

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

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NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

Date of School Committee Meeting: October 29, 2020

Location: Remote Participation

Present: Committee Members: Chairperson Mrs. Carolyn Gallagher, Vice-Chairperson Deniz Savas, Mrs. Sheri Cohen, Mr. Dan Sheedy, and Mrs. Kathleen Stern. ***Also present:*** Superintendent of Schools Joseph F. Baeta, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Jennifer O'Neill, School Business Manager Matthew Wells, Director of Facilities Wade Lizotte, Technology Director Karen Winsper, Coordinator of Special Education Cassandra Russo, Student Representatives Zoe Duran and Malia Savas

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

Vote to Approve Minute Meetings:

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to Approve Minutes of October 15, 2020 Regular Session Meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Sheedy

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Kathleen Stern-abstain; Dan Sheedy-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 4-0-1 motion carries

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to Approve Minutes of October 17, 2020 Regular Session Meeting

SECOND: by Mrs. Cohen

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Kathleen Stern-abstain; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 4-0-1 motion carries

Warrants:

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

- October 16, 2020 \$107,271.14

Student Representatives Update:

Zoe Duran and Malia Savas reached out to the principals and received the following feedback about school openings:

JCS – Everyone seems super excited to be learning and happy to be back to somewhat normal.

HAY – They love seeing the students in the building. The kids are doing a sensational job with keeping their masks on and social distancing.

NMS – Clubs are doing virtual meetings and more hands on activities.

NHS – Some clubs are getting back together. Excited to be celebrating Halloween and seeing the costumes the teachers put together was fun. A little nervous about parties being held over the Halloween weekend. School is going pretty well and they are adjusting to the workload.

Mrs. Gallagher mentioned the recent Board of Health phone call and to be thoughtful of the way we celebrate Halloween.

Mrs. Stern inquired about how the LGN was doing. The student representatives reported Mrs. Luke previously spoke with Dr. Baeta.

Mr. Savas asked Dr. Baeta if he could please reach out to the principals and remind them to respond to the student representatives with information and updates.

Discussion on COVID-19 Data and Information – Dr. Baeta:

Teaching and learning is still taking place and it is important to realize what we are working with.

At 6:00 p.m. today it was reported Norton is now a Red Zone community meeting the low end of the threshold. There is no change to the NPS model. We have zero cases in our schools. Dr. Baeta advised to please take precautions for the Halloween weekend.

The Committee was provided handouts with data and information from surveys that were provided from families, students, and administration. He reviewed some of the data on how our students responded. One of the key components is the students are getting their momentum back, structures are more in place and expectations are leveling. The other part becomes the accountability of the work with the standards we want to utilize and making sure it is followed through.

The biggest concern and hardest to facilitate is in two areas. One is the lack of technology expertise at the family level. Second is students getting onto the technology and the internet going out. About 71% of the high school students reported doing 4-5 hours of school work. This is where we are supposed to be as per state requirements.

He noted the parent surveys almost directly align with the student surveys. The surveys were performed at separate times. There were over 580 individual comments and most were positive. We feel comfortable that we are headed in the right direction. Students are making connections with the teachers. All the surveys reflect that being able to see each other has been a win for all involved.

Another part of this is that mandates still have to be met and truancy still needs to be reported.

Commentary from the parents, teachers, and students is there is a sense of a lot of work. Remote Monday at the secondary level seems to have a heavy work load. We need to find the balance and Principal Dolleman has begun the process of collecting data. Where we are today versus six weeks ago is very different but positive.

We have a great staff, but a core issue is that teachers are stressed. We are concerned about their health and safety in the day-to-day operation. There may come a time when a decision might need to be made to shut down due to not having teachers available. He referred to a statement, "We can all put kids in school but if there are no teachers in front of them it becomes a jail, not a school."

We may need to start considering the return of high need students to school. High need students are different than special education students. High need students may include poverty, homelessness, DCF, ELL, or medical. Getting these students back in school will be an involved process.

