

CITY OF HOLYOKE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021

TIME: 6:00 PM

VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chair Mildred Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m.

Ms. Lefebvre informed members and the public that pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, s. 20, all 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.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Mayor Morse, Mildred Lefebvre, Devin Sheehan, Erin Brunelle, Rosalee Tensley Williams, Rebecca Birks, Irene Feliciano Sims, John G. Whelihan, William Collamore, Nyles Courchesne and Superintendent/Receiver Anthony Soto, Student Representative, Samantha Brennan, Shadai Puelo

**STUDENT SHOWCASE**

Marc Sywgert, Donahue School Principal introduced Ms. Ditcoff, Art Teacher, shows 2 student recent artwork for the last two projects student completed with a short description of their work.

Sacha Mendez created described how she created the drawing using paper and colored pencils. The dreams that are in the background included, I wish that people would stop being racist and also accept people for who they are. Ms. Mendez would love to do more with art in the future and also grow my drawing skills. I find much joy in drawing and I would hate it if I wasn't continuing to do this in the future. My Martin Luther King drawing is also very important to me because he has made such an impact on the world and if he didn't say what he did on that day the world could have been very different.

Jomar Nieves, drew his Martin Luther King picture based on inspiration or reference from real photos of him. I found a photo that caught my attention and had potential for my vision so when the picture was created he used pencil only because I wanted to be black and white. The pencil wasn't dark enough so I used charcoal so it could be very dark and shadowy. The picture was a revolutionary art statement and I wanted to honor Dr. Martin Luther King in the best way i could and that was through my art.

Committee members thanked the students for sharing their creative art work, and shared hopes for the students to continue through the HS Pathways.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

### COMMUNICATION AND REPORTS

Ms. Puelo, Holyoke High Dean Campus shared students completed midterms with a high participation rate. The 10th grade town hall was a success with student-led mc's. There were awards given to family members who attended the town hall, with a special visit from Cedric the Entertainer, who was a guest speaker. Staff and students created a slideshow and delivered a virtual tour of the seven different middle schools and over 400 students. As a result we received 145 applications from sending schools in Holyoke, and the deadline for applications is March 19th.

Samantha Brennan Holyoke High North Campus, there is a car giveaway, sponsored by Gary Rome . Any senior who's in good standing will be able to win a car that is in front of Holyoke High by the like digital sign. There's also a campus learning center in the cafeteria and I've seen a lot of my peers use this opportunity as if they don't have a great space to work at home doing remote learning. Students can go to the cafeteria and spread out in the cafeteria doing their work. We've been celebrating the students 9th and 10th grade who have howls, which are habits of work and learning. Teachers pick every week lwho their howler of the week is and they get some fun stuff. Then for the juniors and seniors get a lawn sign and they're picked by their teachers as well so it's a nice honor. You get to talk to your teachers and they tell you what great work was done that week. The most important thing is that sports are back. This is the second week of sports. I'm on the track team, and sports include football, track girls basketball and boys swimming, and cheerleading. Then winter and the sports are going to run from here until the start of spring break. It's been the highlight of my week so far.

Superintendent Soto shares the that Holyoke Board of H has approved practices taking place after 2 weeks of being in the yellow, and after 3 weeks games can be played.

### SUPERINTENDENT RECEIVER REPORTS

#### FY 22 BUDGET FORCAST

The governor released the budget in the third week of January. At this time we are starting to look at revenue and where the distinct is in terms of Revenue. We are working with all deartment heads and principals to develop our budget for next year.

The state tried to implement the student opportunity act and wasn't able to after the pandemic. Initially, the state thought they were going to be able to implement the funding however the pandemic put a strain on the state's resources. The student opportunity act is money for economically disadvantaged students. The District received a cut mid-year cut and was able to sustain it using ESSR funding. This upcoming year will be the first year of a seven-year implementation. The district received feedback requesting investments for additional student opportunity act funds. Last year the district held

community meeting and conducted a school committee retreat to discuss priorities. The plan was submitted to the state on the use of the student opportunity act dollars.

