-** Expressed her thanks for Acting Mayor Murphy for your role here on the school committee and your time and efforts put in

**Motion to adjourn, all in favor.**

The Regular Meeting of October 18, 2021 adjourned at approximately **8:37 p.m.**