Dr. Baeta's recommendation is to continue in a hybrid model. Specifically, because we have entered into another zone. This zone is not related to Wheaton College. There are no cases within our school system. There are things beyond our control. We have no control over Norton becoming a Red community.

He reported over 150,000 meals have been served by the Norton Food Services and the Chartwells Department since March 2020, at no cost to the taxpayers.

Dr. Baeta thanked the men and women of our Custodial staff who have done a great job every single day to make sure they are hitting every spot.

Dr. Baeta turned the meeting over to The Chair.

Mrs. Gallagher confirmed with Mrs. O'Neill that any questions or comments from the public should be entered into the Q&A section versus the chat.

She commented that the Committee's earlier decision to have a six-week check-in for this hybrid model has gone quick. We are living in a stress response that we cannot really end or get out of changes the dynamics.

Mrs. Gallagher wanted to share with families, teachers and everyone all the hard work performed behind the scene. She thanked with the President of the NTA Shannon Taylor for accommodating and compiling information for the Committee so they can make educated decisions. She confirmed Dr. Baeta's recommendation to continue in a hybrid model. She thanked our administrators for all their efforts in holding many meetings and discussions and getting this feedback from our teachers, families and students.

She thanked Shannon Taylor for providing a report to the Committee about some of the successes and challenges from our teachers that do not directly involve teaching and learning. The Committee is concerned about their feelings of being stressed and overwhelmed. There may be options we can provide to remove some of these off their plate. The issues can be further discussed with the Labor Management Committee.

Ms. Shannon Taylor thanked the Committee for always working with the teachers and how this has been a long road. The Committee is willing to listen and have conversations. This is challenging and all new to everyone. The teachers have had to be flexible but the best part of this is having the kids in front of them. They are still worried about the future and the uncertainty. The DESE requirements are bringing stress. She thanked Wade Lizotte and his custodial staff. They have been phenomenal providing for the safety of the staff and students. We are all concerned about mental health and sustainability for what we are doing. Everyone is very happy about being back and finding the positive things that are working. Having time to plan with colleagues has been monumental. The teachers are more than ever before having to reinvent and change lesson plans. Teachers feel safe as possible in this model. Getting to know the students and being able to address their needs has been a positive outcome. Tech issues have been a challenge but they have become more tech savvy to help students and parents. A concern is about the sustainability of the time kids

are on screens and if this is developmentally appropriate. All this takes a lot more time which takes time away from their families. Norton educators are always more than willing and have risen to the occasion.

The Labor Management Committee meets weekly and are constantly talking to improve and make things better. Dr. Baeta added that the Labor Management Committee is an agreement with NTA Executive Board and the Norton School Committee to take 5 staff members and 3 administrators to discuss critical issues that need to be addressed and how can we resolve them. This is different from the political perspective of trying to create an education model. They have been meeting 1-2 times a week since March. They currently meet on Mondays at 2:00 p.m.

Ms. Taylor referred to our motto of "Flexible, Kindness and Forgiveness." She believes this is something that still resonates in what we are trying to do. They appreciate the Committee and parents and all the recognition and positive comments they have for our educators. She is very proud of her colleagues and the students for being absolutely amazing in all of this.

Mrs. Gallagher commented on the issue that DESE has created expectations that we may not always agree with or support as a public school district and School Committee. She commented we have a Superintendent that leads in the right way. DESE is auditing school departments so we need to at least consider those requirements and demands of DESE when making decisions.

Mrs. Gallagher commented on how they are seeing many differences in developmental theory. Our younger students who are working remotely may be doing it differently than our secondary students. This will need to be a further conversation with the Labor Management Committee.

Mrs. Gallagher shared with everyone that the Committee would like people to continue to offer their thoughts and concerns. They are receptive to what people have to suggest on ways to do things differently and better. We all want to work together and be collaborative.

