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MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Plymouth Public Schools is to challenge, inspire, and prepare all students for success in an ever-changing and complex world.

PLYMOUTH BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING VIRTUAL MEETING – AUDIO ONLY WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2020

7:00 P.M.

MINUTES

Present: Mr. Seaman, Mrs. Kulesa, Mrs. Lucian, Mr. Showers, Mrs. Johnson, Mr. Foote, Mrs. Elsaghir, Mrs. Kremmel and Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani

Others Present: Dr. Semmel, Superintendent, Mr. Hendrickson, Business Manager, Mrs. Parsons, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Mrs. Aronheim, Director of Pupil Personnel and Special Education Services and Mr. Trudeau, Director of Technology

1. **Call to Order & Pledge to the Flag**

Mr. Seaman called the Virtual Meeting of the Board of Education on April 8, 2020 to order at 7:02 p.m. The group joined in the Pledge to the Flag.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda**

MOTION: To entertain a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani, second Mrs. Kremmel, any discussion, all in favor, any opposed, motion carries.

3. **Approval of Minutes**

MOTION: To entertain a motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 11, 2020.

AMENDMENT: Mrs. Johnson – Correction with respect to DISCUSSION: We experienced a transition with one of her sons with an IEP

MOTION: to entertain a motion to accept the previous minutes as amend. Motion Mrs. Johnson, second Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani, all in favor, opposed, motion passes.

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4. Superintendent's Update

Shout Outs

(a) Leadership Team – To all of our administrators and instructional coaches for conventionalizing our distances learning and approach, determining the training needs with staff and families and beginning teaching and learning all in one week. Mrs. Parsons has been a critical member of the team as she helped to navigate the team.

(b) Special Education Department under the direction of Lindsay Aronheim for making sure that all of our students with IEP's and 504's are receiving best efforts to ensure that special needs are being met. This also includes the support of our paraprofessionals who are available to keep students on track.

(c) Technology Department under the direction of Rich Trudeau for identifying the correct tools for teachers and families to use, training for all of the teachers, working with all of the technical questions that arose from staff, parents and students to make things work as they should. His team is still accepting and deploying chromebooks to families, which is done through Harry S. Fisher Elementary School when they are malfunctioning. This is done by appointment. Mr. Trudeau's team has been doing a great job.

(d) Cafeteria Staff under the direction of Alicia DaPonte – A big thank you to her for getting the breakfast and lunch program up and running immediately. Alicia and her team are at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School every day serving hundreds of meals to very thankful parents and students.

(e) The Custodial Staff and Maintenance Team under the direction of Jim Mazon were cleaning the buildings before school was closed and also cleaned the buildings from top to bottom when schools were closed. They are now making sure we have access to the buildings when need. Jim is driving back and forth to Watertown weekly to pick up packages from UPS and FEDEX,

(f) All of Central Office and Building Secretarial Staff – Thank you for all of your hard work. Making sure bills are accurate and paid, that payroll is continuing and is processed and to ensure that hundreds of details are completed to ensure the system continues to function efficiently.

(g) Students and Families who have been hit hard due to the Pandemic who have had to make many adjustments and additional adjustments may likely need to be made in the coming months. Proud of students for engaging with their schoolwork, learning to work from home. Special thanks to parents, as many of them, especially those working with our younger students, who need to support their children and ~~they~~ as they are working from home. They are doing an excellent job

(h) Teachers – Our teachers have had the biggest role of all. They have had to learn a whole new way of teaching students, to record lessons, upload them to U-Tube Channels, hold office hours with students, answer many emails from parents and students, and needed to figure out the best way to get new learning to students.

To conclude Superintendent's Update – the Board of Education has a lot to be proud of. This is only the tip of the iceberg about what has been accomplished over the very short period of time. The entire staff has stepped up to this challenge and are doing their very best to teach out students during this very anxious time and all while managing their own home lives.

