

**CITY OF HOLYOKE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 11-15-2021

TIME: 6:04

CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

School Committee Vice-Chair Mildred Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 6:04 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, Erin Brunelle, Rosalee Tensley Williams, Rebecca Birks, Irene Feliciano Sims, John G. Whelihan, William Collamore, Nyles Courchesne, and Superintendent/Receiver Mr. Anthony Soto.

Communications and Reports

6:22 Motion to 5 minutes recess - Mr. Sheehan Ms. Birks Second

6:29 Restart of the meeting

STUDENT SHOWCASE -

Unified Sports Team

Ms. Lubold, Unified Basketball Coach

Captain Ari Birks & Partner Noah Vargas

Unified basketball is still in season, the end of year Jamboree on Friday, November 19, first game starts 4:05 and second game 5:15 at Chicopee comp. The team is 2 and 3 at this time.

Noah Vargas - Joined unified basketball team after speaking with Ms. Lubold. Once he joined the team, he enjoys helping the teammates, being a leader, and it is not as competitive as basketball, but as unified basketball, it is a different experience that he enjoys very much.

Ms. Birks- recognizes Noah and Mariann as great examples of #bekindHPS and compassion that the district is advertising. Noah and Mariann both rally around our students and made sure that every child got their moment of fame. Including the kids from the other team.

M.A.S.S certificate presentation - Jacqueline Jourdain

- a. **Lori McKenna** -Shout out to Ms. Lubold recognizing great things and making students feel part of the team. Jackie is an amazing student, part of student government, student advisory council, teaching assistant, dual enrollment classes. She is a leader in the classroom.
- b. **Jackie Jourdain**- Thanks to Mckenna and Mahoney and all her teachers for their recognition for this award. After graduation going to a 4-year college, med school to be a primary care physician or psychiatrist.

PUBLIC COMMENT (via the remote link above) - No Public Comment

COMMUNICATIONS & REPORTS

Student Reports

- HHS-North - Samantha Brennan
 - Junior at HHS North - elections for student govt for freshman class of 2025
 - Student government is running school spirit
 - Student advisory council with McKenna, and Mr. Maldonado
 - Student Cabinet with Mr. Soto
 - Madrigals concert with Mr. Todd
 - Harold Newspaper Interviews
 - a. Mr. Garcia prior to his election
 - b. Mr. Soto
- HHS-Dean - Shyanne Hall- Not present

Presentations

- **Ghost Boys Presentation**
 - Partnership and UNH in regard to ghost boys. Grade 7 is reading a book called Ghost boys as part of our equity response, and response to our panorama results.
 - Sue Hucul- Holyoke HPD will be facilitating the discussion with our students at Metcalf, Stem, McMahan. We want students to feel safe in sharing their stories and working with the district. Universal community stories help deepen our understanding of ourselves while participating with complex reasoning. The goal is to help students learn strategies that include complex reasoning, compile and cite textual evidence, support of position as a result of this text. This is going to give our students an opportunity to use this book as a guide to explore complex issues of income and inequality, historical injustices, systemic racism, and bias. The goal is to inspire students to experience how these stories can be powerful and connect with themselves in the world. Families can opt-out of this program.

- **The committee would like to invite Ms. Hucul back for an update and follow-up at a later meeting.**

Holyoke Ethnic Studies Presentation-

Joel Arce, Resident of Holyoke, PHD candidate at Umass - Member of the Holyoke Ethnic Studies Community Advisory Board

Zaielle, Graduate from HHS 2020, A poem- A world without racism. **(Page 9 of presentation).**

Nick Cream, US History at Dean grade 10,

Background of the program and structure of the Ethnic Studies (ES) program. ES Services close to 1000 HPS students in 7-12. Pushing students in the real-world context, ES takes place through ELA and Social Studies classrooms. ES has a heavy focus on multi-literacy development, analytical skill-building, and community knowledge. Young people of color and young people from low-income families have historically been denied an education that embraces them for who they are and this program embraces them for who they are, and the different types of knowledge that they bring to the classroom. Helps students build academic and social skills that apply to the real world context and 21st century work and Community settings.

Educational scholars and policymakers have looked or ethnic studies as a way to address these inequities and injustices and is grounded in the 5 C's **(Slide 10 of presentation)**

Expansion of the ES program. In SY 2013-2014 middle school teachers began to pilot ethnic studies units and curriculum in eighth-grade classrooms. SY 2016-2017 ES was offered to grade 9 and more expansive offerings for grade 8, with guidance from the program director. ES program was built into the High School Redesign plan, and Community and Global Studies pathway. Standard aligned coursework the developed relationships with community partners and incorporates local history. Has offered a range of programming opportunities for teachers and students which include dual enrollment for juniors and seniors at Westfield State, HCC, and UMASS.

