

**BROOKLINE SCHOOL BOARD
AUGUST 2, 2021
MEETING MINUTES**

A regular meeting of the Brookline School Board was conducted on Monday, August 2, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. at the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy.

Kenneth Haag, Chairman, presided:

Members of the Board Present: Erin Sarris, Vice Chairman
 Karen Jew, Secretary
 Rebecca Howie
 Alison Marsano

Members of the Board Absent:

Also in Attendance: Andrew Corey, Superintendent
 Gina Bergskaug, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
 Patricia Bouley, Principal, Captain Samuel Douglass Academy

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS - None

CORRESPONDENCE/RESIGNATIONS/NOMINATIONS

Updates relative to personnel will be provided as part of the principals’ report.

Superintendent Corey noted communications received have been regarding mask requirements commenting a year ago we were on the flip side of this issue. Following tonight’s discussion and that which will occur at the August 17th meeting, the Board and Administration will be able to make the most informed decision regarding this issue.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Brookline School Board [June 30, 2021](#)

MOTION BY MEMBER SARRIS TO ACCEPT, AS PRESENTED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER JEW
MOTION CARRIED

4-0-1
Member Howie Abstained

Brookline School Board – **Public Hearing** [June 30, 2021](#)

MOTION BY MEMBER SARRIS TO ACCEPT, AS PRESENTED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER MARSANO

4-0-1
Member Howie Abstained

PUBLIC INPUT – None

PRINCIPALS' REPORT

Patricia Bouley, Principal, Captain Samuel Douglass Academy (CSDA), stated the report provided with the [agenda](#) includes information relative to upcoming events.

Open positions include 1 MTSS Paraeducator, 3 Paraeducators and a Reading Teacher (offer currently being made) at the Richard Maghakian Memorial School (RMMS) and 2 MTSS Paraeducators and 1 Paraeducator at CSDA. The hope is that interviews for the Paraeducator positions will begin next week. Also open is the position of District Psychologist (currently contracting).

The Eagle Scout Pavilion project at RMMS has been postponed until the fall.

At RMMS, building projects include the replacement of 6 classroom floors, portable ADA accessible ramps (ordered) and the STEM and reading rooms transitioned into grade 1 classrooms. At CSDA, the transitioning of the computer lab to a grade 4 classroom has been completed. In addition the ramp hallway banisters have been repaired/rewelded.

Current enrollment numbers as well as the NESDEC numbers (for comparison) were provided as part of the report. Chairman Haag questioned if additional enrollment is anticipated for kindergarten, and was told that Principal Molinari has indicated registrations continue to come in. An update will be provided for the next meeting.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned the open MTSS positions. Principal Bouley stated part of the reason the positions remain open is the process; were seeking first to fill the position of Reading Teacher. A lot of the applicants are from that pool. Ideally, certified teachers will fill those positions. Starting out in those type of position and having that type of experience in intervention for both math and reading is always a great steppingstone into a district.

Chairman Haag questioned if the district is built out in terms of the ability to utilize space currently used for specials to address classroom needs. Superintendent Corey responded, at RMMS, the next course would be to repurpose the library; divide it into two classes and move the library down to the basement. It is projected there will be the need for 1 additional classroom in each grade over the coming years. That should continue with CSDA as well. By September, the Administration will have cost estimates and more finalized drawings to review. One of the big areas that doesn't really generate new space, is the kitchen at RMMS. It is an area that needs to be highlighted as it is older and outdated. Some of the slightly smaller classrooms would be reconfigured for services to assist with special education.

DISCUSSION

- School Draft Reopening Plan

Superintendent Corey spoke of a call he participated in earlier in the day with the Department of Education (DOE). What has really been put forth to Superintendents is local conditions. Last week, the Administration met with Dr. Benjamin Chan, State Epidemiologist, New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services (NH DHHS). A final discussion will occur with Dr. Chan next week. Being reviewed are local conditions. Superintendent Corey spoke of his participation in a number of Superintendent meetings to try to figure out what his colleagues are doing in various districts some of whom are coming back for the first time.

