

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

Monday, September 27, 2021

The meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held in-person, with virtual public access through Zoom Conferencing, on Monday, September 27, 2021. Chairperson Marjorie McBride, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 p.m.

Present: Marjorie McBride, Chairperson; Tara Thibaudeau, Vice-Chair; Sheila Ellsworth, Treasurer; Victor Cabral, Secretary; Nicky Piper. Carly Reich, Sarah Bullard, Erin Schofield, and Karen Cabral; Edward Mara, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent; Diane Sanna, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent; Anthony Ferrucci, Chief Financial Officer; Brenna Toland, Director of Student Support Services; Thomas Wood, Director of Facilities; Rose Muller, Director of Technology; Mary Ann Carroll, Esq., District Solicitor; Lee Ann Beaupre, Human Resources Manager; **Guests:** Ellen Estrella, RN, Deborah DiBiase, MHHS Principal, Wayne Lima, Nicole Lyons, College & Career Coordinator; Diana Campbell, Recording Secretary.

I. **Executive Session**

II. **Open Session**

_____Chairperson McBride called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05p.m.

III. **Opening Business**

_____Chairperson McBride invited all present to join in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

IV. **Public Comment**

Jessica Almeida, Bristol resident and parent of Rockwell students, spoke about her experience with mask compliance for her children. She felt that the masks her children were wearing are compliant with school guidelines, yet were rejected by a teacher, nurse, and principal. She took her concerns to RIDOH and was told to bring an appeal to the School Committee.

Peter Hewett, Bristol resident, stated that he thought the Minutes of meetings should be made public soon after each meeting, before they are approved by the School Committee. He also asked if it was true that the School Committee cannot answer questions during Public Comment. Chairperson McBride answered that questions that concern topics that are not on the Agenda cannot be answered by the School Committee. He also wanted to know if the individual members of if the School Committee supported the inclusion of Critical Race Theory in the curriculum.

Lindsay Jacobs, Bristol resident, wanted to raise awareness of how the District is quarantining children. She encouraged the School Committee to look at how

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other Districts are doing it for ways to minimize the time out of school for students who are being quarantined due to being near someone who tested positive for COVID.

Stephanie Costello, Bristol resident, agreed with Ms. Jacobs. She explained a “halo” approach that is being used by some other Districts to limit the number of students impacted by quarantine guidelines to only those within close proximity to someone who tested positive for COVID.

V. **Consent Agenda**

All items under the Consent Agenda were considered to be routine by the School Committee and will be enacted by one motion except for Item C. Approval of Contract: Director of Student Support Services, which was pulled by Chairperson McBride. Chairperson McBride also noted that there was a name correction on Page 9, paragraph 4. There was no separate discussion of the remaining items

- A. Approval of School Committee Meeting Minutes for:
 - 1. June 28, 2021
 - 2. August 16, 2021
 - 3. September 13, 2021
 - 4. September 21, 2021
- B. Homeschool Requests (30 students)
- C.
- D. Property Disposal List
- E. Approval of Requisitions over \$5000

MOTION: Mr. Cabral made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Ms. Thibaudeau. The Motion passed unanimously.

C. Approval of Contract: Director of Student Support Services

MOTION: Mr. Cabral made a motion to approve the Contract for the Director of Student Support Services with an end date of June 30, 2024. Ms. Piper seconded the motion. The Motion passed unanimously.

Interim Superintendent Mara introduced and extended his congratulations to Brenna Toland as the District’s new Director of Student Support Services.

Ms. Piper commented on an item under E. Approval of Requisitions over \$5000, citing that the item was a forward-thinking proposal from Ms. Toland. She asked Ms. Toland to explain her proposal for purposes of providing the information to the Public.

Ms. Toland explained that her proposal, approved as part of the Consent Agenda, to hire a consultant to review all out of district (OOD) placements to monitor the progress of the students and their readiness to return to in-district classrooms.

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She outlined a 3-year timeline for the project, which could save the District funds, while providing an analysis of OOD placements and IEPs.

