

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

MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Present: Ms. Sandy Fryc, Chairperson; Mr. Jon Wensky, Vice Chairperson; Dr. B. Dale Magee, Secretary; Ms. Lynsey Heffernan; Mr. Jason Palitsch (by phone); Mr. Patrick Collins, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Ms. Amy B. Clouter, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Ms. Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; 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/video recording of this meeting is available on the Shrewsbury Public Schools website.

The meeting was convened by Ms. Fryc at 7:02 pm, who advised that Mr. Palitsch was participating by phone.

I. Public Participation

Mr. Tim Scheer, Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Social Sciences Teacher, addressed the Committee (by phone) on behalf of 125 Shrewsbury Public School (SPS) educators and community members. He noted highlights from a letter co-authored by himself and others that was sent to the Committee to express concerns regarding the district's reopening plan. Ms. Fryc advised that the Committee welcomes feedback from all stakeholders, expressed appreciation to the 145 SPS staff who participated in crafting the district's reopening plan, and noted the letter would be taken into consideration.

II. Chairperson's Report & Members' Reports

Dr. Magee noted a new episode of School Talk had been recorded by Committee members and released on cable that addresses different paths for students after graduation from high school.

III. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Sawyer noted that: three recently held webinars for families on school reopening were well attended and thanked participants; three webinars for staff (by level) on reopening would be held the next day; and updated guidance had been released that day from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) which included a DPH mandate for all students to receive an influenza vaccine prior to the end of the calendar year in order to participate in school.

IV. Time Scheduled Appointments:

A. Approval of Gateways Academy to Operate as a Private School: Vote

Dr. Sawyer highlighted information presented to the Committee from Ms. Cynthia Ahearn and other founders of the proposed Gateways Academy school, noted they provided sufficient documentation regarding the quality of their educational program to meet a reasonable standard, and recommended that the Committee vote to approve the operation of the school.

On a motion by Mr. Wensky, seconded by Dr. Magee, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize Gateways Academy to operate as a private school offering grades Kindergarten through 12 in Shrewsbury. Roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Palitsch, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes.

B. Update on Reopening Planning for the 2020-2021 School Year: Report

Dr. Sawyer began the report with a summary of key messages; current public health data (state and local); data on initial family choices for educational programs (noting cohort D students, based on initial data, would likely be taught by SPS teachers at the elementary level, mostly SPS teachers at the middle level, and by a third party solution at the high school); and information on heat concerns relative to masks and establishing benchmarks for early release or “no in person” school days. Ms. Belsito provided data on the recently completed Extended School Year (ESY) Program for Special Education students, and Director of Nursing Noelle Freeman presented the associated data from the ESY Health Office.

Committee members acknowledged the ongoing complexities of planning for reopening, and asked clarifying questions relative to mask compliance during the ESY Program, coordination between SPS and COVID-19 test providers, and implications for fall sports from the pandemic.

V. Curriculum

None.

VI. Policy

A. Allowance for Shrewsbury Public Schools Employees to Attend School In-Person to Assist with Workforce Stability: Recommendation & Vote

Dr. Sawyer discussed difficulties for parents around working and having their children in school on a different schedule, and noted the potential for a staffing challenge at SPS as a result. He advised that one way to alleviate this pressure would be to allow SPS staff whose children go to school in Shrewsbury to attend school more frequently in-person, adding that DESE Commissioner Jeffery Riley has suggested and supports this type of approach for districts, and might issue related guidance. Dr. Sawyer also addressed similarities and dissimilarities with essential workers relative to childcare during the pandemic, and recommended that, depending on space, the district allow more frequent attendance by the children of SPS staff who are in grades K-6, with exceptions on a case-by-case basis for other ages.

Noting they had already received feedback from the community relative to this agenda item, Committee members shared their perspectives in turn, noting different degrees of support for the recommendation and/or its underlying philosophy; acknowledged issues around equity relative to educators and other workers being viewed as “essential,” and to staff who live in Shrewsbury versus out of Shrewsbury; and expressed a desire to delay a vote to gather more data and feedback from the community.

VII. Finance & Operations

A. Revised Tuition Rates for Extended School Care: Recommendation

Director of Extended Learning Karen Isaacson presented information on: the child care shortage resulting from the pandemic, the pandemic’s impact on enrollment in the Extended School Care (ESC) at SPS, updated budget assumptions and the resultant monthly budget projection (\$19,998 loss), and a local rate comparison. Ms. Isaacson noted the required rate increase to cover expenses (60% over FY20) and the factors supporting the increase, and recommended raising tuition for full-fee families as part of an overall recommendation to enable continuation of the ESC Program. Mr. Collins and Dr. Sawyer added that an ESC workforce reduction was implicit moving forward, expressed regret, and hoped staff would apply for other opportunities in the district.

Committee members expressed a desire for time to think about the recommendation and to get feedback from the community; acknowledged the critical importance of child care for families and the need for parents to have certainty regarding ESC’s availability and ability to remain operational; and asked clarifying questions about families on the waitlist and the physical capacity of the program.

Mr. Palitsch left the meeting at 8:30 pm.

VIII. Old Business

None.

IX. New Business

None.

X. Approval of Minutes

None.

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 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. Wensky, seconded by Dr. Magee, on a roll call vote: Ms. Heffernan, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; Mr. Wensky, yes; and Ms. Fryc, yes, the School Committee voted to adjourn to executive session at 8:44 pm.

XII. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Wensky, seconded by Ms. Heffernan, the committee unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 10:12 pm. Roll call votes were as follows: Ms Fryc, yes; Ms. Heffernan, yes; Dr. Magee, yes; and Mr. Wensky, yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth McCollum, Clerk

Documents referenced:

1. Letter from SPS Educators, Staff, and Families
2. Gateways Academy Documents
3. Reopening Update Slide Presentation
4. SPS Workplace Stability Recommendation Memo
5. Extended School Care Slide Presentation