

**Hopedale School Committee
Minutes of the Meeting of
Tuesday, January 5, 2021**

Members Present: Alysia Butler, Chair
Lori Hampsch, Vice Chair
Lisa Alberto
Jennifer McKeon
Kristi Brytowski

Also Present: Karen M. Crebase, Superintendent
Adam Banayan, School Committee Student Representative
Katelynn Brunt and Madison Sullivan, Student Council Representatives
Tyler Small, Natalia Lee and John McDonough, FinFit Fair Team
Anne Sullivan, PACE President
Laura Buchanan, Jr.-Sr. High School Art Teacher
Stephanie Ridolfi, Athletic Director
Derek Atherton, Jr.-Sr. High School Principal
Karen Cosgrove, Pupil Personnel Services Director
Brian Miller, Memorial School Principal
Kristen Poisson, Bright Beginnings Center Principal

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law, GL chapter 30A, section 18, and the Governor's March 15 and August 7, 2020 orders imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, the regular business meeting of the Hopedale School Committee was conducted via remote participation. The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm under these provisions with a quorum present. She invited members of the public to monitor the meeting by using the information provided on the Town's website and announced that the meeting was being recorded and streaming live. Members of the public are welcome to email questions to schoolcommittee@hopedaleschools.org. A video of the meeting will be available on the Town website.

1. Minutes of December 1 and 4, 2020 - Upon a motion by Mrs. Alberto and seconded by Mrs. McKeon, the Committee unanimously approved the minutes of December 1 and 4, 2020.

2. Student Representatives' Report – Jr.-Sr. High School: Katelynn Brunt and Madison Sullivan reported on general council meetings, an officers workshop, the recent toy drive, secret snowflake, and planning for fundraisers and staff appreciation activities.

3. Superintendent's Comments – The Superintendent reported that a detailed update on COVID information will be presented later in the meeting. The annual FinFit Fair was successfully held virtually this year. The district has received 85 hotspots from T-Mobile through a program with DESE. A ceremony was recently held to recognize Food Services staff for their efforts distributing meals to families. DESE has determined that the district is meeting time and learning standards. Ms. Crebase will provide information on additional funding that may be available through the new federal stimulus legislation when it becomes available.

4. Response to Superintendent's Comments – Mrs. Butler extended her appreciation to the administrators for their work on behalf of the community.

5. Financial Items/Budget -

- **Monthly Report of Accounts Payable Warrants:** The Committee reviewed the recent warrant report. Upon a motion by Mrs. Hampsch which was seconded by Mrs. Alberto, the members unanimously voted to ratify the payment of one FY20 accounts payable warrant dated December 24, 2020 in the amount of

\$321.00 and three FY21 accounts payable warrants dated December 10, and 24 (two), 2020 in the amount of \$256,640.71.

- **Monthly Reports of Payroll Warrants:** Upon a motion by Mrs. Hampsch which was seconded by Mrs. Alberto, the members unanimously voted to ratify the payment of three payroll warrants dated December 3, 17, and 31, 2020 in the amount of \$1,409,663.02.
- **Monthly Budget Reports:** The members reviewed the monthly budget report for December 2020.
- **Warrants for Signature:** There were no warrants distributed for signature.

6. Committee Reports-

- **Committee on Policy:** Mrs. Alberto presented three policies for a Second Reading: **JRA- Student Records, JK- Student Conduct, and KBBA - Non-Custodial Parents' Rights**. After a brief review of the policies, the Committee unanimously voted to approve them for adoption upon a motion by Mrs. Alberto which was seconded by Mrs. McKeon.
- **Committee on Budget:** The Superintendent noted that there will be a detailed budget presentation later in the meeting.
- **Committee on Public Relations:** This item was passed over.