VI. Discussion/Possible Action

Chairperson McBride announced that the October 10, 2021 School Committee Workshop will focus on COVID and the District's guidelines and processes for testing, masking, quarantining, etc. to provide the Public with information and an opportunity for discussion.

A. Roger Williams University Memo of Understanding

MOTION: Motion was made by Ms. Thibaudeau to approve the Roger Williams University Memo of Understanding; 2nd by Ms. Cabral.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Ellsworth asked how many students are enrolled in the classes and if the college credits are good for any university or only Roger Williams University (RWU).

Dr DiBiase explained that the program increases student access to higher level Math courses, which provides college credit for Math courses that are also part of the Math/Engineering Pathways of Study. She stated that there are currently 33 students enrolled in the courses and that the credits are transferable to any university that accepts Roger Williams University credits.

Mr. Lima explained that the courses are taught by MHHS staff but the assessment portion of the courses are done by RWU. The College Algebra course for credit is part of MHHS College Algebra course, with the for-credit part taught in one semester and Trigonometry (non-college credit) taught in the 2nd semester. The other Math course is College Precalculus.

Ms. Thibaudeau asked where the funds for the program are coming from in the Budget and if there was additional training needed for teachers. Mr. Lima explained that the students pay the school for the college credits they receive and the District then pays RWU. The contract calls for a minimum payment to RWU of \$5940. The District will cover any difference between what is collected from the students and that amount. Training for staff is included in the contract. The materials and coursework are the same as offered at RWU.

Ms. Piper stated that this is a good deal for students because the cost of college credits for a student attending a college is significantly higher than what is proposed in the MOU.

Chairperson McBride stated her concern that students have to pay anything at all. She feels that the District should be covering these costs similar to the way

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the District pays for the AP tests for students taking AP courses. She also asked about any funds set aside to help students who are not able to pay.

Ms. Bullard stated that she feels that all students benefit from the course regardless of whether they take the college credits or not. She acknowledged that RWU is offering college credits for purchase. She asked if the baseline (20 students) is across both courses or for each course. Principal DiBiase answered that it was for both courses.

Mr. Cabral suggested that the District go back to RWU to ask them to pick up the tab for the students.

Ms. Cabral asked if there were any schools that would not take the transferable credits. Mr. Lima stated that since the courses are very standard, it is unlikely for any other university to accept the credits. Students receive a transcript from RWU.

Ms. Schofield asked when families are told about the fee. Mr. Lima explained that at the end of the year, students are asked if they want college credits.

Ms. Thibaudeau asked where the funds come from should the number of students paying for the credits fall short of the committed payment to RWU. Principal DiBiase stated that it would come out of the High School budget. Mr. Ferrucci agreed that he would work with the HS to determine which funds from other line items would be reallocated to cover the payment. He also noted that there are discretionary funds as the Principal's disposal that can be used.

Ms. Cabral stated that the MOU is not clear that students will have to pay for course credits.

Ms. Piper stated that the agreement is a good opportunity to provide college credits to students at a good price. She doesn't want the Committee to kill this opportunity, though she noted that the MOU could be written to reduce the District's exposure.

Ms. Ellsworth asked if RWU would be willing to set up a reserve for students who cannot afford the fee. She also asked if there was a deadline for signing the MOU. Principal DiBiase stated that students will still take the course, they just wouldn't get the credits if the MOU is not approved.

VOTE: The Motion passed by a vote of 5-4, with Chairperson McBride, Mr. Cabral, Ms. Cabral, and Ms. Ellsworth dissenting.

B. Approval of Bid Awards

Mr. Wood explained that he was seeking approval to accept the Bid of Casey Engineered Maintenance of Cranston, RI, for \$10,457.94 for custodial equipment.

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MOTION: Motion was made by Ms. Ellsworth; 2nd by Ms. Thibaudeau to accept the bid of Casey Engineered Maintenance for \$10,457.94 for custodial equipment; The motion was approved unanimously.

C. Procedure for Approval of Grants/Grant Spending

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion to send all grants to the Budget & Facilities Subcommittee for approval, prior to submission to the full School Committee; 2nd by Mr. Cabral. The motion passed unanimously.