Danielle Hayes, Dept Head ES,

Explains student work provided by students in ethnic studies, (Slide 11 of Slidedeck)

Ms. Hayes explains ES students learn and demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways. Students who create murals are writing poetry or evidence-based essays. Develop those traditional academic skills on annotating a text, evidence-based writing, and develop their voice and capacity to advocate for themselves.

Joel Arce- Since June staff partners have voiced their concerns and wanted to go through the commitments and promises made by the district. At the June 21st meeting - The district provided an update on the restructuring if the Dept head/ Director position. The district said it would be revisited, and would not have the same teaching load as other Dept. Heads. Since the decision to eliminate the

director position, other staff would take over some responsibilities, reassess if not working, and provide updates.

Discussed what has been lost as a result of the director position now being a department head position.

- No Ethnic Studies Dual Enrollment Classes
- Less Individualized Coaching for Teachers
- Less Community-Based Student Learning
- Lost Ethnic Studies-specific PD time for Ethnic Studies Teachers
- Lost Communication/Follow-up University Partnerships

Over the summer HPS staff, and partners applied for the Nellie Mae Grant Proposal, to alleviate the financial burden of the district having to pay for the full-time director position. Mr. Arce claims the district contacted Nellie Mae stating that they are changing the scope of the proposal and not making it specific to the ES program, which could cause the loss of \$500,000.

Sade Bonilla, Professor from UMASS

Research which was conducted in San Francisco is similar to the Holyoke Program has shown that:

- Students in a year long ninth grade ethnic studies course in San Francisco had outsized gains in attendance credits earned for graduation over children not in ethnic studies.
- Promotes student critical awareness of social issues and encourages civic engagement and Community responsive social justice
- Students past six more classes in high school they had better grades in math science and English so, not just in ethnic studies courses.
- More than 90% of them graduated from high school in five years versus 75% of their peers, who are not encouraged enrolling ethnic studies.
- Students enrolled in college at a higher rate

Critical Factors:

- Effective interventions
- Appropriate teacher training
- Board of education was highly supportive of the ethnic studies pilot, and also supported administrative support for launching the course which included teacher planning support from experienced educators at a local university.

In order to sustain the course provide the ongoing necessary teacher professional development.

Ms. Bonilla expresses her fears around the change in position is that there will be an absence of support for teachers and rolling out a new curriculum.

Christcyra Sok - Testimony Attached.

Raul Gutiérrez- Testimony Attached.

Pre-Recorded Parent and student testimonials will be sent to the committee.

Joel Arce- Parent and student testimonials will be shared within a week, and extended an invitation to Mrs. Birks and Superintendent Soto to the cab meeting taking place on Nov. 18.

Superintendent Soto-

Is in support of the program. The concerns just came to his attention a week ago. Since that meeting, he has worked with district leaders in order to support those teams.

In response to:

- The lack of teacher support - There are expert teachers and instructional coaches in all of our buildings. Staff can also connect with the academic team or Val Annear as the point of contact.
- The workload for the Dept Head- The district reduced the teacher load from 7 classes to 4 classes with 1 being a prep.
- Dual Enrollment Opportunities on HOLD- Met with Paul Rodriguez, ES CAB Member, is not accurate, all programs are running and do exist and is a collaborative team effort from the advanced learning team at the High School.
- Concerns of Programming- Superintendent Soto, will be holding monthly meetings with Ms. Altshuler, and Ms. Annear meets with Ms. Hayes regularly to continue to address concerns
- Nellie Mae Grant- Palante handed our team a grant within one day of when it was to in regard to strengthen the Palante, ES, and expanded the ES director position. The grant outlined key partners in the grant as HPS district leadership, and no conversation took place. The grant did not follow the process and Superintendent Soto still gave the approval and had Dr. Mahoney reach out to the organization for more time to discuss the potential. That outreach caused the grantee to see there was no alignment with the district and the programming and offered HPS to apply for other grant opportunities. The process for any competitive grant above \$25000 must be submitted 30 days prior to the deadline, and has to be approved by the cabinet.
- Student Cabinet - Has been recreated with all students in HS and Middle school and includes students in ethnic studies.
- Teacher Professional Development- ELA teachers were pulled based on data. In January ELA ES teachers will be in attendance for the PD.

This is a program of the HPS and we want to ensure the program is supported, and strongly urges those who want the program to be successful and work with the superintendent and his team to grow and improve this program. Members of HPS admin and SC have tried to be a part of the CAB meetings and have received resistance.

Mr. Whelihan - Thanks to Ms. Birks for reaching out to the program and working with Mr. Soto. And recommends the program needs a reboot and reconnect after the recent disconnect. The program is important and promotes critical thinking in the school system and our country.

Mrs. Birks- Has tried to join to CAB Meeting. Was told in an email would think about whether they would think about allowing her to join the meeting. We do not know who is communicating via the

Holyokeethnicstudies email. And it seems like ES CAB is closing down the communication and we need to work collaboratively to continue this happening.