He is aware some people have gone onto the DOE website and viewed the plan for SAU41. That was a financial obligation where the district had to file the template (information required) to obtain round 3 of ESSER funding. The template provided a very broad view, but a plan that is not etched in stone. Currently, the district has mask optional this summer. Special education programs and academies are being run. Buildings like HPS and RMMS have contracted individuals inhouse. The summer activities have gone very well. There have been no cases of COVID. Both students and parents have been pleased with the summer format.

Superintendent Corey stated no matter what the plan is for the school year, as buses are considered Federal transportation, masks will be mandatory on buses. The driver must have a mask on when students enter and depart the bus.

The issue of building masks will be discussed with the Board. One of the big concerns is the Delta variant. Presently, there are 41 cases in New Hampshire with a population of 1.3 million people. It does seem to be growing. There are a lot of state-wide and inter-state tournaments occurring in youth athletics, people are traveling, etc. It is understood that the situation that exists today may not be that which exists in 10 days. It would be unrealistic, at this point, to finalize plans.

The likelihood is that the start of the school year will see recess being handled with cohorts so that when students go outdoors, they stay with their class. All plans will have the ability to pivot when deemed necessary. In terms of lunch, the desire is for transitioning back into the cafeteria for two reasons; would like to be able to access the gymnasium after school and by community looking to use it and bring that normalcy back to students. It is likely there will be a transition to rectangular tables in the cafeteria as it is believed 4 students can sit at a table. At any point during the year, if things are not going well, the gym could easily be accessed, and the space transitioned back to how it was last year.

The district would like to welcome volunteers back. They would be asked to be masked. It is believed this will assist with the sense of normalcy and start to address some of the curriculum concerns, e.g., reading aloud. Should the data change, the district would revert to not permitting volunteers. All volunteers will go through the same process required pre-pandemic.

The intent is to work again with the Brookline Afterschool Program. They will be using the facilities to offer those services to families and will mirror our guidelines as they did last year.

Superintendent Corey noted last year the SAU followed the recommendations of the NH DHHS. The CDC is a national organization providing guidelines for hot and cold spots. Right now when looking at Brookline and Hollis, there is 1 case in each town. It is not a new case. We're just getting to the 10 days. He checks every day and there have been no new cases.

Right now the outlook is good. But at the same time we are conscious of the fact that we get one chance to open. We don't need it to blossom too quickly and end up in a remote environment.

In terms of cleaning protocols, there is more data around surfaces now, but they will continue to be addressed with the misters. The focus will be on maintaining the 3' of social distancing, which can easily be done with full classes, and the decision on masks.

The hope is that the NH DHHS will put in place firmer guidelines, but we have been told not to expect much. Superintendents have conducted Zoom calls weekly trying to assist each other in compiling the data and establishing pivot points, e.g., at what point are masks optional, mandatory, how long after vaccines are available to all, etc.

Superintendent Corey commented although there remain a great many unknowns, he feels much more confident than he did a year ago because we know we have a very restrictive plan we can move to and address everything that is likely to come up. He is hopeful this will be a better year.

It is not believed each district requires the same protocols to be in place, e.g., the COOP is being viewed slightly differently as that age group has had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

The start of the school year will be as it always is. There is the need to re-establish routines. The district will practice fire drills, how to get to the bathrooms, etc. No matter what decisions are made, for the first few weeks of school, it will be a matter of developing the routines. If necessary, the markers can be placed on the floors again marking 3' of distance, etc.

The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Student Services will coordinate their plans. The Director will take over the coordination of nurses. Our nurses are also participating in the calls with NH DHHS. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent will address communications with families. It is not yet known, but what is being heard is that quarantining will not exist; if a student in a class contracts COVID, the class will not be required to quarantine. There will be retraining on contact tracing (narrower focus).

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug remarked, with the narrower focus on contact tracing, the district must put in place what it can within the physical structure of the buildings. Perhaps that would be a consideration to continue with masks as a precautionary piece.