D. ELC Grant

Assistant Superintendent Sanna explained that the ELC (Epidemiology & Laboratory Capacity) grant is a federal grant that provides funds, through RIDOH, to districts to enable schools to expand school-based screening testing and to support COVID-19 response programs. The funds will be used to fund nurse technicians, a courier to bring tests to State labs, physicians to support the process, PPE for the schools, and a PPE manager to manage the distribution of PPE in the District.

Ms. Estrella explained the testing process. BINAX testing, referred to as surveillance testing, used to be done for those that are asymptomatic. Now they will be able to also use it for symptomatic patients. If the test is positive, the person can be administered the VCR test and the person quarantines until the test results are known. This is a tool that will help to keep students in school as much as possible.

Ms. Estrella stated that the District is doing a good job of stopping the spread of the virus within the schools and that infections are coming from outside of the schools. By providing the testing in-house, it will be faster and will return students to school more quickly. Nurse Techs will be trained in the testing process and will be able to provide that support to the School Nurses.

Chairperson McBride reminded the Committee that the October 13 School Committee Workshop will be devoted to COVID and the District's policies and procedures for testing, quarantining, and other related topics.

MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Piper to approve the ELC grant application; 2nd by Ms. Thibaudeau.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Piper stated if the District has this support, students could potentially be out of the building less. Ms. Estrella stated for symptomatic students, that is true. But for those unvaccinated students who are in close contact with someone who tests positive, the amount of time out of the building will not be less.

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Ms. Ellsworth pointed out that the \$154K is reimbursed quarterly, so that the District will be paying for these services up front. Assistant Superintendent Sanna pointed out that it works like the ESSER funds. Mr. Ferrucci agreed that it is similar to other federal grants.

Ms. Ellsworth noted that the agreement includes that there could be on-site inspections. Assistant Superintendent Sanna stated that that is typical of Federal grants. The government reserves the right to do an on-site inspection to see that their funds are being used appropriately.

Ms. Ellsworth stated that she feels that this could be taking away from the pressing educational needs of the district by requiring that the Superintendent oversee the implementation of the funds.

Mr. Cabral asked what would happen if the grant is not approved by the School Committee. Assistant Superintendent stated that some of the items could be paid out of ESSER funds. The District would also be rejecting \$150K in funding that can be used to help with its efforts to deal with the COVID pandemic.

Ms. Thibaudeau agreed with Ms. Ellsworth that this doesn't seem like the role of the School Department.

Ms. Bullard disagreed. She stated that the job of the School Department is to protect the students under its supervision. To have funds to address the issue in-house is an appropriate way to take care of the health of the school community.

Ms. Piper agreed that anything that can be done to keep the students in the classroom is a good thing. The grant directly supports the students and frees up the ESSER funds to address educational needs of students who may have fallen behind.

Ms. Schofield pointed out that the nurses are asking for this and stating that this grant will assist them.

VOTE: The Motion passed 6-3, with Chairperson McBride, Ms. Ellsworth, and Ms. Cabral voting in dissent.

E. National Grid Energy Efficiency Project

Mr. Wood explained that National Grid identifies projects that can promote energy efficiency and then provides some funding to support the implementation of the project. The project will cost \$261K and National Grid will provide a \$65K grant towards the cost. Additionally, National Grid will track the energy savings for the District and reimburse it over time.

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MOTION: Motion was made to approve the National Grid Energy Efficiency Project by Ms. Schofield; 2nd by Ms. Thibaudeau.

Ms. Ellsworth pointed out that this project was approved by the Budget Facilities Subcommittee.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

F. Organizational Chart

Chairperson McBride stated that the Organizational Chart was provided as an FYI for the Committee and that it will be reviewed and discussed at the Policy and Curriculum Subcommittee meeting.

VII. Adjournment

Motion was made by Ms. Cabral; 2nd by Ms. Thibaudeau, to adjourn the meeting. All approved the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:57 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

**Victor Cabral, Secretary
/dbc**