MS. Lefebvre- The person who is responsible for responding to emails is Dana A, instead of signing Holyoke Ethnic Studies.

Mr. Sheehan- History Alive clarification if it meets the Mass frameworks, which it does, the frameworks were updated in 2018. Matters of Curricula and how they are rolled out in the school and is not the role of the committee but the principal according to the uniform procurement laws with the advice of the superintendent. Ed form says we do not have that authority. The committee creates policy, and budgetary approval.

Danielle- Explains the inability for teachers to go above and beyond. Ms. Hayes feels she is dropping the ball due to the workload, and the capacity for the program is diminishing.

Joel Arce- will continue to see dual enrollment opportunities as well as guest speakers to join in on the conversations in terms of album scope and sequences.

Jose Lugo- Testimony Attached.

Ms. Lefebvre- Questions the creator of the ES CAB and how members are selected.

Ms. Hayes- explains there is no formal process or application for being a part of the ES CAB. If you join you have to join for a year and as people are in collaboration with our Community.

Superintendent / Receiver Reports

- **Dual Language Task Force**
 - **Established in Feb of 21- Goal: Develop long-range strategic plan to develop, strengthen and expand Holyoke's Dual Language program. Middle school expansion, and program dual Language**
 - **Timeline - Research, Feb-Dec 21, Analyze, Oct 21- Feb 22, Feedback Jan-March 22, Recommendations Spring 22 to present and engage with families.**
 -

Mr. Whelihan - Wise to look forward to past the middle school and expanding it is wise to get ahead of the curve.

Courchesne - JR High in mass there is a certification students can receive, is it going to be incorporated in this plan. Lower level certification

Val- Assessment is taken at the HS level.

Sheehan- no stand-alone middle school program in the New England region, was that negative? Legal concerns around having a sole dual language school

Val- In this area there are no stand-alone middle schools that are solely dual language. We are digging further, but in communication with Framingham with a 25 programming, they have the enrollment to make the middle dual school, they choose not to because there is a lot of inequitable access to the curriculum.

Whatever model we choose, with the most robust middle school experience and how dual language is incorporated in that while creating bi-literate students to increase the number of students receiving the Seal of Biliteracy. More information to come following the analysis.

Covid-19 Update

- **COVID classroom closure due to 2 clusters at Donahue School, consultation with DESE and the BOH for approval to close.**
- **COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic with Holyoke Health Center for Students ages 5+ and their families**
- **Date: TBD potentially Dec 9th.**
- **Metrics (NOTE: Information is current as of 11/10/21)**
 - **Days of School: 54**
 - **Total cases since the start of school: 287 students and staff**
 - **Number of cases resulting in possible transmission to another HPS student/staff: 34 (31 students and 3 staff)**
 - **Total cases past 2 weeks, 10/27-11/10, (32): 6 staff and 26 students**
 - **Vaccination rates : (See Slide 33 of Slide desk)**

Mr. Whelihan - Clarification of the classroom closure procedure.

Soto- Anne Marie Stoncik DESE, we worked with the emergency response team, the BOH, and the nursing team. Time on learning remotely will count for student hours.

Sheehan- Expresses concern around the timing of the vaccine clinics for 5-11 happening in December and then children receiving their second shot right before Christmas break. Explains other communities are leading the state with the most amount of Vaccinations. What are the steps that we are trying to do, to get students Vax?

Mr. Soto- Is working with HR Cheif for Incentive package for Vaccination, and test and stay opportunity. Families are signing up when their child presents as a close contact. The team is still ironing out logistics for the clinic and is currently working with HHC and BOH on prviding this opportunity.

Birks- Suggest we consider partnering with B&G or YMCA which will be available for families who are picking up their child(ren).

Marianne- HHC wants to be able to provide and committed to putting on a clinic and have the students get vax with their pediatrician. Info was shared on the Holyoke website and the HPS update to push out to inform families.

Sheehan- Over the summer calls were received about vaccination clinic, we can promote out and share the information with vax clinic info and link to Mass vaccination website and registration.

Lefebvre- Kelly community dinner for participation for families to give information or sign up for te

Birks- HHC is not the only provider in the community and should reach out to other providers

Feliciano sims- shoot out the info to the city council and committee to share on social to support with getting the word out.

BEHAVIOR UPDATE

Superintendent Soto This year has been an incredibly difficult year for many of our students and staff. Staff and students have reported an increased amount of behavior issues. Most of these concerns have been brought up at the Middle School and High School levels. Students are struggling to adjust to in person learning and socializing in school with their peers after not being in person fully for over 18 months.