There is 3.5 million dollar increase in our net school spending, which is 3.9 % of over last year. Overall foundation enrollment has decreased by 198 students. This drop is in the earlier grades like pre-k and k, unfortunately the state is using this year's enrollment numbers to fund districts.

Our charter reimbursement increased by 1.2 million. And an increase of 2.2 million in transportation. The increase is due to the savings that occurred for the non use of transportation and the district transferred those funds for the use of remote learning.

The district received a significant amount of ESSR money this year , about 16.5 million dollars of additional revenue. Without that revenue we would be looking at a 4 million dollar deficit. The district is looking for way to invest this funding in order to address the gap in learning and support for student

Expenses are expected to increase. Salaries increase by 2.4 million on the general fund, supplies and services by 1.5 million, and health insurance increased about 415, 000.

The charter and school tuition expenses are going up by 1.2 million, which represent a 9 % increase.

The districts revenue increasing by 3.9 million and the expenses of the district increasing by 7.8 million dollars. ESSR funding would be able to assist in addressing the 3.9 million dollar budget deficit. This will allow the district to move forward with a balanced budget, and a budget that will address the learning gap and social emotion needs of the students.

The budget relies heavily on state funding, and about 87% of our funding comes from the state chapter 70., and 13 % of our budget comes from local tax dollars. Holyoke has to consistently monitor the changes in funding at the state level which can effect the district budget.

The budget development process is based on the information given above. Chiefs and department heads are tasked with submitted service budgets that are based on the last year. Then budget hearings will take place. Surveys were sent to the community requesting their feedback from all key stakeholders on how the district should invest this money.

#### MIDDLE SCHOOL PROJECT - PRE K PORTFOLIO

In January the MSBA after the failed the vote and encouraged the district to apply for a new statement of interest for a new building in the spring of 2020. The district submitted the statement of interest approved by the city council for one middle school building. In the fall the district met with the MSBA and city leaders, where they expressed they are in support of the plan.

In the beginning of March and in January of 2021, we started to begin meeting with Holyoke leaders, city councilors, a school committee member, some state legislators, to get feedback on how to make sure we're moving forward. In June, the MSBA votes whether to advance HPS SOI project.

The next step moving forward is the feasibility study. There is a meeting scheduled to meet with the joint city council and school committee subcommittee where the district will provide this presentation with more details to inform them of the invitation into the MSBA project and moving forward with a new building. The earliest that would possibly happen is fall 2025.

Ms. Birks seeks clarification on whether this plan will need to be bonded by the city, and will not need a vote of the people.

Mayor Morse clarifies that the interpretation of the failed vote as a lack of support for the funding mechanism which was essentially a tax increase. The city analyzed the finances and can possibly pursue one school with the traditional way of paying for a project and that's a traditional municipal bond. The city council by two-thirds majority votes to bond for a project the city pays for it on an annual basis over 30 years that's part of our debt service. The people would not have an opportunity to vote on a debt exclusion override this is the responsibility of the city council and the mayor to present that option to that body for their um for their approval.

Anthony Soto explains HPS is currently running 10 different grade configurations for 11 schools. Even once the transition of Kelly and Donahue to elementary schools is complete (in years SY21-22 and SY22-23), respectively and Metcalf is a PreK-8 school, there would still be 7 different grade configurations for 11 schools as opposed to a standard district that would have two.

It has also resulted in the average size of schools in HPS is below the national and state average. [The schools that are closest to middle school (Peck, STEM, Veritas) have an average of 306 students (vs. 595 in MA and 575 in the USA). . The schools that are closest to being elementary schools (all others) have an average enrollment of 371 students (v.s 412 in MA, 453 in USA).

HPS needs to work closely with the School Committee, City leaders, HPS staff, families and students to solicit input on how to continue to move forward with the plan for distinct elementary and middle school students, in a way that: minimizes disruption to the extent possible, plans for the structural/operational requirements that allows a strong academic program to flourish, Lives out our HPS equity commitments (see appendix), and is financially sustainable. This might require rezoning or 1-2 school closings over the next 1.5 - 4 years.

