

Swampscott School Committee

Regular Session Meetings

February 24th, 2021

A meeting of the Swampscott School Committee was held virtually in Swampscott, MA commencing at 7:00 p.m. with the following members present: Ms. Amy OConnor, School Committee Chair, Ms. Suzanne Wright, Ms. Carin Marshall, Mr. Ted Delano, Mr. John Giantis, School Committee members. Also, Present: Pamela Angelakis, Superintendent of Schools, Jean Bacon, Director of Teaching & Learning, Martha Sybert, Director of Finance, and Martha Raymond, Asst. Superintendent of Student Services. Myra Diaz, and Tabitha Randell, Student Reps were present.

The School Committee was meeting in a virtual setting, fully remote via teleconferencing, practicing social distancing, and in accordance with the Governor's suspension of certain open meeting laws. The meeting was being recorded and broadcast live on the local cable station.

Director of Teaching & Learning:

Mid-Year Assessment Data: Dr. Bacon reviewed the issues last fall and the actions that were taken (i.e., Hybrid Model on 10/26, 4 days per week for all students with IEPs in late December/January, case managers for seriously disengaged, Bootcamp Grades 10-12).

She reviewed the i-Ready reading assessment by Tier 1 (at or above grade level), Tier 2 (1-grade level below) and Tier 3 (2 or more grade levels below) students. The reading goal is for 80% of students to achieve Tier 1 without intervention (Winter 2021-61% versus 41% in the Fall). All grade levels improved from fall to winter.

Dr. Bacon reviewed the AIMSweb math assessment. The Tier 1 students (74%) are on track to meet end-of-year grade level expectations. In a normal year they would hope 80% of students would fall into Tier 1. The same percentage of Hybrid and Remote students fall into Tier 1. Some grade levels are doing better than they did in the winter assessment last year (Grades 2/3).

Mr. Delano asked about the caseworkers and kids served. Dr. Bacon said there are two caseworkers and about twenty families.

Mr. Giantis asked the definition of disengaged. Dr. Bacon said it encompasses not turning in work, not showing up, or turning in work of insufficient quality.

Ms. OConnor asked if there were enough resources to expand tutoring. Dr. Bacon said they have enough resources. She said that some students are not showing up to work with their tutors. Ms. OConnor asked if disengagement was a function of Hybrid and Remote learning or would be happening anyway. Dr. Bacon said a big portion of the disengagement would be happening anyway.

Ms. Wright asked if the tutors are remote. Dr. Bacon said they are remote except for one HS tutor. Ms. Wright asked if more students would engage if tutoring was in person. Dr. Bacon said that a captive audience helps but sometimes kids are not ready to learn.

Ms. Marshall asked if Tier 1 would be at 80% or lower if this was a normal situation. Dr. Bacon said that ideally, 80% of students would be at grade level. Dr. Bacon spoke about the Grade K reading being at 79% with no intervention. This result shows that strong instruction is getting kids to where they need to be even in this pandemic.

Mr. Delano asked if the presentation would be available for parents. Ms. Angelakis said it is linked to the public agenda. She will make it available in the Superintendent blog. Mr. Delano asked for a walkthrough of an elementary student intervention. Dr. Bacon said math tutoring is two half-hour interventions weekly in a small group and reading is three half-hour interventions. Mr. Delano asked if all the help was via Zoom. Dr. Bacon said all the math is virtual and some of the reading is in person.

Dr. Bacon reviewed the MS data. The number of students earning D/F at the end of Trimester 1 doubled from last year. The percent of HS students earning D/F in Quarter 2 is lower than last year. She reviewed the breakout by Hybrid and Remote learners for both MS/HS. Ms. Angelakis said that forty-one additional MS students were brought in after the 1st Trimester report cards.

Ms. Wright asked if there was a way to tell if poor performance was due to disengagement versus trying and failing. Dr. Bacon said the MS kids they started tutoring in January were disengaged with a D/F. The MS Remote population is 30%. Mr. Calichman said that since the 1st Trimester every class is live Zoom where initially it was pockets of ELA and Math. He said the vast majority of the D/F students are disengaged.

Ms. OConnor asked if MS students were in front of a teacher whether the student is at home or in school. Mr. Calichman said students are in-person live or streaming live from 8-12.30.

Dr. Bacon spoke about the disproportionate challenges of MS/HS students on IEPs. IEP Students with disabilities are twice as likely to earn a D/F as students without an IEP. This was true pre-pandemic. Ms. OConnor asked how many kids were on IEPs. There are about 17% district-wide (118 students).