7. Agenda Items:

- **FinFit Fair:** The members of the FinFit Team reported on the virtual fair which was held on December 9, 2020. They provided a summary of the program's goals and expectations; the participation of students, guest speakers and volunteers; the introduction of a new interactive budget sheet; and the efforts to transform a traditionally in-person event into a virtual one. Mrs. Oliveri, the group's advisor, commended the students for their dedication to the success of the event.
- **PACE Update:** The Committee welcomed Anne Sullivan, President of Memorial School's Parent Advisory Council on Education (PACE) for her annual report. Mrs. Sullivan reviewed the impact COVID-19 has had on fundraising, social activities, and enrichment programs typically sponsored by PACE and encouraged staff to apply for available SEED grants. This year's goals for the organization include welcoming new members and continuing the successful collaboration with SEPAC. The members and administrators thanked PACE for their support.
- **School Highlight- Jr.-Sr. High School Art Teacher Laura Buchanan:** Mr. Atherton introduced Ms. Buchanan who is currently teaching art remotely. Ms. Buchanan shared samples of her students' work, reported on the success of using sketchbooks, and described the Virtual Art Club. Guest speakers have been invited to the remote classes to share their educational experiences, works and careers with students. Plans are underway for an art show in the spring. The Committee thanked Ms. Buchanan for providing an enriching art experience for students in a virtual setting.
- **Discussion on Remote/Hybrid Models and Current COVID conditions:** The Superintendent presented current data on positive cases in Hopedale, trends for student attendance over three years, and the number of staff and students who have tested positive or are currently quarantining. The administration will consider evidence of school transmission, student cases, staff cases, staff availability, student attendance rates, town positivity rates and state positivity rates when considering whether to move from hybrid to remote learning.

The Superintendent reviewed the reasons for recently moving the Jr.-Sr. High School to remote learning on a temporary basis, including the number of expected test results, staff availability, and new student cases. To ensure the safety of staff and students, the Superintendent recommended extending the current move to remote learning at the Jr.-Sr. High through the following week with a return to the hybrid model on January 19, 2021. Mrs. Hampsch made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation, which was seconded by Mrs. Alberto. Health Agent William Fisher reviewed the safety protocols currently in place at the schools, including masking, hand washing and distancing, and explained they have contributed to lower rates in the schools than in the community as a whole. Members noted that despite the successful routines in place in school buildings, increased community transmission is placing the hybrid model at risk. The Chair requested a roll call vote when discussion ended. The members unanimously voted to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent and continue remote

learning at the Jr.-Sr. High School until January 19, 2021 as follows: Mrs. Hampsch- yes, Mrs. Alberto-yes, Mrs. McKeon- yes, Mrs. Brytowski-yes, and Mrs. Butler- yes.

Regarding Bright Beginnings Center, the Superintendent reported that there are no current staff or student cases and, therefore, no reason to consider a change in schedule for the preschool at this time.

At Memorial School, Mr. Miller shared that several staff and students are quarantining and that the administration has been analyzing available data daily. The elementary school remains in the hybrid model and is following established protocols and routines. Mr. Fisher described the process by which the Board of Health, public health staff, and school personnel are advised of positive cases and testing in order to determine whether changes in learning models should be considered. School Nurse Kathleen Kavanaugh requested that the Committee consider moving Memorial School to remote learning because of expected new data and impacts on staff availability. Mr. Miller responded to inquiries regarding mask breaks, student attendance, staff availability and the use of substitute teachers. In light of current data, Mrs. Alberto made a motion to table the discussion of moving Memorial to remote learning pending additional information which would support the change. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Hampsh and the members voted unanimously in favor by roll call vote as follows: Mrs. Butler- yes, Mrs. Brytowski-yes, Mrs. McKeon- yes, Mrs. Alberto- yes and Mrs. Hampsch- yes.

The Superintendent concluded the discussion by stating that she will continue to work with the Board of Health and health personnel, and will make decisions and recommendations based on what is best for each building according to specific circumstances and data. She confirmed that the goal of the administration is to keep the schools open for in-person learning as much as possible.