In 16-17, listening tour and analysis confirmed the community's preference for distinct elementary and middle schools. In the fall of 18, we began conversion of K-8s to elem. and middle schools, we opened 2 new middle schools: Holyoke STEM and Veritas Prep and allowed Morgan and E.N. White to fully and Kelly to partially convert to elementary schools. In the fall 2020 the district partially converted Donahue to an elem. school, yet Metcalf now has middle school. In the fall 2021, Kelly will now be fully converted to an elem. school, and Veritas has all grades 5-8. In the fall of fall 2022, Donahue will be fully converted to an elem. school, yet ENW DL 6th graders need a middle school location.

The district has questions for the committee, seeks feedback regarding

- What questions or feedback do you have?
- What advice do you have for moving the middle school building project forward?
- What advice do you have as we continue to move forward the PreK-8 schools to distinct elementary and middle schools?
- Who specifically (people or groups) should solicit input from to ensure that the entire community has a voice in the middle school building project and PreK-8 portfolio work?

## HYBRID LEARNING & RETURN TO SCHOOL

Our first in-person day of school 2/22/2021. There were approximately 275 students PK and K participate in in-person learning 4 days/week.

The district gathered feedback from families via surveys. Feedback from of the majority families reported the students love going to school, they feel safe sending their children to school, schools were clean, safe, welcoming and 88% of survey responses reported no transportation issues.

The feedback from schools included staff are excited to have the students back, livestream teaching is a bit of a challenge and will take getting used to and it overall good start and the students were happy to be in school.

The district has a phase in approach to the full return to hybrid learning.

- 357 students in grades 1-2 enter the week of March 8th
- 369 students in grades 3-4-5 enter the week of March 22nd
- 253 students grades 6-8 have selected to enter into school-based CLCs the week of March 29th
  - full in person return for MS students = 4/26
- 65 High School students continue to participate in CLCs at both campuses
- High school students will transition to the hybrid model starting later this Spring

The return to in-person learning 5 days/week starting in April for the grade levels listed below.

- April 5th date for grades PK-5
- Middle school date 4/26
- HS- return TBD
- District planning actions:
  - Continued planning with BOH
  - Supporting staff return to in-person learning
  - Supporting school leaders in reconfiguring learning spaces
  - Ordering additional PPE materials for elementary schools
  - Family Survey due back March 17th

The Holyoke Board of health conducted walkthroughs of all buildings not that student are required to return to in person. Students will now be at 3 ft distance, masks must be worn at all times and reviews of the air quality in the building as well as cleaning protocols

DESE has released new tentative dates for MCAS administration for Spring 2021 for grades 3-8. The new dates are: Grade 3-5, ELA, Math, STE on May 10- June 11. Grades 6-8, ELA, Math, STE, TBD, and for the High Schools the tentative schedule is ELA and Math, May 3- June 4, and science June 1- June 11.

## COVID 19 UPDATE

A COVID-19 Vaccination Survey went out to all HPS staff on 3/4/2021 in order to determine the number of staff members interested in getting the COVID-19 vaccine through our HPS/Holyoke Health Center partnership. The District has partnered with the Holyoke Health Center to offer COVID-19 vaccination clinics. The data from the survey will be shared with the health center so that they can place an appropriate request for doses. We are doing everything possible to secure doses and schedule clinics that will meet the scheduling needs of HPS staff that will result in the least disruption to our students' learning. The Abbott BinaxNOW Rapid Antigen Diagnostic Test is available to test students and staff who show symptoms consistent with COVID-19 with signed consent from the staff member or student's parent/guardian.

HPS will be offering a free COVID-19 pooled testing program for students and staff at our schools. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH). The pooled tests will be performed weekly with a shallow nasal swab for all participating students and staff members and we anticipate receiving the pool results within 24-48 hours. If the result of the pool is negative, then all individuals are presumed to not have COVID-19. If the result of the pool is positive, then all individuals in the pool must be re-tested individually at school using the Abbott BinaxNOW Rapid Antigen Diagnostic Test. This test would be performed by the school's nurse using a nasal swab. All families will receive a message from Project Beacon with instructions of how to register their child. Students aged 18 or older will be sent their own unique link to create an account for themselves.

