

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

RECEIVED
NORTON TOWN CLERK
2020 JUL -1 A 10: 20

Date of School Committee Meeting: Thursday, May 7, 2020

Location: Remote Participation

Present: Committee Members: Chairperson Kathleen Stern, Vice-Chairperson Carolyn Gallagher, Mrs. Sheri Cohen, Mr. Deniz Savas, Mr. Dan Sheedy ***Also present:*** Superintendent of Schools Joseph F. Baeta, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Jennifer O'Neill, Director of Pupil Services Jeanne Sullivan, School Business Manager Matthew Wells, Technology Director Karen Winsper, Director of Facilities Wade Lizotte, Student Representatives Cooper Smith and Caroline Daly

Call to Order: Chairperson Stern called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being video recorded.

Warrants:

Mrs. Cohen reported that she reviewed and approved the following warrants, to be entered into the public record:

- February 6, 2020 \$872,789.70
- February 20, 2020 \$455,065.05
- February 27, 2020 \$241,786.97
- March 4, 2020 \$110,568.39
- March 18, 2020 \$567,865.61
- April 16, 2020 \$403,060.37
- April 23, 2020 \$159,839.61
- April 30, 2020 \$380,674.65

Student Representative Update:

Caroline Daly was excited that the Senior 2020 yard signs were dropped off and it was a great surprise. It was also nice to see faces. Cooper Smith commented it was nice they did that for the Seniors. He also mentioned AP Exams were starting next week and students will be taken them remotely. Dr. Baeta thanked the NHS parent board, NTA and all the other organizations for doing this and for the many donations.

FY 20 Financial Update – Mr. Matthew Wells:

Mr. Wells reviewed a spreadsheet and discussed finances regarding the budget and revolving accounts for cost avoidances. He noted we are not receiving revenue for the Facility Rental Account, therefore, some expenses will be moved to appropriations.

Currently, we are not making payments to our vendors H&L Bloom for our student transportation and Van Pool transportation through BICO. At this time, no transportation is being provided to our students. Mr. Wells reviewed different payment options for the Committee to consider and he emphasized that a 78% payment to Van Pool is not something we can support. Dr. Baeta also informed the committee he was not in favor of a 78% payment to Van Pool. Dr. Baeta also advised the Committee that a bill has been filed by the vendors for a negotiation to reach an agreement for payment of something. Mr. Savas wanted to clarify this is regarding just BICO transportation and if there will be any recourse to BICO if we walked out. Other concerns were how will this affect our transportation services in the future? If we do not agree to the 78% payment, is this stepping out of our agreement with BICO? If we do not pay, does the cost go to other BICO members? Dr. Baeta informed the Committee these are some of the issues he is looking into.

Mr. Wells advised the Committee that the vendors' negotiation is putting together a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to the current contract and then after the crisis is over we go back to the original contract. Dr. Baeta mentioned the employees of these vendors are not our direct employees, but they are available to us. The CARES act may allow for these vendors to apply for loans/grant for their payroll. If the vendor does receive funds and we also pay, then we should get a refund. Further discussion and voting will be addressed at a later time.

Discussion on Refunding Fees – Mr. Matthew Wells:

Mr. Wells reviewed the spreadsheet regarding refunds and the impact on our budget.

Most of the Clubs & Activities are still operating through distance learning. Some activities may be seasonal so it was addressed we should take this into consideration.

The Athletic Spring user fees have been refunded. We have pre-purchases that need to be made for the Fall sports that will now have to come from appropriations. Discussion and explanation was held regarding Spring coaches and payments which will come to the Committee for a vote.

The Little Lancer preschool program had been doing distance learning and it was going very well. Unfortunately, at this age group difficulty with remote learning and continued participation became an issue. Ann Marie Baker sent an email explaining how the program has been affected. Mr. Wells addressed different refund options. Mr. Sheedy suggested adding a 75% refund for comparison to this refund. Mrs. Sullivan addressed the issue that we still need to provide services for disabilities. We are not going to end the preschool program completely. If it is working for some families, then they can still continue to participate.

Transportation has not been provided for 3 months. A pro-rated refund would then apply.

Mr. Savas commented that we should provide the parents with an option to donate their refund, i.e., to the lunch program, as well as the direct payment or carrying over the credit for next year.

The Committee will review and vote on refunds at the next meeting.

Next Phase of Remote Learning – Mrs. Jennifer O’Neill:

Mrs. O’Neill updated the Committee on Remote Learning and discussed the different phases we have been initiating with guidance from DESE.

Phase 1 focused on students, families and staff safety, our lunch program and providing academic devices and work packets.

Phase 2 started the remote learning plans. The goal was to reinforce a deepening understanding of skills already provided. Connections were made with families and we provided support to any barriers they might be enduring.

Phase 3 will now introduce new contents and making sure all students are engaging. Meetings have been held with department teams and staff to make plans on what can be taught and re-visited. Assignments will be expected with flexibility. Documents will be distributed to families to re-explain what is expected with remote learning. We are distributing electronic devices to families in grades preK-2 if they do not have a device.

Phase 4 is returning to school in the Fall and staff is working to create some sense of normalcy for students.

