

MINUTES

Hoosac Valley Regional School Committee
School Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 28, 2021 - 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

REMOTE: Regina Hill, Adam Emerson, Mike Mucci, Nannette Reid, Bethany DeMarco , Mike Henault

Absent:

OTHERS: Superintendent Aaron Dean, Members of the Community

Call to Order: Chairman Mike Mucci called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Chairman Mike Mucci stated that tonight's meeting is an emergency meeting that was influenced by concerns raised by community members. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss our current policies. As part of our discussion we will open up to public comment or questions. This is not a direct question and answer. It is an opportunity for the community to express their opinions/concerns.

Public Comment or Question: Various members read statements and voiced their concerns about not being in person and the toll it is taking on the kids and families. One parent stated that she has four children in the district ranging from grades 1 through grade 12. She is a household with two working parents that are trying to keep their jobs and trying to educate her kids. Other parents echoed that they want what's best for our kids and we need to get them back in person. We have seen changes in our kids, understand that we are trying to keep everyone safe but we need to get these kids back into school. Parents expressed concern about the MOA in place and asking the School Committee to reevaluate that. One parent stated that he spoke with both the Superintendent and Union President who both expressed they prefer in person learning. If the School Committee was onboard, then they should change the MOA with the union. Could a different metric be used to determine if it was safe to be in school. Even when the town code level is red, people can still go to stores, go out to eat and do other activities, but we can't go to school. The governor said it's time to get our kids back in school, it's the safest place for them to be. Discussed the importance of getting our kids back into sports as well. The kids need these outlets.

Communications: Athletics/In Person Learning:

Mike Mucci wants to open up to the S.C. members to address what we heard. He asked Superintendent Dean what his intentions are based on the data we just received. Aaron reported that Adams remained in the red. When we closed 2 days before Christmas break, there was a lot of spread and it was impacting the school and staff. The spike we are just coming off of was pretty significant. We didn't feel it was safe to keep things going. Adams remained in red for 4 weeks and 2 weeks for Cheshire. The extra week we just added to go remote was to make sure we were over the spike. We are heading in the right direction. It does pain me to hear all the struggles people were talking about tonight. The plan moving forward is we are going to take a look at the numbers but we can move to phase 2 which will bring back, pre-k, kindergarten, special education programs and if we are able to bring back these close contact cohorts, athletic practices can start tomorrow. I am willing to go as far as we can go based on our MOA. As the vaccine comes out we are hopeful to open up more grades.

Nannette Reid stated that she came on to the School Committee because she cares about children and wants to make a difference. It is our responsibility to take some action and work on getting our students back in the classroom. We need to renegotiate the MOA based on school numbers and not the community. I feel we can get the kids back into the classroom and do it safely.

Bethany Marco stated that there has been misconceptions on how we make our decisions and this outlet is a great way to break those misconceptions. We are held with what the state has for guidelines. We want our kids back, but it has to be in a safe way. We are listening to everyone, but we are held to what we have to follow for the guidelines. Thanked the community members for being very respectful tonight.

Mike Henault: as an educator and a father of 2 kids in the district, feel strongly that we need to get back into classrooms as soon as it is safe to do that. The current metrics we are using were negotiated in good faith. Everybody did the best we could with what we have. We all know that students learn better in person and remote setting is less than ideal. We need to have options for families and students who chose not to attend that they still get an education as well.

Aaron stated that as we look long term, the MOA is not going to be the biggest factor, right now what we are looking at is transportation, we can only transport so many students, we need the state to lift the transportation guidelines to get the kids in school. We can't get everyone back with the 6 feet guidelines that are still in place. The hybrid was able to happen on a feasibility study to maintain the 6 feet. There was a lot of work done at the beginning of this to come to where we are at based on the guidelines we must adhere to.

Adam Emerson thanked the families for being here and being involved. Happy that parents are getting engaged. We might have differing thoughts, but we are talking about it. We have heard a lot of thoughts, what are our next steps? What can we do tonight, in the coming weeks, how do we proceed from this point forward? Aaron reported we are moving to phase 2 to get as many students in the door as we can and tying athletics to phase 2 to the piece. If we had to go fully remote, we would need to shut down. Beyond that, we have to do some planning on how to expand this. This will require conversations with the union. I work at the will of the committee.