In terms of the rest of the year, we have not heard yet from the Commissioner of Education or the Governor whether or not school closure is extended. There is a scheduled conference call tomorrow, April 9, between the Commissioner of Education and all of the Superintendents. It is expected that additional information will be received at that time, including information on school closure. Per our approved 2019 – 2020 calendar, we are going to observe April break. We believe this will be good for our families and staff due to the amount of stress that has occurred.

In speaking with Jim Kilduff, Board of Finance Chair on April 8 regarding the Board of Education Budget Presentation of the Plymouth Board of Finance, he indicated the Board of Finance is ready to begin Budget Presentations. The Board of Education will present its Budget on April 23 at 7 p.m. It will be a Zoom Meeting similar to this evening's meeting. More information will be forthcoming. Dr. Semmel indicated he would do the presentation from his workstation. There will be a PowerPoint Presentation lasting approximately 10 minutes. Mr. Hendrickson and the team will be available to answer any questions from the Board of Finance.

All members of the Board of Education are invited to attend the presentation along with parents.

IMPORTANT: The last day of school is Friday, June 12, 2020. Graduation will be dependent upon school closures. So tentative graduation date is Friday, June 12, 2020. However, this will need further discussion.

5. **Student Representatives**

* Taylor Greenwood – The student representatives will be discussing the pros and cons with respect to distance learning.

Taylor genuinely surprised how seamless the process has been. It was not a rocky transition from her perspective. It was nice to see the teachers were not struggling which made her feel more comfortable working from home. One of the biggest benefits is that she does not have to can wake up not at 6 a.m. Schoolwork is so much easier when it is not structured into a school day. She is able to go to work without worrying that when she got back home she would need to do more homework. She now has time for hobbies, which has not been possible since beginning high school. However, it is much more difficult to remain motivated when you are not sitting at a school desk.

* Julia Zaniewski – She does not see many issues with distance learning. It is actually going a lot better than she expected it would in regards to students actually participating and doing their work. She loves the aspect of how she is able to do her work at her own pace. This works well with her work schedule.

* Tyler Mendela – More manageable. Gets one activity per day per class. He is able to wake up at 8:30 a.m., do some schoolwork, and then have lunch with his mother and dog. He then does the remainder of his schoolwork. Sometimes he will go into work or he may have the rest of the day to do what he wants, helping his grandmother make masks or go out and have fun.

However, one comment Tyler did have was that the students could not meet live for Spanish and Math classes. That is definitely a learning barrier in his and some of his peers' opinions because learning a second language is difficult enough and when you are giving it through kind of a one sided interaction it makes it a little more difficult.

Question: Mr. Seaman – Why can't we do this with Spanish and Math classes?

Response – Dr. Semmel- Tyler was there a reason given why? Part of the reason Walt is that what he is looking for, what he is suggesting, and Tyler correct me if I am wrong, is that you are looking for the entire class to meet at the exact same time?

Response – Tyler Mendela – Right

Response – Dr. Semmel –That can definitely be challenging when you do a live synchronous, like tonight, but I definitely agree with Tyler, a course like Spanish, can benefit from having that even if it is 5 students or 10 students. However, Tyler, you may find that having 20 plus students talking at the same time could be very challenging if you did it that way.

Response – Tyler Mendela – We have a synchronous in my AP History Class. It is a very small class; however, it is definitely helping students retain the information more. The first weeks of distance learning, students were able to have a synchronous class and it was a lot easier to be able to understand and talk with peers and practice pronunciation with the Spanish teacher.

Comment – Mrs. Parsons – One reason it was chosen not to go synchronous (everyone being live at the same time) has a lot to do with equity. We have many students accessing the classes when they can, so going live makes it a lot more difficult for that to happen. Whereas, with the asynchronous, teachers are recording shorter “inaudible” in the classroom and are available to answer questions and support during office hours. Office hours are when students are able to come in live and work with teachers. Feedback – Students prefer asynchronous v. synchronous. However, there are some places where it is beneficial and there is the option to occasionally go synchronous learning at the middle and high schools. We are looking at trying a trial of SANSSPACE, a language lab software.