Dr. Baeta thanked Jenn and the team and teaching staff for continuing to push the issue of equity, mastery and creativity, and the labor management for working towards having clearer language of expectations. Dr. Baeta asked the student representatives if they had any input from their peers. Carolyn Daly expressed that students are working so a flexible schedule is helpful. Cooper Smith reiterated teachers are being flexible and accommodating. Mrs. Stern addressed if long-term subs are expected to do remote learning. Dr. Baeta explained they are active employees engaging and running classrooms.

Questions and Answers from audience.

Why are teachers not being held to a standard to actual teach, having office hours is not teaching? Dr. Baeta addressed the issue that we just completely changed our approach to teaching and learning in the Commonwealth and nationally. Another issue is that we do not know what is happening in people’s homes in terms of scheduling. We are not defining remote learning as “teaching” in the sense of how our teachers were trained to do. The goal is to provide flexibility to families and the teachers and staff because they are home too. Asynchronous approach is the best way to go. Mrs. O’Neill stated we are following guidance from DESE that suggests we give a deepening and understanding of skills and concepts already provided. Mrs. O’Neill discussed different adjustments and programs that have been developed for all grade levels.

Discussion on Formation of Sub-Committee for Planning Purposes in the Event of a Non-Traditional Opening of School in September – Dr. Baeta:

The District has limited resources and cannot wait until later this year to look at options for September 2020, pending the continuation of not having a traditional opening. Although the current Remote Learning Plan (RLP) is a model in many ways, it will not be enough to continue doing what were are currently doing. Three working groups are being formed.

- Group 1: Staggered Opening PreK-12
- Group 2: Remote Learning 2.0 PreK-12
- Group 3: Online Learning Grades 3-12

Each group will have 7 members, including a Chair and Vice-Chair, and parental involvement.

- Group 1 Chair: Joseph Baeta
- Group 2 Chair: Jennifer O'Neill
- Group 3 Chair: Karen Winsper

Timeline: May 11th – June 30, 2020
Recommendations in writing by June 20, 2020

Dr. Baeta announced he will be hosting meetings for anyone to express their concerns and issues. He also mentioned emails and Let's Talk is always available.

May 13th at 6:30 pm, the meeting will provide for any questions and answers.

May 20th at 6:30 pm, the meeting will provide for any long and short term future ideas and also looking at the Fall.

Information will be sent out to participate in these meetings.

Dr. Baeta expressed concern about what resources and tools will be available. The Commonwealth has clearly decided they are not going out and purchasing certain things on behalf of districts. Everything is under local control. Based on State numbers that are subject to change, we could have a 10% State cut which is a \$1.2M direct hit which would be staggering to the school district. Previously, funds for technology were not available in appropriations. If it wasn't for School Choice funds, we would have nothing. Dr. Baeta is working with the Town Manager to reorganize the Capital plan to purchase more technology equipment for the future. More information will be provided next week.

Mrs. Stern informed the Committee she has attended several Massachusetts School Committee meetings. There are quite a number of schools that are struggling. Mrs. Gallagher also attended a meeting and expressed how committed we are as a group and working to support children. Some districts are not even close to what we are doing, i.e., some schools have teachers driving house-to-house delivering paper assignments, projects; some districts do not even have internet connection.

Dr. Baeta mentioned that what is happening in one home is not happening in another home. With social distancing, how do we get more people involved? He also expressed concerns and statements that social and emotional well-being will be a major hurdle; our mental health; this has been a learning curve for all of us; technology may have taken us away from eye-to-eye contact, but imagine not having Zoom and Google hang out right now.

FY 21 Budget Update – Dr. Baeta:

Mr. Wells is re-working the budget for a meeting with the Finance Committee on Monday night. Dr. Baeta has been working with Mike Yunits, but the State's numbers have changed, so we do not know what is going to happen. Without speaking for Mr. Yunits, he is trying to get an election for June 20th and a Town Meeting on June 25th, but that will be the Board of Selectman to decide. We are hoping to get more information at Monday's meeting. This will impact the commitment we have to the union and contract negotiations, with Caroline Gallagher and Deniz Savas as representatives.

Other Business:

- Mrs. Stern congratulated the college seniors who are from Norton and graduating this year.
- Mrs. Cohen requested a joint meeting as soon as possible with Selectman, Finance Committee and School Committee to address the breakfast and lunch program the school is providing. Dr. Baeta will email and set up meeting.
- Dr. Baeta will be having a meeting with High School administration tomorrow to discuss Class of 2020 activities and events.
- Dr. Baeta will be requesting an Executive Session at the next meeting.

MOTION: by Mrs. Cohen to adjourn meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Savas

VOTE: Roll Call: Kathleen Stern-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Sheri Cohen-yes;
Carolyn Gallagher-yes;
5-0 Motion Carries

The meeting adjourned at 7:34 pm.

Next Meeting Date: Thursday, May 14, 2020 - Virtual

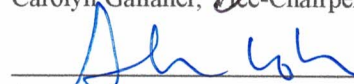
Respectfully Submitted,
Joseph F. Baeta, Ed.D.
Secretary Pro Tem



Kathleen Stern, Chairperson



Carolyn Gallaher, Vice-Chairperson



Sheri Cohen



Deniz Savas

Daniel Sheedy

dmk