Mr. Delano expressed concern about the 29% of Remote students with D/F. He mentioned the need for financial resources to help the students. Ms. Raymond said they have been investing in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) PD. She discussed the shift in the thinking of how students demonstrate understanding material and mastering skills.

Mr. Calichman said the administration is making daily calls, going to student houses and have paid visits to a parents' place of employment in order to reach disengaged students. Ms. Marshall asked if the measures are helping. Mr. Calichman said it comes down to Remote students that aren't engaged. They can come up with plans but if they can't get hold of them, they can't work with them.

Dr. Bacon shared that there is solid evidence that elementary and high school that gaps are closing, and Hybrid learning improves grades in Grades 5-12, compared to fully remote learning.

Ms. OConnor asked about Grade K students getting into a routine. She asked if we are worried about having another transition soon. Dr. Bacon said that 80% of elementary school students are coming in and more in Grade K. She said there will be some relearning.

Ms. Wright said that the 29% Tier 1 start this year showed how far behind kids started this year because of last year.

Chair:

Social-Distancing Vote Required: Ms. OConnor introduced those on the call (Dr. Cheryl D'Souza-SPS School Physician, Amanda Mulcahy-SPS Occupational Health Nurse, Craig Harris-SHS School Psychologist, Rebecca Bucklin-Teacher/SEA president, Margaret Ardman-MS teacher, Susan Comparto-HS teacher, Jeff Vaughan-Health Dept., & Chief Graham Archer-Fire Dept.).

Ms. Angelakis provided an update on the commissioner's call. DESE is aware of the substitute teacher shortage. Ms. Angelakis has placed our name on the substitute listserv. Starting the first week of April, the plan is to begin rolling out five days a week for elementary students in a phased approach. She said the Governor plans to request an increased time on learning (it was reduced during COVID). DESE has said parents have the right to keep their kids remote for the remainder of the year. Ms. Angelakis said DESE is coming out with guidance for summer programs.

Ms. OConnor spoke about the SC-driven Distancing Survey results (1358 usable responses). She discussed the crisis, the process, the category of "other", and the breakdown of responses by school and grade. She presented the district-wide percentages that would return with a 3-foot distance (65%), and the percentages that would return by school level. The elementary school had the highest response rate and desire to return (77%). The HS was a 50/50 split for returning and staying or going remote.

Ms. Marshall spoke about the 3-foot distance as a basis of the discussion. She discussed the 6-foot distance as a limiting factor to students returning but not the only factor. She spoke about voting to follow the CDC guidance in the fall, how much has been learned, and the impact of not being in school. She said that 6-feet is preferable but that a balanced approach and 3-feet is considered reasonable, effective, and safe by DESE, the MA chapter of American Assoc of Pediatrics (AAP) and science (WHO). Ms. Marshall spoke about teachers and staff remaining at 6-feet. She found 3- to 6-feet is becoming the more acceptable distance for students.

Dr. D'Souza spoke about the minimal transmission rate student to student, especially at the elementary level. She spoke about weighing the risk and benefits. Dr. D'Souza said the rate of more severe illness is lower in kids. She recommends they go back to school as mental health is suffering.

Mr. Craig Harris spoke about student and educator mental health. There has been a 21% increase in HS mental health cases from the previous year. He spoke about elementary concerns and educator chronic stress. Mr. Harris said that returning to school may see an increase in mental health conditions due to issues being observed and uncovered, changes in routines, and increased academic expectations.

Ms. Bucklin, spoke about the resilience of kids and staff. She thanked her colleagues for always striving to do better. She is disappointed that vaccines for teachers are not being prioritized. Ms. Bucklin discussed Remote learners, no live streaming, lack of substitutes, the state of the buildings, and that social distance for teachers at the elementary level is not possible due to student needs.

Mr. Vaughan read a statement from the Swampscott Health Dept. He said the department continues to follow and support the CDC, MA DPH, Center Disease Control guidelines and regulations through the pandemic. Mr. Vaughan spoke about the CDC operational

strategy for K-12 schools. The two mitigation strategies for in-person learning are to keep a physical distance of at least 6 feet or more and the universal correct use of masks. Since Sept 1, 2020, there were 151 confirmed lab cases that were under the age of 18 (19.6%). He spoke about MPH weekly health reports that Swampscott was red for 6 weeks in a row (yellow since 1/28). He spoke about the deaths, vaccine demand/supply, majority of students not eligible for vaccines, new strains, travel, increase of close contacts at 3-feet, and the importance of remaining vigilant.