Things we had already started this year:

- We have increased counseling positions supports this current year and made sure that every school has an adjustment counselor
- We have implemented a new curriculum called TRAILS that each school is required to deliver. Schools have been given autonomy on how to deliver this curriculum and our Director of SEL is in the process of tracking the progress of each schools implementation
- Every K-8 school has either PBIS or some student incentive program to promote productive and positive social behavior
- We have 2 Behavior Support Specialists supporting our schools and they have done up to 60 observations and consults providing feedback to school behavior support teams to strengthen their support
- We have the BRYT program at Peck, Sullivan, Lawrence, HHS North Campus, and Kelly.
- For staff we have an Employee Assistance Program that they can take advantage of

Additional supports added since the start of the school year

- At HHS North Campus we have added an additional Assistant Principal, Adjustment Counselor, and Student Support Coordinator. The assistant principal helps to backfill the administrative position previously held by Dr. Mahoney.
- There were 4 district wide behavior support paras that had been vacant all year and we have deployed these positions to schools instead of using a Districtwide support model. This means

that McMahon, Sullivan, STEM, and HHS North all received an additional behavior support para position

- All behavior support para's across the District are receiving a stipend of \$4,000
- Our Director of SEL will be creating a clear picture of what Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports exist at every school so that the community and families can easily understand what our SEL and behavior support efforts are by school.
- We have asked all parents and teachers to review the student handbook so that students understand basic expectations and potential consequences for violating them
- I have asked the Teacher Advisory Group to survey their peers on SEL and behavior supports that exist in their school communities. We asked them to specify what are we doing that we should continue to build on? What are we doing that we should stop doing? What are we not doing that we need to start doing?
- HPS "Pathway to Kindness" challenge is something we are working on this month to promote kindness and respect. Nominations can be submitted on social media using the handle #BeKindHPS
- Wellness package
 - Wellness weekend day off on 11/12
 - Half day on 12/10
 - Wednesday before Thanksgiving off for 12 month staff
 - \$125 and \$50 stipend for all
 - All principals asked to give half of the school based PD time back to teachers so that they can use that time for planning and collaboration

This issue around behavioral and SEL supports has emerged as one of the most important things that HPS needs to solve after listening to many of our Entry Plan stakeholder comments. We have some things in place but need to strengthen them everywhere so that teachers spend less time on this and have more time to elevate instruction for students.

Also, Providing open gym opportunities for the community.

Ms. Tensley William- has a recommendation for support for the Open Gym

Birks- is there a way we can do this, without CYO, and keeping that partnership - and has concerns about the people that used to do it are not going to be able to do it when they have done alot for our families and be mindful with our new plan and respect past partnerships.

Clarification from Soto- We have to work with the schedule to include CYO partnerships and not shut them out but will be renting out the gyms to support not only kids that sign up for that league, but others too. Not renting out to other requests but we are working with HSNI & CYO. Just Holyoke Organizations. Superintendent wants to bring back a place for students to come and play. We have not received a request from parks and rec for use. We are not wavering on multiple days, but 1 day, in the flats, south Holyoke, Lawrence, Tokeneke, and Jarvis since it does not exist.

Whelihan- Student behavior is happening nation wide, COVID is affecting people in a negative way. Happy about the stipend for counselors, that is going to assist over the 4 years.

On-Going Business:

Dean Property Transfer

Mr. Whelihan- Spoke with the engineer to have them join but he could not. The issue was on the agenda for the 30 November meeting with the Joint committee meeting. Hopes are to get it vetted and have the engineer there to give insight and update the new mayor.

Motion to move this matter to the joint sc/ cc - second Ms. Tensley Williams

Discussion:

Mr. Sheehan- is there a educational need for the Public Schools for area A, B, C **as shown on slide 38 of the Slide Deck.**

Mr. Whelihan- At the last meeting some committee members had concerns about the development and the pros and cons, which was tabled that night, until more information was provided by the engineer.

Mr. Sheehan- Suggests we have the engineer come to the meeting, to make a decision.

Ms. Tensley Williams makes a recommendation that we vote tonight.

Motion to withdraw the motion

Second from Ms. Feliciano Sims

No motion - All in favor

Motion

Motion for sc to vote on the dean property transfer- The Holyoke school committee in its authority transfer to the city of Holyoke the property as shown in the exhibit that we have deemed that this property serves no need for the Holyoke Public schools. Reference exhibit a attached.

Second- Ms. Feliciano Sims

Motion passes unanimously

Rollcall

Mayor Garcia- Yes, Mr. Sheehan- Yes, Ms. Lefebvre- Yes, Ms. Feliciano Sims-yes, Ms. Birks- Yes, Ms. Tamsley Williams-yes, Mr. Whelihan- yes, Mr. Courchese- Yes

Motion to adjourn - second Ms.Feliciano sims.

Meeting ends: 9:32

New Business:

Meeting Minutes: Not sent will provide at the next meeting after review/feedback from Mr. Sheehan & Ms. Lefebvre