Superintendent Corey noted for families having a medical need, those matters will go through the office of the Director of Student Services and will be handled on an individual basis. There will be some students who cannot return to school. Accommodations will be made, e.g., home tutoring, Virtual Learning Academy, all teachers will be utilizing Google Classroom, etc. At this point, we are not looking at remote learning as all the data has shown the need for students to be face-to-face as much as possible.

Inventory has been catalogued. There is a device for every student, and the district could pivot in a matter of days to a fully remote environment, if needed.

In terms of what was seen in the spring and last fall, we do encounter difficulties with masks for those students having allergies or children who suffer from asthma. Our nurses worked with those families and will continue to do so.

Superintendent Corey spoke of the youngest students who don't know how to slow down, e.g., if going outdoors on a hot day their activity level does not reduce. There is the need to balance the use of masks with the energy level, etc. It is not intended that masks will be used outdoors, but there may be the need to build in some quiet time/relax time before coming back into the building to reduce their body temperature before putting a mask on. He believes there to be a need to look at how we get a few more mask breaks during the school day.

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug addressed a question raised around technology and devices; the district will be able to provide every child with a device, which will be in the classroom, but not transported back and forth to and from school every day.

Member Jew asked if there are any thoughts for the school to be utilized as a vaccine site, should a vaccine for this age group become available during the school year. Superintendent Corey spoke of the success last year when it came to pairing up with other districts. What would likely be done is a look, regionally, at whether the location would be in SAU41, Amherst, Milford, etc. The minute you start packaging multiple schools together you have a greater chance of getting a clinic because the DHHS wants the biggest bang for their buck. One of the reasons we got the adult clinics was because we had 1,000 people getting vaccinated. Our students typically used the WebMD. He believes that would be the major focus of the push point for services. The district has received information that there will be a wealth of services for families.

Chairman Haag questioned and was told symptom monitoring will no longer be done through the system. The idea is that parents and staff members will still run through those questions and if a student/staff member is not well, they need to stay home.

Asked where the guidance of 3' of separation and the narrowed focus on contact tracing comes from, Superintendent Corey stated in the spring of last year, DHHS moved the distancing down to 3'. The district did not choose to do that. The quarantine is still somewhat of an unknown because we have been told it will not happen from a school point of view, but if a family member were to get it, that family could be quarantined. That is something Dr. Chan will address next week and information that can be shared at the next meeting. It is sort of a catch 22. He is pleased we will not have the potential for a quarantine of a large number of students, but at the same time he is hoping it can be made black and white enough so that the nurses can understand how it works. There will still be isolation were an individual to be sick, but not yet tested; should stay home and isolate. But the quarantine would be for the student's siblings only. It is very narrow in school. He does not see many notices going out saying students have already been contacted who are in quarantine.

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated they would notify those students who potentially were in close contact, but the next step is families would observe and make determinations on their own. From what she has gathered from the discussions, the district is no longer allowed to place students in quarantine.

Chairman Haag questioned if there would be a requirement for volunteers to attest to having had a vaccination. Superintendent Corey stated in this State it is against the law to ask about vaccination status. Although he has not yet made a final decision, he is leaning toward requiring masks for the Pre-K-6 environment. He has concern with the Delta variant. The data around that could impact the decision. In some ways we are better off than last year and in others there is less guidance.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned if other districts are looking at community transmission as a pivot point. Superintendent Corey stated he would meet the next day with medical professionals that reside in the two communities. They will look to provide guidance for setting up thresholds for pivoting. It is very difficult as although it is about the community, it is also about the schools. Last year most of our cases that affected the community weren't necessarily associated with school children. That is the question we have not yet figured out.

Sitting here today, with all the data available, it is believed we should start the school year as mask optional and set pivot points that would require the use of masks. There is concern with students and staff coming back and together from a variety of locations. His recommendation will be provided at the next meeting for Board consideration.

Chairman Haag asked if quarantining would change if masks were off. If the entire classroom is unvaccinated and masks are not worn, should a student get COVID, he would think the entire classroom would be at risk. Superintendent Corey remarked they were shocked quarantining was going away. The subject did come up in

the conversation between the Superintendents and the Commissioner of Education. There is the hope there will be additional guidance.