Holyoke's designation is yellow (it has been for three weeks now!).. As of the second report in March, the case count for the prior 14 days is 201 cases. The average daily incidence rate is 35.3/100,000, and the percent positivity is 3.86%. Since the school year began ( 9/14) through 2/28 HPS has had 434 cumulative positive cases. This includes: 328 remote students, 28 in-person students | 16 Remote staff, 62 in-person staff

The total case counts by month include: September 14-30: 3 cases, October: 24 cases, November:74 cases, December: 123 cases, January: 136 cases, February: 74 cases. The total for February cases 74 include: 56 students ( 48 remote, and 8 in- person) and 18 staff (5 remote, and 13 in-person). The total for March cases through 3/11 include: 19 students (17 remote, and 2 in-person) and 2 staff (both in-person).

Sean Gonsalves, Holyoke Board of Health, is confident with the districts ability to return students to inperson learning safely. The change to 3ft spacing will not be an issue in the classrooms. Public Health nurse, and Sanitarian have been conducting tandem inspections at the school, and provide an outside perspective on the improvements if needed on the evolving guidance. The board of health will continue to work with the schools, and conduct repeat inspections in the same school as students phase in through out the year in order to continue collaborations.

Mr. Sheehan shares having a former HPS Nurse, Deb Shaier, is a unique experience as a former HPS nurse, and assists in the the efforts due to the working knowledge of our system.

Mr. Soto shares that the heaviest lift is the staff. The district is reviewing the accommodations in place and working with building principals to ensure that staffing is in place for the return of students. The district is hiring a dedicated LPN to assist with the contact tracing process as well as an additional nursing position to assist with contact tracing.

#### FOOD SERVICE

The food Service team is working on ensuring the right meals are in place. In addition to continuing our food sites, there's going to be more more students in person we're going to be looking at potentially consolidating the sites. There is also issues with staff, however staff are calling in and are eager to return.

#### SENIOR ACTIVITIES

At this time, we will be conducting a graduation task force, which will speak of all senior activities that will take place. The team will include the board of health, and lead by Dr. Curtis and Dr. Mahoney, Mrs. Birks, building principals, student and parents. The district is aware that there were issues last year in terms of planning and want to be able to put a plan together that makes our student happy.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Minutes of the December 14th Meeting.

MOTION: set by Ms. Brunelle, seconded by Miss. Tensley Williams to accept the December 14 minutes.

#### ROLLCALL:

Mayor Morse yes, Mildred Lefebvre yes, Devin Sheehan yes, Erin Brunelle yes, Rosalee Tensley Williams, yes, Rebecca Birks, yes, Irene Feliciano Sims yes, John G. Whelihan yes, William Collamore yes, Nyles Courchesne yes.

DEAN STUDENTS REQUEST TO SPEAK REGARDING GRADUATION- students need more time to attend.

MOTION: Mr. Sheehan, seconded by Mr. Whelihan sets a motion to refer the Dean Students to the graduation committee.

Mayor Morse yes, Mildred Lefebvre yes, Devin Sheehan yes, Erin Brunelle yes, Rosalee Tensley Williams, yes, Rebecca Birks, yes, Irene Feliciano Sims yes, John G. Whelihan yes, William Collamore yes, Nyles Courchesne yes.

ONGOING BUSINESS - NO ONGOING BUSINESS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The committee learned Mayor Morse will be resigning as Mayor, and share their gratitude for his service and friendship over the years.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn set by Ms. Brunelle, seconded by Mayor Morse.

Mayor Morse yes, Mildred Lefebvre yes, Devin Sheehan yes, Erin Brunelle yes, Rosalee Tensley Williams, yes, Rebecca Birks, yes, Irene Feliciano Sims yes, John G. Whelihan yes, William Collamore yes, Nyles Courchesne yes.

**Meeting adjourns at 8:35PM**