Adam Emerson: where does the discretion lie going to phase 2, is that you just have the authority to do? Aaron: under the current guidelines that is what I have the authority to do. Mike Henault: would like to have a metric that is data driven that is a clear move from phases and to give Aaron that discretion. Aaron's hope that we are going in the right direction, when the communities reach that yellow marker, we can go back to hybrid. Mike asked if we open up for athletics that we open it all up. Kind. special ed. and athletics is that the group you are looking at? Yes, special ed is our closest contact, same as athletics and that some of the numbers are going in the direction we hoped for. He would like the committee's voice on this if they are comfortable with that approach. Mike Mucci: very involved with sports, actually in favor with what Aaron is proposing to go to phase 2. What they have done and the precautions they put in place, feel like they provided an opportunity for the cohorts for a safe environment.

Morgan Shafer, Union Vice President: in terms of MOA we have one of the more progressive ones, tying athletics into phase 2, is opening a can of worms. We are in school more than others, we just need to give it a chance. It's an area with close contact and we just need to give it some time. We will get there but we need to do it safely.

Regina Hill: Thanks to the families that spoke tonight, great to hear from your side and exactly what you are going through. The district empathizes with what you are going through with your children both mental health and academics. Aaron's thoughts tonight would be a starting point for us to look at. Feel very strongly that athletics along with academics is very important to students for a number of reasons. We do have a good coaching staff and they can keep it safe and would be very helpful for the kids mental health. We can move the bar a little bit and open some of the in person next week, making headway doing some of the sports and maybe move forward with the union to discuss some of the teachers' concerns and what the state requirements are may get us in the right direction.

Mike Henault: balancing the need for athletics and as a former A.D. I too miss sports. Springfield public schools who opened for basketball and hockey have mandatory testing, is that something we can do? A little leary about changing our phases right now. Aaron: there are some places that found a way to implement testing, we are not there yet. In terms of planning, our A.D. did a lot around safety protocols. I too struggle and am looking at the committee for some direction.

Molly Meczywork, co-athletic director, reported to the families and school committee members what safety protocols they are putting in place regarding the opening of sports (example: no jump balls, wearing of masks, wiping down of balls, no parents/spectators in attendance).

MOTION: On Motion of Mike Henault and second by Nannette Reid:

VOTED: that the district start with phase 2 beginning on Monday, February 1, 2021 with phases implemented as determined by the previous plan and give the Superintendent the authority to revert back to remote as he deems necessary. Academics only, not tying in athletics. A roll call vote was taken. The vote was unanimous

The Committee had discussions back and forth regarding athletics.

MOTION: On Motion of Regina Hill and second by Bethany DeMarco:

VOTED: move forward with athletics, in phase 2, limiting it to students and paid coaches to follow the safety protocol set up by the school, state and MIAA. A roll call vote was taken. The vote was unanimous.

Adam Emerson talked about expanding all extracurricular activities? Aaron reported that one hurdle we have right now, like band, can't even play their instruments in the same room according to the state guidelines. We can take a look at other extracurricular activities that we can get in. Principal Byrd stated that everything has been remote, the essence of equity, it would be great to have those in person, especially the tutoring center. Aaron stated that this is a logical step we can take a look at.

Aaron stated that the next regularly scheduled S.C. meeting is February 8th. If Adams is still in the red on February 4th, we will continue remote learning from the 8th - 12th. Mike Mucci stated that if we continue hybrid from the 8th - 12th that will lead into February break and we will need to think outside the box in terms of how we deliver better instruction in the remote model. Aaron stated that it will require families to do their part over February break to not add to the spread so we can return to hybrid following the break. In terms of thinking outside the box, Mike Mucci asked that we look into altering the Wednesday schedule to include alternating in person time by cohort on Wednesday - Week 1 cohort A attends in person, week 2 cohort B attends in person in order for the expansion of meaningful learning tied to content. Aaron noted that all of this requires negotiations with the union and suggests the committee give him the direction to open negotiations.

MOTION: On Motion of Bethany DeMarco and second by Nannette Reid:

VOTED: to have Superintendent Dean open negotiations with the union regarding increased learning time. A roll call vote was taken. The vote was 5-0-1.

MOTION: On Motion of Adam Emerson and second by Regina Hill:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 pm. A roll call vote was taken. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Dean, Superintendent

Lisa Bresett, Recording Secretary

Place: Per Governor Baker's order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting G.L. c. 30a, Sec. 20, the public will not be allowed to physically access this School Committee Meeting. Members of the public can access this meeting via live stream by calling +1-408-650-3123 ; Access Code: 681-412-093 or <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/681412093>