Mrs. Stern referred to data and information that was collected from the surveys. She noted that information from the students indicated they felt safe and this is important. She commented on the office hours held by the teachers and how teachers felt kids were not checking in. She would like to see more of a breakdown from the age group where parents indicated the extra help they have to provide to their child. Dr. Baeta reported that the office hours for teachers are being discussed with the Labor Management Committee. He also explained that high school students can go directly to see their teacher during this time but at the elementary level the students go directly to the bus. He advised we will address this issue and take it to the next level with new ideas. He also mentioned that funding is a big concern if we offer extended day, any summer programs or programs during school breaks. We need more funding for time on task to be approved.

Ms. Taylor commented that office hours have been primarily teachers responding to emails. This doesn't just pertain to the designated office hours. Teachers respond to emails all the time, all day. The kids are reaching out on their own at all times. Mrs. Gallagher recognized this may not be a one size fits all model. The Committee may need more of a breakdown to determine how we can make it work.

Mrs. Cohen thanked the teachers for reaching out to the Committee with their questions, ideas, thoughts and criticism. They need to hear what is happening. The Committee takes everyone's emotional needs into account for the decisions they have to make. It was brought to her attention

some of the teachers may have felt disrespected regarding some recent voting. Speaking for herself, she is truly sorry. That has never been the intention. She also commented it was nice to have positive feedback from the surveys and to see what we can do to help our teachers. She thanked our teachers for putting all of their own issues aside and putting on that smile for our students.

Mrs. Gallagher commented that we need to find the balance that supports everyone. It is a struggle to keep everyone's best interest to support our staff and students. She agrees that any votes or decisions that are made are never meant to be personal or a lack of disrespect to the teachers. That is why Norton is the district we are because we have staff that care about our students. This six-week check-in gave us some points that we need to sit down and address.

Mr. Savas expressed that we are all going through a pandemic. This pandemic is affecting everyone's life. Decisions have to be made that may not suit everyone's needs. Let's keep in mind we all need to have humanity. We need to get back to where we were. This is a really solid, great district with great relationships. The Committee has historically been pro-staff and will continue to support and appreciate the NTA, teachers and every staff member.

He commented on the hybrid model and where we are going with this. He would like to entertain the idea of going back to school full time. There are a lot of stresses on teachers and students that would be alleviated. At the same time, there are DESE regulations that will not allow us to do this. The surveys have given us a broad view and we can continue to drill down from here. Everyone is doing a great job. We thank you and appreciate all the time and effort that has been put in.

Ms. Taylor thanked Mrs. Winsper and the Technology Department for getting us to be a 1:1 district. The appointment of Christina Scilingo as Digital Learning Specialist has been a resource we have all been comfortable with and she has made this tough time better. Mrs. Winsper responded her staff could not do it without the support from the School Committee and administration.

Dr. Baeta, through The Chair, addressed the anticipation right now as we move forward. One is the continuing and improving of our model. It is also continuing to look at our Digital Learning Academy model and what is going on there. Mr. Marty Geoghegan is the Acting Principal. He has provided updates and thoughts on how to continue to improve this. The support he has received from the Curriculum Department has been incredible. This is beginning to smooth itself out in many ways and is still being worked on with certain groups.

He suggested another check-in in terms of providing data by breakdown of grade levels and maybe some testing pilot questions from teachers and parents that will allow us to dive in. The Labor Management Committee will be finalizing its actual remote learning agreement. The second week of December may be a good time for a second check-in. He reminded everyone that next Tuesday, November 3rd and November 11th is a day off for everyone, not a remote day.

Mrs. Cohen asked Dr. Baeta if there is a possibility to bring some of the younger students back in school more. Some of Dr. Baeta's concerns are staffing, transportation, or where do they sit for lunch. Mrs. Cohen thanked him and appreciates his input and concerns.

Mrs. Gallagher mentioned to Dr. Baeta a previous discussion they had about what other districts may be doing unique, i.e., half days, and if he was able to get any feedback. He did receive anecdotal data and discussed some of those topics. He mentioned human resource issues are daunting and how the public may not recognize these situations.