Vice Chairman Sarris stated support for starting the school year more vigilant and having identified points where the continued need is assessed.

Superintendent Corey noted, with approval of the plan, he will also seek approval for him to have the flexibility to make a change when deemed necessary.

Member Marsano stated the variant is showing permeability with vaccinated individuals, our school population is unvaccinated, and the variant is showing a greater ability to spread among that age group, which COVID had not. Until this population has the ability to be vaccinated and/or more is known, we will have to have the ability to pivot. She agreed with starting the school year a little more vigilant.

Superintendent Corey spoke of the need to have discussions as we approach the various holidays. It is unknown what travel will look like. We may want to be on the cautious side and use remote effectively as it remains an option. Remote will be looked at for some of the snow days this year just to keep our end date close and provide flexibility.

Asked about Fridays returning to a normal schedule, Superintendent Corey stated through the work that was done prior to leaving school, gaps were identified. Summer academies and online options were able to be offered. Families have been tremendous about doing additional reading and math. It is not yet known how much that gap has been closed. It may be (around the holidays) that an occasional Friday early release is inserted for teachers to do the PLC work.

Chairman Haag noted, of the communications he has received, the overwhelming majority is in favor of wearing masks.

- Facilities Committee Update

Superintendent Corey spoke of the discussions that have occurred. The initial focus was with RMMS and energy/mechanical studies. That moved into looking at enrollment and seeing that start to grow. Work began with an architectural firm. The first thing they did was a needs assessment from the standpoint of instructional spaces. They went through a series of discussions with the Administration and provided some mock plans (draft form).

At RMMS there is an infrastructure problem. Over the years, many of the boilers have become residential boilers, there are multiple boiler rooms in the building, and the building is at an age where the window R factor is much lower than in most homes. There is an opportunity to look at changing our heat source to propane, which would give the SAU more buying power. In terms of enrollment, they came up short four classrooms (1 in each grade). The balancing act is not over-building, but historically when the Town has built out, our numbers have stayed pretty consistent once we have caught up to that buildout. Historically there were times in Brookline where class sizes were in the mid-high 20s. That was one of those times when the population exploded, the schools weren't necessarily ready. We are now trying to keep up.

An area that needs to be addressed is the kitchen area. It is very dated. They would look to update and expand that and continue to use the gymnasium as the cafeteria and instructional. In terms of classroom space, we are set to accommodate the students coming in next year at our ratios. We can do that again the following year. Most likely more of the specials would be put on carts or the library looked at

as a space that can be divided into classrooms. The library could be moved into the basement. One of the problems faced with moving anything into the basement is it is not handicapped accessible. The two-story foyer would be the natural place where an elevator would be added.

The last piece is the main office structure, which would be better off being moved down to the Milford Street entrance (more secure). The main office would be on the same floor as the entrance. The annual visits by Homeland Security took place this month; would like to see the Amherst Street entrance used. That might include some sort of bump out and a reconfiguration of a classroom in that area. That space would be gained back by taking the existing office/conference room space.

The architects have committed to providing cost estimates in September. From there, the Board can begin to make the Town aware of the study and start discussions on whether to move forward from a budget standpoint.

At the same time, CSDA has been looked at. As those classes come through from RMMS, they would be one classroom short. One of the benefits of CSDA is that there are the two portables that don't get as much use. They are dated and need to move on in the next few years.

From the standpoint of building while enrollment goes up, we could use the portables. We would build 3 classrooms on the other end towards the swing sets and when those classrooms are completed, we would have the extra classrooms for grades 4, 5, and 6. Then the portables would be taken away.

The computer lab for the 4th grade classroom was taken to address current needs. We could gain back music and art rooms if needed and put those folks on carts. There are some stop gap measures so that if you went for a bond and it failed, there are alternatives. They are short term fixes.

