

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

**MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, January 19, 2022**

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; Ms. Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; 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**

Ms. Heffernan announced she would seek re-election to the School Committee for a second term in the upcoming 2022 election. Dr. Magee reported that he would not seek re-election for a fifth term on the Committee. Ms. Fryc expressed appreciation to the Shrewsbury Senior Men's Club for inviting her to attend a recent meeting.

**III. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Sawyer expressed appreciation to Ms. Heffernan and Dr. Magee for their service on the School Committee; noted that the Shrewsbury Education Foundation is currently accepting nominations for their John P. Collins Awards of Excellence; and reported that despite challenges relative to staffing, Shrewsbury Public School (SPS) students are receiving a positive educational experience.

**IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:**

**A. Student Spotlight: Sherwood Middle School Presentation**

Sherwood Middle School (SMS) Principal Jonathan Kelly introduced the following staff and student representatives, who described how they are living out Sherwood's Core Values through their work to raise money for communities recently impacted by tornadoes in the U.S.:

- Ms. Beth Jones, Special Education Teacher; Ms. Gail Merloni, Paraprofessional, Child Specific Aide; and SMS students Isaam Amir and Khloe Lothrop, who worked with others to raise over \$2K for the American Red Cross
- SMS student Brayden Kent, and Walter J. Paton School students Louis Duke and Brenna Kent, who set up a hot cocoa stand for a fundraiser in their neighborhood
- SMS student Abrar Haq, who read a letter he wrote to tornado victims that was sent along with his donation to relief efforts

The Committee and Dr. Sawyer expressed appreciation to the presenters for their efforts to assist communities in need.

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

Dr. Sawyer presented current state, local, and district-specific COVID-19 case data (including hospitalizations; cases by day, school, grade; case comparisons for vaccinated versus unvaccinated individuals; and vaccination data by age). Director of School Nursing Noelle Freeman provided updated information on: changes to the district's *Test and Stay Program* (noting that going forward the testing site would provide rapid tests for symptomatic individuals); the district's *Routine COVID Safety Testing Program*; and Case Management (noting paused contact tracing, and increased testing options for students and staff, going forward). Dr. Sawyer reported data on student and staff absences, and noted the importance of keeping schools open for students' social-emotional well-being and academic progress. Additional information was provided to the Committee in response to clarifying questions on rapid antigen test approvals, rapid and PCR testing protocols and reporting, and future at-home testing.

### **C. Disproportionality in Special Education: Report**

Ms. Belsito reported that in 2020 the district had been identified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as having a finding of "disproportionality," with White students being over-identified with emotional disabilities. Ms. Belsito summarized the actions taken by the district in response to the finding, which included contracting outside reviewer Walker Therapeutic and Educational Programs to conduct a review and provide a report. Ms. Belsito presented detailed information on the report's purpose, its findings relative to existing strengths and areas identified for improvement in the district, and its recommendations going forward (which include determining if underrepresentation of Asian students in Special Education might be a component in the disproportionality finding).

Members of the Committee shared their perspectives in turn, with consensus that the report identified many existing strengths in the district, but did not provide sufficient information around the disproportionality finding. Mr. Palitsch asked clarifying questions about how to address investigating the issue of potential underrepresentation of Asian students in Special Education. Dr. Magee cited multiple concerns relative to the report, including: a paucity of information, the data time frame possibly being too short, the relatively small number of special education students (46/939) identified as having an emotional disability, and a lack of comparative analysis with other districts; he also proposed that his concerns be attached to the report. Ms. Fryc expressed support for the ability to attach concerns to the report, and noted reservations about drawing too many conclusions around students and disproportionality from this stand-alone report. Ms. Heffernan felt more investigation was warranted to determine if a problem with disproportionality exists, noting in-house data analysis might yield additional information if there is time and capacity to do the work. Mr. Wensky stressed the critical importance of having all students' needs met regardless of background. Dr. Sawyer advised he would investigate, in the context of Open Meeting Law relative to public documents, the potential for adding concerns or feedback from the Committee to reports presented in meetings.

## **V. Curriculum**

### **A. SHS Program of Studies for 2022-2023: Vote**

Noting Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Principal Todd Bazydlo presented information on proposed changes to the SHS Program of Studies at their last meeting, Mr. Wensky advised that no feedback from the community regarding the proposed changes had been received by the Committee. Dr. Sawyer recommended that the Committee vote to approve the proposed changes. On a motion by Mr. Palitsch,

seconded by Dr. Magee, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Shrewsbury High School 2022-2023 Program of Studies as presented.

#### **VI. Policy**

None.

#### **VII. Finance & Operations**

None.

#### **VIII. Old Business**

None.

#### **IX. New Business**

##### **A. Assabet Valley Collaborative: Update**

Dr. Sawyer began the report with an overview of Assabet Valley Collaborative's (AVC) structure and programs, and the services it provides to member communities. Dr. Sawyer presented AVC's Annual Report and Annual Audit Report for FY21, noting that overall the Collaborative is on strong financial footing and has a new financial leader. There were no questions from the Committee.

##### **X. Approval of Minutes**

Without objections from the Committee, the minutes from the School Committee Meeting held on January 5, 2022 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 8:37 pm.

##### **XII. Adjournment**

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Dr. Magee, the committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 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. Sherwood Middle School Slide Presentation
2. Pandemic Response Slide Presentation
3. Disproportionality in Special Education Memo
4. Disproportionality in Special Education Report
5. Disproportionality in Special Education Slide Presentation
6. Shrewsbury High School Program of Studies 2022-2023
7. Assabet Valley Collaborative 2021 Annual Report
8. Assabet Valley Collaborative 2021 Audit Report Memo
9. Assabet Valley Collaborative 2021 Audit Report Financial Statements
10. Set(s) of minutes as referenced above