Mr. Savas referred to a comment in the parent survey that he felt was a great idea. Since the lower ages are having a hard time staying on the screen, can we break-up Mondays for shorter periods? This maybe something to talk about. Dr. Baeta informed the Committee it is already being discussed. He also informed the public they are discussing alternating the cohorts.

Ms. Gallagher confirmed there were no other questions from the audience.

Ms. Gallagher would like to have another check-in. She mentioned if the recommendation to move the next meeting to November 12th is approved, this will allow some time for discussions with the Labor Management Committee and we can check-in during that meeting or should we set a more formal date. Dr. Baeta recommended utilizing the November 12th meeting to discuss any topics. This is a process and we can then schedule a meeting after the Thanksgiving break if necessary. Mr. Savas suggested, since this is a continual check-in or unless there is specific data change, we may not need a specific date. Dr. Baeta recommended the Labor Management Committee could also prepare a memo to the Committee and public of updates and changes. The Committee agreed and will continue to have open discussion.

Mr. Savas inquired if it was originally scheduled to vote at this six-week check-in to continue with the hybrid model. They will have to review previous records to determine.

Second Reading and Vote on District's Personal Travel Policy During Covid-19 – Dr. Baeta:

Dr. Baeta advised the Committee the form is also being shared with all families. This is an Executive Order of the State of Massachusetts.

MOTION: By Mr. Savas to Approve District's Personal Travel Policy During COVID-19

SECOND: By Mrs. Stern

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Kathleen Stern-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 5-0 motion carries

Election of Voting Delegate and Alternate Delegate to MASC Delegate Assembly – Dr. Baeta:

In place of the annual joint MASS/MASC conference, MASC will be conducting a special virtual program on Saturday, November 7th. Kathleen Stern will be attending the meeting and has agreed to be the Committee's Delegate and Carolyn Gallagher has offered to be the alternate.

MOTION: By Mr. Savas to appoint Mrs. Stern as Voting Delegate and Mrs. Gallagher as Alternate Delegate to the MASC Delegate Assembly

SECOND: By Mrs. Cohen

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Kathleen Stern-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 5-0 motion carries

FY'21 Financial Updates – Matthew Wells:

Mr. Wells provided the Committee with financial reports. He referenced an increased expenditure for unplanned staffing issues. Dr. Baeta informed the Committee these finances were provided to the Finance Committee and Select Board.

Other Business:

- The Committee received minutes from previous meetings that will need to be formally approved. Any changes can be submitted to Terry Rand. The approval of these minutes will be on the next agenda and voted on at the next meeting.
- Dr. Baeta would like to see more teachers and students present at future meetings.
- Mr. Sheedy would like to thank Jennifer Tonelli, Amy Mahoney and Dr. Todd Kefor who are involved in our Global Studies Team. They put a lot of effort into the program and it is unfortunate the student tourism has been cancelled due to the pandemic.

Next Meeting:

MOTION: By Mr. Savas to move the meeting from November 5th to November 12, 2020

SECOND: By Mrs. Cohen

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Kathleen Stern-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 5-0 motion carries

Motion to Adjourn:

MOTION: by Mrs. Stern to Adjourn Meeting

SECOND: by Mrs. Cohen

ROLL CALL VOTE: Sheri Cohen-yes; Dan Sheedy-yes; Kathleen Stern-yes; Deniz Savas-yes; Carolyn Gallagher-yes 5-0 motion carries

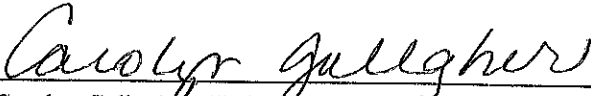
The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Next Meeting Date: Thursday, November 12, 2020

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at Meeting:


- Student and Family Survey Feedback
- Faculty Meeting Update
- NPS Administration Hybrid and DLA Comment
- District Personal Travel Policy During COVID-19
- Financial Update Report dated October 23, 2020

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




Carolyn Gallagher, Chairperson

Deniz Savas, Vice-Chairperson



Sheri Cohen



Daniel Sheedy



Kathleen Stern

dmk