SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
100 MAPLE AVENUE
SHREWSBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

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

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, this meeting was not open to physical attendance by the public, but was broadcast live on SELCO Channels 29 & 329 and streamed live on the Shrewsbury Media Connection website. A complete audio/visual recording of this meeting is available on the Shrewsbury Public Schools website.

The meeting was convened by Ms. Fryc at 7:01 pm.

I. Public Participation
None.

II. Chairperson's Report & Members' Reports
Ms. Heffernan acknowledged the work of Jeffrey LaRose, Oak Middle School Physical Education Teacher, to find creative ways, like sledding, for students to get outdoor exercise.

III. Superintendent's Report
Dr. Sawyer acknowledged the work of Jeffrey Lane, Director, and the staff of the Physical Education, Health, and Family & Consumer Science Department to find innovative opportunities for outdoor activities for students. Dr. Sawyer also reported that the district undertook its first-ever remote learning day in lieu of a snow day cancellation on Tuesday, February 9.

IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:
A. Update on School District's Response to the Pandemic: Report
Dr. Sawyer summarized key messages, district case counts, and current state and local public health data. He provided data on student/staff case ratios, hybrid cases by school, and positive cases by week since September 2020; discussed updated state guidance on decision-making around determining changes to educational programs; noted strategies for maintaining stability in the district; addressed cases of suspected in-school transmissions; and provided an update on the pooled surveillance testing being conducted in the district. In response to questions from the Committee, Dr. Sawyer provided additional information on potential vaccinations for Shrewsbury Public Schools staff, noting that 94% of those who responded to a staff survey would be willing to participate in a vaccination clinic, but adding that there is uncertainty around vaccine availability at the present time.

B. Fiscal Year 2022 Budget: Superintendent's Recommendation
Dr. Sawyer began his report by noting that the district is facing an "Education Emergency," citing multiple reports on COVID-related student learning loss and learning challenges, increasing student and staff mental health emergencies, and family struggles. Dr. Sawyer added that the crisis brought on by the pandemic is compounded by an ongoing structural funding dilemma in the community that threatens further damage to the educational program, and recommended that the district maintain current staffing levels and programs, and open the new Beal school as planned, for Fiscal Year 2022. During the presentation, Dr. Sawyer and Mr. Collins noted that his budget recommendation is for a 10.95% increase over the current year, in order to a) fund the costs of maintaining the current level of personnel and programming; b) to address one-time budget reductions used in the current year through staff wage concessions/freezes and use of savings from the spring closure in order to avoid deeper cuts than the $1.9 million (30 positions) already made; and to add staffing to open the new Beal School as planned. They noted the gap between his initial budget recommendation to do this was $4.9 million more than the Town Manager's initial budget recommendation (which is based on estimated available revenue and must assume a balanced budget). The presentation compared per pupil student expenditures in Shrewsbury to other local financial metrics, and with different communities, illustrating that as a district Shrewsbury funds education spending in the bottom 11% of Massachusetts school districts on a per pupil expenditure basis. Mr. Collins discussed a variety of technical elements of the budget, including a summary of historical reports detailing the ongoing and predictable structural funding dilemma being experienced by the district; key factors and assumptions around expenses in the FY22 budget recommendation; enrollment projections; and COVID-related costs and funding for FY20 and 21. He noted how strategies to save revenue/jobs in FY21 contribute to a larger revenue gap for FY22, and detailed funding needed just to maintain a status quo budget, and then to open the new Beal school as planned. Dr. Sawyer addressed possible future cuts that could result if reductions are necessary to close the $4.9 million gap, which could include not opening the new Beal School as planned and also reducing in the range of 50 positions; noted that federal stimulus aid and an operational override represent potential options for addressing the funding problem (with timing being critical); and presented a timeline going forward. Committee members offered their perspectives in turn, with common themes being the ongoing, predictable nature of the funding dilemma and their desire for the Board of Selectmen to place an operational override on the ballot as soon as possible. Committee members also suggested that members of the community who want the opportunity to vote on providing more funding to the school district could contact the Board of Selectmen to request that an override be placed on the ballot.

C. Redistricting of Elementary School Attendance Zones: Vote
Ms. Heffernan raised a point of order, noting she was uncomfortable moving forward on redistricting given the uncertainty relative to opening the new Beal school in light of the FY22 budget information just presented, and she expressed concern that proceeding might convey a false sense of certainty to staff and the community regarding opening the new school. Mr. Palitsch and Dr. Magee concurred. Ms. Heffernan made a motion to table the decision until there is greater certainty; Mr. Palitsch seconded the motion. Ms. Fryc requested a substitute motion be made to table the discussion on redistricting the elementary school attendance zones to the School Committee meeting scheduled February 24, 2021. On a motion by Mr. Wensky, seconded by Mr. Palitsch, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the substitute motion. Dr. Sawyer added that his initial thinking was that it would make sense for the Committee to make a decision about the redistricting plan for implementation whenever the new Beal school opens at the next meeting.

D. Staffing Report for 2020-2021 School Year: Report

Ms. Malone noted that different information platforms are used by the district for staff accounting/payroll (MUNIS) and staff/student records (PowerSchool), and that MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reporting is based on PowerSchool information. Ms. Malone provided an overview of FY21 staffing, noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staffing, and advised that current staff demographic data does not match that of the student population and thus provides a benchmark for progress in future diversification. She added that day-to-day substitute teacher positions offer a path towards other more permanent roles in the district and present an opportunity to diversify staff as this group's demographic is closer to the student demographic.

V. Curriculum
None.

VI. Policy
A. Updated Policy on Title IX & Anti-Harassment: Vote
After its first reading at a prior meeting the policy draft was resubmitted to legal counsel for review to address concerns from the Committee. Ms. Malone noted several changes that were made to the draft to address those concerns, but added that counsel recommended that the district remain with a record retention period of seven years instead of committing to a period of thirty-five years. In response to questioning from the Committee, Ms. Malone provided information on implementing training on the updated policy for the leadership team and SPS staff. Dr. Sawyer recommended approval of the updated draft. On a motion by Mr. Wensky, seconded by Dr. Magee, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the updated policy titled Anti-Harassment & Title IX Policy as presented, to be included in the School Committee policies as both #316 and #645 in the personnel and student services sections respectively as presented.

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 January 27, 2021, and the School Committee Workshop held on February 3, 2021 were accepted as distributed.

XI. Executive Session
Ms. Fryc 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; and
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, 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: Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes, the School Committee voted to adjourn to executive session at 9:06 pm.

XII. Adjournment
On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Mr. Wensky, the committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 9:31 pm. Roll call votes were as follows: Ms. Fryc, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; and Dr. Magee, yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth McCollum, Clerk

Documents referenced:

1. Pandemic Response Update Slide Presentation
2. FY22 Superintendent's Budget Recommendation
3. FY22 Superintendent's Budget Recommendation Slide Presentation
4. FY21 Staffing Level Report
5. FY21 Staffing Level Report Appendix A
6. FY21 Staffing Level Report Appendix B
7. FY21 Staffing Level Report Appendix C
8. FY21 Staffing Level Report Appendix D
9. FY21 Staffing Level Report Appendix E
10. FY21 Staffing Level Slide Presentation
11. Updated Title IX & Anti-Harassment Policy Draft
12. Set(s) of minutes as referenced above