

**SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
100 MAPLE AVENUE  
SHREWSBURY, MASSACHUSETTS**

**MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021**

Present: Mr. Jon Wensky, Chairperson; Ms. Sandy Fryc, Vice Chairperson; Ms. Lynsey Heffernan, Secretary; Dr. B. Dale Magee; Mr. Jason Palitsch; Mr. Patrick Collins, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Dr. Jane Lizotte, Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being; Ms. Barb Malone, Executive Director of Human Resources; and Dr. Joseph Sawyer, Superintendent of Schools.

A complete audio/visual recording of this meeting is available on the Shrewsbury Public Schools website.

The meeting was convened by Mr. Wensky at 7:01 pm.

**I. Public Participation**

None.

**II. Chairperson's Report & Members' Reports**

Mr. Wensky expressed appreciation to organizers of the recently held Sherwood and Oak Middle School Spelling Bees for the opportunity to participate, noting he, Ms. Fryc, and Mr. Palitsch acted as judges.

**III. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Sawyer congratulated the spelling bee participants and thanked the Shrewsbury Public Schools Performing Arts Department for hosting successful in-person concerts at Shrewsbury High School (SHS) and Oak Middle School that featured all the different performance groups.

**IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:**

**A. Focus on Student Belonging: Paton and Oak Middle School Student Presentations**

Dr. Lizotte introduced student representatives from the Paton Pride Meeting Leadership Team - Megan McDonald, Amelia Hackenson, Colin Avis, Liam Gauthier, Keegan Daly, and Mehreen Ali - who described what it is like to be part of a student leadership team, discussed how all-school meetings contribute to a sense of belonging, and demonstrated a breathing exercise for the Committee. Ms. D'Arcy McCarthy, Oak Middle School Community Service and Leadership Club Advisor, and student Ayla Tran discussed the recently held *Coins of Fury* event at OMS that raised money for families in need, and noted that it was the most successful in the fundraiser's history (earning \$6304.60).

**B. District Response to the Pandemic: Report**

In his report Dr. Sawyer summarized current state, local, and district-specific data on COVID-19 cases, including data on breakthrough cases, and cases by school and grade level; provided an update on the *Test and Stay* and *Routine COVID Safety Testing* programs in the district; and acknowledged questions and concerns relative to the COVID-19 Delta and Omicron variants. Dr. Sawyer also reported that SPS, like other school districts and sectors of the economy, was experiencing significant staff shortages, noting substitute teachers are in short supply and some positions in the district remain unfilled, adding that a

higher level of absences occurring in the district resulted from a variety of factors including COVID and other illnesses.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr. Collins advised that there is currently more interest in the *Test and Stay* program than the *Routine COVID Safety Testing* program, possibly due to individuals who are vaccinated feeling less need for routine testing.

## **V. Curriculum**

None.

## **VI. Policy**

### **A. Admissions Policy Change at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School: Report & Potential Vote on Communication**

Dr. Sawyer provided a summary of recent changes to state regulations for career/vocational/technical school admissions that were enacted to address concerns relative to equity, but that also make it more difficult for non-member districts to attend career/vocational/technical schools going forward as member districts will be given access first. As a result, there is the potential for fewer/no SPS students to attend Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School (AVRTHS) in the future since Shrewsbury is not a member district. Dr. Sawyer suggested that: the Committee empower Mr. Wensky to communicate the potential impact of these changes to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and elected state officials; the district seek out other career/vocational/technical schools to determine if they might have available seats for SPS students; the Committee discuss what can be done in district for students seeking other learning opportunities.

Mr. Collins gave detailed information on the multi-step process that would need to be completed successfully in order for Shrewsbury to join AVRTHS as a member district. He also provided historical information on Shrewsbury's relationship with local vocational schools, including Worcester Vocational High School and AVRTHS, and discussed potential reasons why Shrewsbury did not become a member district of AVRTHS when it opened (1973).

Committee members engaged in discussion and shared their perspectives in turn. There was agreement that the negative consequences associated with the changes needed to be addressed at the state level, as did the lack of capacity relative to vocational opportunities for students statewide that existed even before the admissions changes were made. The Committee asked clarifying questions about: training persistence rates for vocational students (which are low); the differences between the elective shop courses offered in the past at Shrewsbury High School and the robust technical programs currently available at AVRTHS; and the potential for SHS to partner with community colleges to provide career training for students.

On a motion by Ms. Heffernan, seconded by Mr. Palitsch, the Committee voted unanimously to empower the Shrewsbury School Committee Chair to send a communication to government officials explaining the impact that the change in state regulations will have on Shrewsbury resident students who wish to access a technical high school education.

## **VII. Finance & Operations**

None.

## **VIII. Old Business**

None.

## **IX. New Business**

None.

## **X. Approval of Minutes**

Without objections from the Committee, the minutes from the School Committee Meeting held on December 1, 2021, and the School Committee Workshop held on December 8, 2021 were accepted as distributed.

## **XI. Executive Session**

Mr. Wensky requested a motion to adjourn to Executive Session:

A. For the purpose of addressing G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(7) “[t]o comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements” (“Purpose 7”), Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §§ 22(f), (g) – for the purpose of reviewing, approving, and/or releasing executive session minutes;

B. For the purpose of addressing G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(3) “to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect of the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares” (“Purpose 3”)

- the Shrewsbury Education Association Units A and/or B, the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association, and/or the Cafeteria Workers Association; and

C. For the purpose of addressing G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(2) “to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel” (“Purpose 2”), where deliberation in an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body; and return to Open Session only for the purpose of adjourning for the evening. On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Dr. Magee, on a roll call vote: Mr. Palitsch, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; Ms. Fryc, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; and Mr. Wensky, yes, the School Committee voted to adjourn to executive session at 8:36 pm.

## **XII. Adjournment**

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Dr. Magee, the committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 pm. Roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Palitsch, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Ms. Fryc, yes; and Mr. Wensky, yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth McCollum, Clerk

Documents referenced:

1. Pandemic Response Slide Presentation
2. AVRTHS Admissions Policy Change Document Packet
3. Set(s) of minutes as referenced above