Noted was that the same discussions are happening with the same company at the middle and high schools. Those facilities were toured last week. It is likely some 3 years from now that the group will arrive in the COOP. What brought this project home is that both Hollis and Brookline will welcome over 80 kindergarten students this year, which has not occurred in his tenure. Traditionally, we would welcome a kindergarten class of 130-140 and as we grow, they get up to the 180-200. We are starting at 160, and what we are learning about those families is that, for many, the kindergarten student is their oldest child.

Superintendent Corey spoke of the positive experience it has been to have the Administration and architects working together as they bring fresh eyes to the issue. The district is used to a space being used as a space, e.g., when looking at the library space we are simply used to it being used as a library, but it is a massive area for 2 classrooms. If unable to pass a bond, it is a great short-term fix were we can still offer all the services we need.

Chairman Haag remarked it sounds as though for this year and the next, if nothing happens, we are okay. September was one of the deliverables. The School and Town Services Study Committee (Committee) is starting to write language around ordinances and master planning as the overall vision for schools, the Aquifer district, minimum lot size, etc. Also discussed were impact fees builders and homeowners can come into. The cost estimates that will be provided in September were discussed as an impact fee. All data/fact finding has shown there is the need to make changes.

Chairman Haag stated his anticipation there will be multiple avenues to try to help curb growth some because of the way our potential built out could be and the growth we have seen over the past decade or so.

Superintendent Corey noted there are only 10 weeks for construction. It is likely there will be the need to phase a project in over multiple years prioritizing the work to be done. The Amherst School District has looked at a new school to accommodate 500 students. That cost came in at \$66 million. From the standpoint of the structure of our buildings, they are very sound and cost effective renovations could be done.

Superintendent Corey stated the building cost estimate will be quick and easy as it is square footage of a new build. Where the difficult costs come in relate to where to place a mechanical room that would now service the entire building or two mechanical rooms instead of 7 different locations, how you want to approach ventilation, etc. He commented on work done at the Hollis Primary School where they went to solar and to heat source air pumps, which means the building has heat and air conditioning. They hadn't necessarily gone for air conditioning, but because it is electric generated through the solar, it was cost neutral. It was much easier to put those units in a 60-year-old building than to retrofit a ventilation system through concrete walls. That is the piece that is being investigated now; most efficient way to go for heating system, if we went solar is it a field or on the roof, etc. The presentation planned for September should be able to provide at least ballpark numbers.

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Update

Superintendent Corey noted material included with the agenda packet. A wealth of discussion has occurred on this issue across both towns. The SAU is not doing Critical Race Theory (CRT). He is in the process of reviewing the feedback provided and will likely craft amendments to the language.

This discussion of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) came about after the Superintendent received an email from 12th grade students who brought up concerns they have had since entering the middle school.

At this time, the opening of school and the building project must be the priorities as they have concrete deadlines. The Administration will work with staff around the new laws passed concerning divisive concepts, etc. That work is already built into the Administrative Retreat. This is something that is happening across the State. He is pleased with where the district is in the process. It is difficult at times, but no different than years prior when Common Core came out. There was debate around that, and the Administration and Board took a methodical, slow approach when looking at the information.

There are a couple of pieces the district is educating people on. If there is a concern over instructional material, we already have a process where they can make their objections/concerns known. There is a balancing act between curriculum and an instructor's bias. We are all human and sometimes make mistakes. That doesn't mean that we are looking to promote, as a school district, a particular view. Instances such as that are addressed as a personnel issue.

What we are trying to do is increase our capacity to deal with all the different students we encounter. Raul Blanche, member of the COOP Budget Committee and Technical Writer by trade, looked at the document, and had a great deal of feedback to provide. He has volunteered his services. We are making progress. A group of citizens provided the COOP Board with comments around the teacher instructional practices policy. There are a lot of different steps being taken.

The district has received Right-to-Know requests around material. The Administration has complied with those. One of the requests was from a group of citizens seeking information around costs incurred. That

request is being finalized. Superintendent Corey commended the Assistant Superintendent for her work in this regard.

Asked about the amount of time required to respond to the Right-to-Know requests and if the cost of responding to such requests was included in the information provided, Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated it is difficult to come up with a number. Hundreds of manhours have gone into just one of the requests (from every building and department). She would not be surprised if the first round of budget discussions includes discussion of personnel to handle communications. Her job has not been able to be addressed in the month of July.