6. **Public Comment** (limited to 3-minutes per speaker)

None

7. **New Business**

(1) Proposed 2021 - 2022 – School Year Calendar

MOTION: To entertain a motion to approve the 2021 – 2022 School Year Calendar as presented. Motion Mr. Foote, second Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani, any discussion, all in favor, any opposed, any abstentions, motion passes.

8. **Board Member/Committee Reports**

A. Finance/Operations – Dr. Semmel, Superintendent & Mr. Hendrickson, Business Manager

(a) Review of Accounts by Facilities Report for the month of March 2020

Through March, the Board has spent or encumbered 17.3 million of its budget or 70.7%. Last year at this time, we had spent 16.8 million or 69.7%. We have roughly spent 1% more this year. This is primarily due to payment of the health insurance a month ahead.

Other Key Items:

We are still awaiting the \$94,000 transfer from the Town from our Sinking Fund to take care of the Plymouth Center School Roof Project. Magnet School Transportation continues to show a deficit because we are waiting for the second half of the grant, which is due in May. In March, we paid half of our regular transportation invoice because we had 10 days of in session school of the scheduled 21 days. The \$85,000 transfer was received from the Town for their portion of technology assistants. That is why the month to date expended amount shows a credit. The sum of these items pretty much accounts for that 1% difference between March of this year and last year.

In this time of the COVID-19 challenge, it should be pointed we continue to pay all of our salaries and benefits, additionally the heat and electricity to all buildings is being supplied, although the expense is somewhat less than normal. The Governor had an Executive Order 7R, which asks all districts to continue to pay vendors, especially highlighted were bus companies. There were some various continuing discussions on how much of that expense we should be responsible for. We are having discussions amount our peers, Thomaston and Wolcott because we have a similar contract with All-Star. That leaves me with 10% of the budget, which is discretionary, which may be slightly reduced, but I expect that is school is back in session that will rebound.

Late last week, a conference call took place with Ms. Demsey, Chief Financial Officer of the Department of Education and approximately 75 business managers. Some key points of that conference call. Some individuals may think schools are saving a ton of money. However, 80% of a school's expenses are people related. Added to that the obligation from the Governor's Executive Order plus any extraordinary expenses in this trying time could make it tight for a district. It was suggested that districts err on the conservative side. All grants, including ECR and ECS would be paid on time and in full. Referencing the Governor's Executive Order that was previously mentioned, a district is only obligated by executive order to pay only for labor and benefits. However, we are entitled to documentation on that and any other portion of a carrier's expense is negotiable. Discussion on IDEA Grant, which is in Special Education. There is an annual task called the Maintenance of Effort of Compliance. This year that task may be waived. That waiver needs to come from the Secretary of Education in Washington. CAFE, CAPSS and CASBO are pursuing this.

Question – Mrs. Johnson – When is CAFE, CAPSS going to be notified from the Secretary about IDEA?

Response – Mr. Hendrickson – I do not know. We just had the conference all last Thursday. I have almost a daily call with my CASBO colleges to be updated on what is happening.

Question – Mrs. Johnson - Can you update us if you hear from them about it?

Response – Mr. Hendrickson – Sure

The Accounts-by-Facilities report will be forwarded to the Town of Plymouth Board of Finance.

(b) Possible Transfers - None

(c) Roof Project at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School – Update

Just yesterday, we received the proposal back. It is being reviewed by Dr. Semmel and Mr. Hendrickson. It is a very aggressive bid and appears to be well under what was presented to the Mayor, Chair of the Board of Finance, the Superintendent and Mr. Hendrickson. However, we still need the expense related to removing and then replacing the solar panels on the roof. The contractor that submitted the bid was the same contractor that did the Plymouth Center Roof.

