

MATTAPOISETT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MATTAPOISETT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEET
August 6, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.
MEETING HELD REMOTELY THROUGH ZOOM
Mattapoisett, MA 02738

Members Present: James Muse, Carole Clifford, Shannon Finning, Carly Lavin and Karin Barrows.

Members Absent: NONE

Others Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Diana Russo, Administrative Asst. to the Supt, Rosemary Bowman, Principal, Mattapoisett Public Schools, Kevin Tavares, Associate Principal, Mattapoisett Public Schools, Member of the Leadership Team, teachers, staff, parents and members of press.

Meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. by Chairperson Muse. Mr. Muse welcomed Ms. Carly Lavin, the new school committee member. Mr. Muse thanked Mr. Nelson and everyone involved during this very unprecedented time. He thanked all the staff, administrators, parents, everyone involved in the Reopening Task Force teams for all their hard work. Mr. Muse also reminded everyone attending the meeting that these plans are very fluid and subject to change.

V. General

A. Approval of 20-21 Reopening Schools Plan

The Superintendent thanked all tri-town stakeholders for their support and patience throughout these unprecedented times and expressed his gratitude to everyone who has been working on the reopening plans. He expressed that it is an honor for him to work in towns that are so involved in their school community. Mr. Nelson asked that Chairperson Muse allow the other Building Principals to also be part of the presentation. Chairperson Muse allowed the principals to participate.

Superintendent Nelson, Principal Bowman, Principal Devoll and Principal Coellner presented the draft plan to the school committee (please see attached). The Superintendent's recommendation is that the school committee approve a hybrid plan to start the 2020-2021 school year. The superintendent reminded the school committee that this plan is very fluid and could change at any time. The superintendent also mentioned that guidance has come from DESE requiring districts to have 10 training days for staff before students start the school year, therefore Mr. Nelson explained that the school calendar would be reviewed for those changes at a Joint School Committee Meeting on August 11th.

Chairperson Muse thanked Mr. Nelson and the administrative team for the presentations and asked if any school committee members had any questions or feedback.

Dr. Finning made the following statement:

I want to preface my remarks by acknowledging and expressing my gratitude to the many volunteers as well as teachers, staff, administrators and school committee members who worked on this plan. I fully understand and appreciate the unique challenges you faced in trying to navigate so many unknown and known variables. I also want to recognize that individual student's families and employees must make the best and most informed decision based on their own personal risk factors and I support them doing so.

I appreciate that our superintendent must provide a fully remote/online option to DESE for review. While I have some questions and concerns about the online and hybrid plans I want to begin by addressing what I believe is unconscionable, the failure to detail a fully in person learning plan for any of the schools in our district, which is one of the three requirements of DESE - to approve this plan as presented would be a failure on our part to hold our district accountable for submitting the very plans required by the state.

As someone who likes to utilize a data informed approach to decision making, the positivity rate for Mattapoisett, according to the MA Department of Health and reported last night by the Boston Globe is 0.67. – Zero point six seven. If you recall, when this pandemic first ravaged our state, the Governor introduced a target of a positivity rate of less than 5.0% and as a state we are currently just over 2% after several weeks under 2%. This data point is significant because the best decisions are local – even in Boston Public Schools, decisions about learning modality are not being made across the board – rather by administrators in each of the schools within the district.

For further consideration, there have been 42 confirmed cases of Coronavirus in Mattapoisett this year. We have had 1046 people tested year to date, 145 people tested in the last 2 weeks and 1 positive test in the last 2 weeks for a positivity rate of 0.67.

*If you couple our positivity rate with the feedback from students and building staff at Center and OHS, 69.3% of Center families and 72.4% of OHS families and 69% of Center staff and 23% of OHS staff preferred in person delivery. ****this data is clearly people who PREFERRED FULLY IN PERSON INSTRUCTION (not in person or hybrid as was stated by the superintendent and another committee member during this meeting.***

*For the committee to simply dismiss the possibility of a fully in person model with the statement and I quote: “based on our feasibility study of school buildings and current transportation guidance provided by DESE we do not believe a full in-person return to school is possible based on all available data points” is unacceptable. **In fact, to do so would be shirking our responsibility to ensure compliance with state and federal mandates.** What are the data points regarding the building concerns and, for transportation? DESE indicated that 32 students could safely learn in a 750 square foot room and most of our classrooms are much larger than 750 square feet. Why is this not addressed in the report? If the primary concerns are about transportation why not commit to exploring a feasibility study with families about family driving/carpooling - led and coordinated by families, not the district?*

***Why not consider the population of students K-3 as in need of in-person support as vulnerable populations based on the challenges associated with successful engagement in online learning and social-emotional impacts?** Certainly we recognize their needs differ from students at our junior high and high school and even those as our middle schools yet our plan treats them all the same! Now to the hybrid and remote learning models – has the committee considered the significant socio-economic disparities that will result from this plan? How will you mandate that student’s families oversee student engagement in synchronous online activities through the school day when from my understanding the majority of our students come from families with both parents (when in a dual parent household) work outside of the home? Further, if the hybrid path is taken, families need the opportunity to select their cohort group not be randomly assigned by first initial of their last name – families are scrambling to create pandemic learning pods with others with whom they are comfortable and they must be afforded the opportunity to select into on-site and off-site days in concert with each other.*

We cannot accept this plan as proposed, we must have an in person option included before we approve the plan to do right by our students and our families.

