

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

MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

Present via virtual participation: 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. Amy B. Clouter, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; 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.

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, this meeting was not open to physical participation by the public, but was broadcast live on SELCO Channels 29 & 329 and streamed live on the Shrewsbury Media Connection website. A complete audio/video 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

Ms. Fryc advised that public participation is possible at virtual meetings and advised anyone interested to reach out to the School Committee via email.

II. Chairperson's Report & Members' Reports

None.

III. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Sawyer reported that guidance regarding reopening of schools was expected the following day from Governor Baker and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), which would facilitate planning and communication in the district going forward. He added that as a result, Agenda Item IV. D., Update Regarding the School District's Response to the COVID-19 School Closure: Report, was cancelled since it would have been informed by the still-pending guidance.

IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:

A. Student Recognition: Speech & Debate State Champions

Mr. Todd Bazydlo, Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Principal, introduced Advisor Marc Rischitelli, who talked about the successful season - in both traditional and online competitions -

experienced by the team, including a second place overall finish at the Massachusetts State Speech Championships, being recognized as a School of Honor at the 2020 National Speech and Debate Tournament (top 50 ranked school out of over 1,400), and enjoying their 50th year having national qualifiers. Mr. Rischitelli introduced State Champions Sophia Peng (Informative Speaking), Haleema Siddiqui (Poetry Reading), and Pranav Vadlamudi (Play Reading); and Steve Asthana, the first SHS Speech and Debate team member to receive an invitation to attend the prestigious Montgomery Bell Academy Southern Bell Forum Extemporaneous Speaking Round Robin national event. The students had an opportunity to talk about their experiences, event topics, and preparation, and were congratulated by the Committee and Dr. Sawyer.

B. Student Recognition: SHS Senior Scholars

Mr. Bazydlo congratulated the students as a group, and Dr. Sawyer introduced (alphabetically) the ten SHS senior students with the highest grade point averages in their class by reading a brief biography of each. The students had an opportunity to speak and acknowledge family, friends, and educators who had an impact on their education and experiences at Shrewsbury Public Schools. Dr. Sawyer and the Committee congratulated the students. Dr. Magee expressed a desire to get feedback from this cohort of students again regarding their experiences at SPS once they have experienced college.

The students recognized (in alphabetical order) were: Stefanie Del Rosario, Hannah Huang, Sunny Huang, Brady McCue, Shawn Noronha, Jessica Peng, Sophia Peng, Lanna Wang, Vivian Weng, and Athena Wu.

C. Equity Audit: Report

Dr. Sawyer provided a timeline of SPS' partnership with the Assabet Valley Collaborative (AVC) to conduct a formal equity audit process, and introduced AVC auditors Dr. Cathy Cummins, Executive Director, and Ms. Kiesha E. Lamb, Educational Equity Specialist. Dr. Cummins and Ms. Lamb presented an overall summary of the report that included: information on AVC member districts; core tensions, co-designing priorities, and stakeholders; and a reference that the report contained recommendations regarding four areas: instructional practices; culture and climate; family and community engagement; and staffing and professional learning in the district. Dr. Sawyer requested that the audit authors provide details regarding the recommendations so that those watching the meeting could get this information. Steering Committee members Ms. Clouter and Dr. Lizotte provided brief remarks on addressing complex topics and engaging stakeholders. Committee members asked clarifying questions on prioritization and intersectionality of data, and high rates of chronic student absenteeism; noted the importance of hearing all voices and engaging in sustainable conversations; acknowledged the impact to staff and students from some language that is used in discussions regarding elementary schools in the district; and noted that issues of race/equity and budget (fees and fundraising) overlap and impact each other.

Next, noting he was following up on his earlier statement addressing racism and equity (June 3, 2020), Dr. Sawyer presented a summary of information from his memo (dated June 24, 2020) regarding initial steps SPS will be taking to combat and educate about racism in schools and move the district further toward its core value of equity.

D. Update Regarding the School District's Response to the COVID-19 School Closure: Report

As noted previously in the Superintendent's Report, this agenda item was canceled due to still-pending guidance regarding reopening of schools from Governor Baker and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

V. Curriculum

None.

VI. Policy

None.

VII. Finance & Operations

A. Fiscal Year 2020 Budget: Report & Vote on Fund Transfers

Mr. Collins' report summarized the FY20 budget by operational category, highlighted variances across different accounts, and noted how a projected overall positive variance for FY20 could be applied to an anticipated FY21 budget gap; presented a preliminary list of anticipated COVID-19 costs; addressed estimated federal CARES funding and restrictions relative to its use; and noted factors relative to reopening schools that will impact the FY21 budget.

Committee members asked clarifying questions regarding the utilization of FY20 savings to address the FY21 budget gap. Mr. Collins noted that the pending vote for this agenda item would address making transfers within the FY20 budget to ensure that any deficit accounts were covered by positive variance accounts.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Mr. Wensky, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize the administration to make budget transfers from the original budget plan as necessary to eliminate deficits and surpluses, with the intent of fully expending the total FY20 appropriation by June 30, 2020 and balancing all accounts. Roll call votes were as follows: Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes.

B. Fiscal Year 2021 Recommended Budget Reductions: Vote

Dr. Sawyer summarized the updated recommended cost reductions for FY21 presented at the meeting on June 17, noting they were being presented for a formal vote this evening to bring some certainty to part of the budget process ("Phase 1"). Committee members noted existing structural funding issues in the district are being exacerbated by current pressures; acknowledged the potential for difficult decision-making and the importance of keeping teachers; and noted that the potential for the budget situation to change over time will necessitate an ongoing commitment from the community to maintain quality in the district.

On a motion by Ms. Heffernan, seconded by Mr. Wensky, the committee voted unanimously to approve the Fiscal Year 2021 Recommended “Phase 1” Budget Reductions as illustrated in the Superintendent’s memorandum. Roll call votes were as follows: Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes.

VIII. Old Business

None.

IX. New Business

A. Superintendent’s Contract Extension: Vote

Ms. Fryc noted that a vote of the School Committee is required to authorize the Chair to approve an updated employment agreement with the Superintendent of Schools.

On a motion by Mr. Palitsch, seconded by Mr. Wensky, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize the Chair to execute an updated employment agreement between the School Committee and Dr. Joseph M. Sawyer as Superintendent of Schools for the period commencing July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2025, with all other terms remaining unchanged. Roll call votes were as follows: Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes.

X. Approval of Minutes

Without objections from the Committee, the minutes from the School Committee Meeting held on June 17, 2020 were accepted as distributed.

XI. 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 Unit A; Shrewsbury Education Association Unit B; the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association; and/or the Shrewsbury Cafeteria Workers.

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 Unit A; Shrewsbury Education Association Unit B; the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association; and/or the Shrewsbury Cafeteria Workers, 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 Mr. Wensky, on a roll call vote: Dr. Magee, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes, the School Committee voted to adjourn to executive session at 9:45 pm.

XII. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Wensky, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 10:36 pm. Roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Palitsch: yes, Mr. Wensky: yes, Ms. Heffernan: yes, Dr. Magee: yes, and Ms. Fryc: yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth McCollum, Clerk

Documents referenced:

1. 2020 SHS Senior Scholars Report
2. AVC Equity Audit
3. AVC Equity Audit Slide Presentation
4. Equity and Anti-Racism Planning Memo
5. FY20 Budget Status Report
6. FY20 Budget Slide Presentation
7. FY21 “Phase 1” Budget Reduction Memo
8. Set(s) of minutes as referenced above