Ms. Mulcahy reported that as of January they have investigated over 264 cases (reporting about COVID not necessarily positive). She spoke about the data dashboard and the cases that are not sharing data. Ms. Mulcahy spoke about the DESE reporting numbers (7-day counting window) versus the dashboard. She walked through the close contact tracing process and how it will increase if we go to 3-feet.

Public Comment: Ms. OConnor said Public Comment would be 15 minutes and requested speakers to keep to 3 minutes.

Vanessa Cavallo, a Hadley K parent, spoke about the stress on parents and children, and juggling work while attending to their students the entire time.

Erik Schneider, a Stanley parent, spoke about the letter sent to the SC, Board of Health, and Superintendent from the Elementary parents to reduce the 6-foot distance. He shared his experience as a parent and the situation in their household with his son.

Mrs. Catherine Quinn spoke about COVID not being over, the mental health issues, the challenging times, CDC still being at 6 feet, and providing a safe environment for teachers' health.

Keiko Zoll, a Stanley parent, will email links to the SC and leadership that support the 6- to 3- feet change. She mentioned the Wrentham school district rapid vaccine deployment, pooled testing, and the ESSER II grant.

Maryanne Conway, a Stanley K parent, spoke of students falling behind and the need to look at the science. She echoed that it is impossible for parents to balance work and teaching their students that need supervision all day long.

Jonathan Christison, a MS & Clarke parent, said there are no perfect solutions and asked for creativity when looking at the data, mitigations, and learnings. He spoke about the negligence and lack of support for high-performing students. He has been impressed with teachers but that they are lacking the tool kits from the district.

Tabitha Randall spoke about a 3-foot versus 6-foot distance, parent stress, not overlooking the safety of teachers, and the loss of lives.

Marybeth Shea, Clarke's principal, feels proud of the staff and the good results. She spoke about the reality of the pandemic, that 5 days a week increases the spread and contagious period, quarantine of teachers, and other logistics.

Chair Continued:

Social-Distancing Vote Required:

Ms. OConnor is grateful that DESE is looking at it as a measured approach. She mentioned the MOU with teachers requires a 10-day notice prior to a change.

Ms. Mulcahy said that the CDC has updated their COVID-19 risk and increased factors for operating school. SPS is in the "some" risk category. SPS will move up to a "medium" risk factor category and possibly the "higher" risk factor if we move to 3-feet.

Ms. OConnor said this is unprecedented. Ms. Angelakis said they need to revisit the ventilation report as one of the top priorities. They are taking steps to have the classrooms measured at the 3-foot distance.

Ms. OConnor is uncomfortable hearing that some HS classes have two or three kids. She wants to put elementary school space at the HS and busing students back on the table.

Mr. Delano thanked Ms. OConnor for the time she spent on the survey. He sent a letter to Secretary Sudders regarding teacher vaccinations. Mr. Delano mentioned meeting grandparents that were taking the kids from Hadley to the Y. Ms. OConnor said we have families at local preschools that are maskless and have had low transmission. She mentioned that some kids are going to the Y because the school schedule doesn't work for them. She said she hears people ask how this can happen all around us but not at SPS. She acknowledged our building HVAC reports, the difference between union and non-union workforce.

Ms. Bucklin said the union has not been a hindrance in any shape or form, and the HVAC concerns are a benefit of all. She mentioned that Melrose, Danvers, Essex, Manchester are able to bring kids back at 6-feet. She noted that Marblehead has K-6 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. but they have enough space to keep the students at a 6-foot distance due to newer facilities and bigger spaces.

Ms. Wright said she is not sure where she stands when she looks at the data and letters. She said Marblehead has no bookshelves or teacher desks, no use of Smartboards, or anything in the classrooms but student desks. She said the decision is hard as it will not look like regular education. She mentioned mental health, the feeling of loss, and whether younger students would be able to sit at their desks for 6 hours. She said 6-feet is not the magic number and it is not a one-size fits all. She spoke of the different types of transmissions (i.e., student to student, student to teacher), students at 3-feet and 6-feet for adults.

Mr. Harris spoke about the difficulty finding empty space for counseling. He mentioned sometimes walking the hallways at 6-feet to have confidential conversations. He said if we don't have the spaces, we can't provide the services the kids need. Ms. OConnor said it is interesting to hear since HS has the most space.