(d) Track Project at Terryville High School – Update

Resurfacing of the track. Previously, two bids were received. The low bid was \$123,455, which would be good for ten years. However, we went out and received a third bid and that amount was roughly half of the previous amount, which is approximately \$61,268.00. However, the guarantee to redo the track would be cut from 10 years to 5 years. In talking with Jim Mazon, we think this would be the better bid. The contractor is in Glastonbury and has done other tracks in this area.

(e) Personnel Report – Dr. Semmel

Dr. Semmel reviewed the Personnel Report with the Board Members with indicating there were very limited staff changes.

9. **Public Comment** (limited to 3-minutes per speaker)

None

10. **Board Liaisons to Schools**

Mr. Seaman -- Harry S. Fisher Elementary School

The PTA President is looking into whether or not the company involved with the sock fundraiser will allow the fundraiser be held on line. Yearbooks are available for purchase. The cost is \$15.00.

Mr. Elsaghir -- Plymouth Center School

No Report

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani -- Eli Terry Jr. Middle School

Comedy Show has been postponed until the fall. The planning for the 8th grade moving forward ceremony is currently on hold. Future meetings of the PTA are frozen.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani -- Booster Club

Focusing on scholarships. Since there is not going to be a Sports Award Night the Booster Club is anticipating giving out more money than what was budgeted for scholarships, which is a positive thing. It is currently undecided whether or not the Booster Club will be doing pins, letters and a mailing. They will know more in another month or so when there is a decision about school.

Mrs. Kulesa -- Terryville High School

No Report

Mr. Foote -- SEPTA

No Report

Mrs. Kremmel -- CABA

No Report other than CABA staff is working from home

Mrs. Johnson -- EdAdvance

Work force working from home is between 33% - 50%. They are still servicing 80 Special Education Programs at this time, still serving almost 500 meals per day in Winsted and Torrington, still working with group homes, adult education on line services, and much remote learning but basically everything is at home but they are still there.

Mr. Showers -- District Safety Committee

No Report – Next schedule meeting is on May 13, 2020, hopefully.

11. **Board Comments**

Mr. Showers – Dr. Semmel, is the Tri-Board Meeting still going to take place?

Dr. Semmel – He believes it will. He thinks Mr. Kilduff's idea is to do the presentations of the Budget. However, Dr. Semmel questions if they are going to try to do a Public Hearing. He is guessing they are going to handle everything as they normally have in the past.

Mr. Foote – Hoping after all is said and done we do something for the students, especially the seniors.

Mrs. Candrea-Floresciani – Posting on Facebook a positive response. Her children were excited over the meals. Great Program. Really good food.

On-line learning. She has children in the elementary, middle and high school. Her younger child was excited to receive a chromebook. Her high schooler loves the ability to sleep in and take his/her time doing and choosing which assignments to do first.

Mr. Elsaghir – Comment – Very proud of how the Superintendent has handled this matter. He feels the Superintendent made decisions based on what he actually thought the situation called for. Thank you Marty.

Mr. Seaman – Proud of the Teachers, Paras, Custodians, Lunch Personnel, IT Department, students and everyone who has arose to the occasion to make this difficult time easier. Teachers and students are teaching and learning out of their comfort zone. Custodians who are cleaning and disinfecting our schools. Maintenance who ensure that the buildings are in tiptop shape. Lunch staff who have served countless meal to those who need them,

despite all of this. IT Department for making virtual learning and this meeting possible. Without them, none of this would ever happen. Don't know what we would have done. Parents who never thought they would be teachers. Any to everyone, you have a strong leadership. We are all behind all of you. Your diligence is not going unnoticed. Keep up the good work and let's all look forward to getting back to some sense of normalcy.

12. **Next Board Meeting** –The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Education is scheduled for Wednesday May 13, 2020 at 7 p.m. in the cafeteria at Terryville High School.
13. **Adjournment**

MOTION: To entertain a motion to adjourn at 7:42 p.m. Motion Mr. Showers, second Mr. Foote, all in favor, motion passes.

Patricia Piskorski
Recording Secretary
Plymouth Board of Education