Chairman Haag remarked his biggest concern is with senior support staff working on data mining/record collecting as opposed to curriculum development, re-opening of schools.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned if legal services must be obtained to address the requests and was told at one point there were 3 different attorneys supporting one particular request. Vice Chairman Sarris spoke of the cost of that assistance.

DELIBERATIONS

- To see what action the Board will take regarding GADA – Employment References and Verification (Prohibiting Aiding and Abetting of Sexual Abuse)
Given its first reading;

MOTION BY MEMBER HOWIE TO ACCEPT THE FIRST READING OF POLICY GADA – EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES AND VERIFICATION (PROHIBITING AIDING AND ABETTING OF SEXUAL ABUSE)

MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER MARSANO

ON THE QUESTION

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug noted the policy is required by law. A recent audit highlighted the need. It has been approved in both the Hollis and COOP School Districts in the form presented. It was vetted by legal counsel for the Hollis School District as they were the first to take the policy up.

Member Roy questioned if there is a reason the language is narrowed to “a minor or student”, and then in part d why it is limited to 4 years. Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated the policy language is specific to address sexual misconduct with minors. Asked if the district has a policy in place to address other sexual misconduct, Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated there is, and the district also conducts background checks.

This policy is simply an employment reference, e.g., the idea is if we had knowledge of a potential or reported case of sexual misconduct with a minor and then another school district called us for a reference, we don’t supply a good reference.

The limitation of four years is based on law.

The question was asked, given the amount of review the policy has already gone through, if the Board was comfortable with amending the motion to accept the first reading, waive subsequent readings, and approve.

Superintendent Corey recommended the policy appear on the next agenda for a second and final reading to ensure public awareness.

MOTION CARRIED

5-0-0

- To see what action the Board will take regarding JLDBB – Suicide Prevention and Response
Given its first reading;

MOTION BY MEMBER HOWIE TO AMEND POLICY JLDBB – SUICIDE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE, IN SECTION B1 BY INSERTING “A” BEFORE “DISTRICT” AND IN SECTION B2 BY INSERTING “COUNSELOR” FOLLOWING “SCHOOL” AND REPLACING “HIS/HER” WITH “THEIR” AND ACCEPT THE FIRST READING, AS AMENDED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER JEW

ON THE QUESTION

Vice Chairman Sarris noted the specific date listed in Section A and questioned the need. Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated the language is recommended by legal counsel and the policy is required by law. The plan was developed, and the district has gone through the requirements of the plan. The plan has to be brought forward to the Board, but it is established and integrated in our schools. Keeping the language in the policy keeps us consistent with the language of the law, and would remind us, were the law to change, the plan is an older version.

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug commented when the law came out the focus was on the training. The district has fully complied with and put that in place. There are trainers in all districts. We are in a very good place with that, we just neglected to bring forward the plan to this Board.

The suggestion was made that the Policy Committee consider replacing the word “Such” with “Shall” at the start of the sentence in section “j”.

MOTION CARRIED

5-0-0

NON-PUBLIC SESSION

MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG THAT THE BOARD, BY ROLL CALL, GO INTO NON-PUBLIC SESSION PURSUANT TO RSA 91-A:3, II (c) TO DISCUSS A MATTER, WHICH IF DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC, WOULD LIKELY AFFECT ADVERSELY THE REPUTATION OF A PERSON, OTHER THAN A MEMBER OF THE BODY OR AGENCY ITSELF
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER HOWIE

A Viva Voce Roll Call was conducted, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Rebecca Howie, Alison Marsano, Karen Jew, Erin Sarris, Kenneth Haag

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Nay:

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MOTION CARRIED

The Board went into non-public session at 7:17 p.m.

The Board came out of non-public session at 7:22 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG TO ADJOURN
SECONDED BY MEMBER HOWIE
MOTION CARRIED
5-0-0**

The August 2, 2021, meeting of the Brookline School Board was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Date _____ Signed _____