Mr. Giantis said he is a data person but a believer in what our peer communities are doing that is working. He said the concerns are valid on both sides. He mentioned that St. Mary's has a video of kids working side by side in masks, and the many examples of where it is working. He agrees with Ms. Wright that we go in stages working with smaller grades first.

Ms. OConnor said that we are referencing the idea of 3- or 6- feet but it may be 5.5- feet based on the space. She stated that the re-evaluation of space has to happen ASAP with a creative eye. Ms. Angelakis said that they initially looked at 3-, 4.5-, and 6-feet. She said K-1 is the priority, if busing is needed they will look at utilizing grant funding.

Ms. Marshall reiterated the point that we can go to between 3- and 6-feet. She said this gives the option to use 3-feet if possible but doesn't mandate 3-feet, or that anything is happening tomorrow. She said it seems wise to vote now for some type of guidance.

Ms. Bucklin asked if they were envisioning a full day with lunch or a half day with no lunch. Ms. OConnor said that that would be an operational decision. Ms. OConnor said we need to get kids back in a phased approach and provide more time on learning.

Mr. Delano mentioned transitional meetings for new kids in the buildings. Ms. Raymond said if they vote for 3- to- 6- feet that they can change what can be done at the younger level right away. She said it gives more opportunities to be closer and do shared activities such as students reading a book together. Ms. Raymond said it does not mean more kids right away but allowing sharing of social experiences for the kids there now. She said this could be test time and asked if this was a better way to start.

Ms. Mulcahy asked Dr. D'Souza for an opinion on the infection risk at 3-feet. Dr. D'Souza said that we should see how far we can stay distanced and still bring kids in. She said we need a thoughtful phased approach, and that teachers should at least be receiving their first vaccine before this occurs. Ms. Mulcahy mentioned that school decisions have an impact on the community. Ms. OConnor suggested trying to team up with other towns for vaccinations.

Ms. Angelakis said if the vote occurs now, we have permission to start the PreK-1 at 3-feet for the kids in school. Ms. Raymond asked about the medical perspective. Ms. Bucklin said the closer the kids get the more teacher interaction that occurs with the younger kids. Dr. D'Souza said a huge piece is the teacher vaccination. She mentioned that the Wakefield teacher union partnered with multiple districts to get vaccinated in a community effort. Ms. OConnor noted that Ms. Hartmann was vaccinated because she worked at a vaccination center. Ms. Marshall said teachers should not have to do community service to get vaccinated. Mr. Delano brought up his letter to Secretary Sudders. Ms. Mulcahy has brought teacher vaccinations to the town on several occasions. She was told that if they use a vendor company to get teachers vaccinated, that there will be fewer vaccines released for the town.

Ms. Wright loves Ms. Raymond's idea of letting the kids socialize at 3-feet as it is kind of happening organically anyway. She would like data to be gathered on it and to think about how to get kids back for a longer period of time.

Ms. Bucklin said she wants parents to understand there is no staffing. Ms. OConnor mentioned a volunteer workforce to cover lunch. Ms. Shea said there are space issues, and that if teachers stay for the afternoon, they are not available to teach Remote students. Ms. Wright said it is an operational domino effect that one problem can't be fixed until the next one.

Ms. Mulcahy mentioned that 6-feet or greater distance must be maintained during snack and lunchtime. Ms. Angelakis mentioned the good weather coming and tents going back up soon.

Ms. Marshall made a motion to amend policy EBC-S to change the wording of social distancing from 6-feet social distancing to now read 3- to- 6-foot social distancing.

Ms. OConnor said this allows the superintendent and her team to move forward with a plan. Ms. Wright said it also goes to Ms. Raymond points out that they can start current students at 3-feet. Ms. Angelakis said loosening the requirement lets them start plans tomorrow. Ms. Wright said they are still requiring adults to have adults 6-feet apart.

Mr. Giantis asked if we need to add “radius” for clarity. Ms. Marshall said it did not have radius wording previously. Ms. Mulcahy suggested using the language from DESE. Ms. Bucklin asked about pool testing. Ms. Angelakis said we will not be using ESSER for pool testing but will be talking about BinaxNOW testing at the next meeting. Ms. Wright said that the DESE language does not make sense here. Mr. Giantis agreed.

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Delano to accept the amendment to policy EBC-S & seconded by Ms. Wright.

Vote on Motion: The motion passed 5 to 0 via roll call vote.