Ms. Barrows asked Mr. Nelson if a COVID-19 contract tracing person has been assigned to handle all student and staff tracing. Mr. Nelson expressed that at this point that responsibility is not a district one, however he knows that there is more guidance coming from the state around that component.

Ms. Barrows asked if the district was doing any maintenance of the HVAC systems that was above and beyond the normal maintenance and will the next service inspection be done in enough time to have any fixed that they might find. Mr. Nelson expressed that the district has used the same contractor for the last couple of years, but that recently a decision was made to use another independent contractor to review the HVAC systems. Mr. Nelson also expressed that conversations around the HVAC system and maintenance would be addressed in negotiations with the Mattapoissett Educators Association.

Ms. Clifford asked a question about the data presented, she was referring to the 79% for in-person, she asked Mr. Nelson if that was for full in person only or both full and hybrid. Mr. Nelson expressed that right now that percentage was for both, but that he will have other data available once a new survey with more detailed question was sent out.

Ms. Clifford asked if the hybrid plan goes really well how hard is it to move to a full in-person learning model. Mr. Nelson expressed that the intent of the district and the state guidance is that we should be able to move from one plan to another plan as needed, depending on state guidelines.

Ms. Clifford asked what was the reason why the district can't go to full day. Mr. Nelson expressed that in order to go full day our desks would be about 3 feet apart, and additionally Mr. Nelson expressed that he doesn't believe the district would have enough staff members to break down classes to smaller class sizes.

Ms. Lavin thanked everyone that put the plan together, she recognizes that there are a lot of moving parts and variables. Ms. Lavin, referred to the remote learning plan at the JHS where they had up to 60 minutes of asynchronous learning and she expressed it would be helpful to have that for the elementary plan. Ms. Lavin also commented and asked if when considering the hybrid plan if any consideration was given to an AA & BB instead of A, B, A , B cohort plan, she expressed that an AA & BB plan would have more consistency for parents and students. Ms. Lavin also asked if the district had the technology it needs to be able to support both learning models. Mr. Nelson expressed that a lot of the planning for the sample day will start now once these plans are approved, he explained that the work will be ongoing. Mr. Nelson also explained that the 10 training days that will hopefully be approved on Tuesday night at the joint school committee meeting will be used to train staff around technology and also how to best support our students and families. Ms. Lavin asked if any thought or consideration was given bumping high school students to fully remote and using the space to facilitate full in person K-3. Mr. Nelson expressed that the idea did come up, however at the end of the day a decision was made to advocate for students at all levels. Ms. Lavin also stated that it would be helpful to parents to know the new traffic patterns for drop off and pick up. Mr. Nelson thanked Ms. Lavin for her feedback.

Mr. Muse thanked all the school committee members for their feedback and expressed that he is very appreciate for all the work that has been put into creating all these scenarios and identify systems and methods to give our students the best education possible. Mr. Muse expressed that the most important considerations is the safety of our students and staff and also stated that COVID 19 is a highly contiguous virus, however he is confident that if we all work together and take the necessary precautions to protect ourselves and one another we will get through this together. Mr. Muse expressed that his hope is to move forward tonight with the plan presented by the administrative team. Mr. Muse asked if there were any teachers or staff members that would like to speak.

Sara Jacobsen, Co-President of the Mattapoissett Educators Association stated that the association has been working with the school committee and the administrative since March. Ms. Jacobsen stated they know the staff is willing to accept to risks in order to do the important work of educating the children of Mattapoissett, however they have to insist that any risk that can be mitigated is, she

believes it's in everyone's best interest to do this. Ms. Jacobsen explained that a hybrid model does not mean that teachers are home, teachers will be at school 5 days a week, however having 10 students in class instead of 20 will give us the opportunity to manage and teach those students more efficiently. She expressed that the risk of failure is lower with fewer students.

Marissa Hughes, Co-President of the Mattapoissett Educators Association expressed that at this point the hybrid model is the best and safest way to bring everyone into the buildings.

At this point during the school committee meeting many parents spoke both in support of full-in person learning models as well as in support of full remote learning models.

Ms. Barrows thanked everyone for their feedback and expressed her appreciation for all the feedback and thanked everyone for the work put in this plan, she expressed that she cares deeply for the children and the Mattapoissett communication and she believes that the plan before us is the best plan for our students and staff at this time. Ms. Barrows supports the plan currently being submitted.

Ms. Barrows made a motion to approve the Reopening Plan as presented by the Superintendent with the understanding that it can change.

MOTION by Ms. Barrows

MOTION Seconded by Ms. Clifford

(Roll Call Vote: Barrows: yes, Clifford: yes, Lavin: yes, Muse: yes, Finning: no) vote passed 4:1

Mr. Nelson explained that the Mattapoissett School Committee has received a Demand to Bargain from the Mattapoissett Educators Association to bargain any working conditions changes and asked who from the school committee would be participating in negotiations. Ms. Clifford and Ms. Lavin volunteered to serve during negotiations.

The school committee discussed the possibility of having future in person or hybrid school committee meetings. Ms. Lavin and Dr. Finning expressed it was important to have in person meetings to show stakeholders that they were comfortable entering and attending meetings in school buildings. Mr. Nelson expressed that a hybrid model would allow school committee and some administrators to participate in person and have public access through zoom, Mr. Nelson expressed he would look into different option with the support of the technology department.

Meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m. by roll call vote

(Roll Call Vote: Barrows: yes, Clifford: yes, Lavin: yes, Muse: yes, Finning: yes)