Superintendent’s Report: Ms. Angelakis’ report will be posted on the Superintendent’s Page under the SPS web page.

SY21-22 School Calendar/Early Release (1st read): Ms. Angelakis stated that the first day of school is 8/31 for everyone but Kindergarten (9/9). She pointed out that students would be off school from 9/3 until Thursday 9/9 due to holidays (Labor Day, Rosh Hashanah). Ms. Angelakis stated that this was not the ideal way to start off the year.

Ms. Wright asked if Professional Development (PD) could be done at the beginning (8/30-9/2) and if students could start school on the 9th. Ms. Angelakis stated that PD days are in the contract and many people celebrate the holidays.

Ms. OConnor expressed concern that some parents may not have their students attend the first few days of school. Ms. Marshall asked about starting later and making up the time. Ms. Angelakis said they are bound by the contract which can’t change without bargaining.

Ms. OConnor mentioned having the whole district start on the 9th. Ms. Angelakis mentioned the contract and timing of Labor Day. Ms. OConnor inquired about checking if the union would be open to it. Ms. Raymond said Kindergarten needs three days of screening. Ms. Angelakis said the end date was already late and they can’t go into July.

Ms. OConnor asked we put a note on the calendar regarding the challenging start.

Ms. Angelakis walked through each month. Ms. OConnor asked about the Jewish holidays. Ms. Angelakis stated they have not been shortened. She said that several years ago she met with the town Rabbis. She said it was a great conversation about the significance of the holidays. They advocated to keep the time off and even have more holidays in the school calendar.

Director of Finance:

Town meeting warrant discussion: Ms. Sybert discussed Warrant Article #3 which will be presented at a special town meeting on Monday. The article is requesting an increase in funding for LBA feasibility studies (i.e., Geotech, Geo environment, traffic improvement/studies) that were not initially included in the LBA study costs.

Ms. Sybert said it is important to note that the OPM has done a fantastic job pushing the MSBA for funding. She said it is unprecedented but the MSBA has agreed to reimburse a limited amount for the Schematic Design phase study. They are finalizing the portion that is reimbursable and the rate.

Ms. Sybert said Fincomm is aware of the warrant article. They are recommending the town support it.

Ms. Marshall asked who will speak and respond to questions at the town meeting. Ms. Wright said it may be Catie Porter-Roberts. Ms. Wright said that the price with LBA had been reduced as it was thought that the 2014 site study could be used and they had talked about the town picking up some of the traffic investigation costs. She said that they are asking the town to front money until the MSBA reimburses them.

Consent Agenda: Ms. OConnor read the purpose of the consent agenda and the items on the agenda.

- A. Regular Session Minutes-February 10th, 2021
- B. Warrant 21-31 & 21-33

Motion: It was moved by Mr. Delano to accept the consent agenda & seconded by Ms. Wright.

Vote on Motion: The motion passed 5 to 0 via roll call vote.

Mr. Delano announced that he would not be running for re-election. He thanked voters, his wife Candace, his family, the board, and Mike Jalbert (campaign manager) for their support during his nine-year tenure. He stated that it has been a privilege to serve and his decisions were based on the best interest of the children. He will be donating the remaining balance in his campaign fund to the district in memory of Robert Jalbert who perished on 9/11.

Ms. OConnor thanked Mr. Delano for his service. She said he would be dearly missed on the board.

Next meeting to be held on March 10th, 2021

Adjournment

Motion: At 11:14 p.m. It was moved by Mr. Delano to accept the motion to adjourn & seconded by Ms. Wright

Vote on Motion: The motion passed 5 to 0 via roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,







Pamela R.H. Angelakis, M.A., M.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools
/dmm

Date: March 11, 2021

Supporting documentation:

 [SPS Mid-Year Data](#) 



 [Elementary Room Capacity](#) 



 [Classroom Spacing July 2020.pdf](#) 

 [2-22-21 Health Department Statement to the School Committee.pdf](#) 

 [Final Parent Letter 2-23-21 For Reducing 6 feet Requirement.pdf](#) 


 [21-22 School Calendar & Legend Rev 3 - DRAFT - 24-Feb-2021.pdf](#) 

 [February 10th, 2021 Regular Session Meeting Minutes Final](#) 

 [Distancing Survey Results](#) 

 [Agenda February 24, 2021, School Committee Meeting](#) 

 [Social Distancing School Committee Presentation.pdf](#) 

 [Parent Letter re reducing 6 feet requirement \(2\).pdf](#) 