- **Discussion on Winter Sports:** Mrs. Ridolfi reported on the current status of the winter sports season which includes basketball teams for boys and girls at junior high, junior varsity and varsity levels, and the cooperative ice hockey team for junior varsity and varsity players. She reviewed cleaning, distancing and masking protocols for the teams, the creation of pods to limit student athlete contacts to a limited number of opponents, the lack of spectators, and the reduced length of the season. With the Jr.-Sr. High School in a temporarily remote instructional mode, members of the School Committee were asked to consider continuing athletics during this time. A lengthy discussion followed regarding the transportation of athletes to competitions, entering and exiting athletic facilities, the lack of case transmission due to team play, the voluntary nature of the activity and the small size of team cohorts. Discussion also focused on mandates that coaches and athletes adhere to district and league safety protocols, the temporary nature of the move to remote instruction at this time, the fact that activities other than athletics have been placed on hold, and whether athletic participation is safe. Upon a motion by Mrs. Hampsch, which was seconded by Mrs. McKeon, to allow sports to continue during this temporary period of remote learning unless administration determines that they should be suspended due to changed circumstances, the Committee voted by roll call vote as follows: Mrs. Hampsh- yes, Mrs. McKeon- yes, Mrs. Brytowski- yes, Mrs. Alberto- no and Mrs. Butler- no. The motion passed by a majority vote.
- **Air Quality Report:** The Superintendent reported that Environmental Health Inc., which had performed initial air quality testing for the district prior to the start of school in September, returned to analyze indoor air quality in the buildings since they have been occupied for instruction. The reports for the three buildings reflect that measurements continue to be satisfactory and typical of school buildings.
- **Request from graduate student Stephen Hale:** The Committee reviewed a request from Mr. Hale for members to participate in a study exploring the perceptions of school committee members regarding the characteristics and practices of effective superintendents. The doctoral candidate is seeking input from members who have served with at least two superintendents. Members interested in participating will contact the Chair.
- **Annual Review and Approval of Fees:** The Vice Chair presented the 2021-2022 Proposals for Fees and Building Use Fees with recommended increases for athletics, transportation, extended day programs, and food services. There were no suggested changes for building use, preschool tuition or preschool extended day fees. The Superintendent noted the need for reasonable increases while recognizing the current financial circumstances of families. A brief discussion followed, including an inquiry regarding the decision to maintain the current tuition rates and fees at the preschool. Since that information was not immediately available, Mrs. Alberto moved to approve all fees as reflected in the proposals and to table discussion on the preschool tuition and fees until a future meeting. Upon a second by Mrs. Hampsh, the

Committee voted unanimously in favor of the motion by roll call vote as follows: Mrs. Hampsh- yes, Mrs. McKeon- yes, Mrs. Brytowski- yes, Mrs. Alberto- yes and Mrs. Butler- yes.

- **Preliminary Presentation of FY2022 Budget:** The Superintendent reported that the district has been able to successfully work within the FY2021 two-percent budget reduction (-\$252,898) due to no cost-of-living raises for staff, savings for out-of-district remote learning, grants, participation in BICO, and transportation savings. She noted that the budget for FY2022 will require an increase due to contractual obligations, special education mandates, reorganization of the technology and transportation departments, and staffing in the areas of ELL and counseling. A Five-Year Historical Review of the School Budget was presented along with an explanation of the increase to be requested for FY2022 which may be in excess of 7% to restore cuts due to the Town's deficit in FY2021.

8. Correspondence –The Committee reviewed a letter dated December 15, 2020 from The Education Cooperative (TEC) commending Food Services Director Cheyl Bober for her work providing meals to families.

9. Audience to Citizens - The Recording Secretary was asked to read questions submitted via the School Committee's email account. Questions and comments for the Committee were submitted by Jen Bartolotta, Lisa Novelli, Len Guertin, and Michael Ledone. Concerns and questions involved the approval of in-town basketball, the potential move of Memorial School to remote learning, plans to increase in-person learning, plans for returning to full in-person instruction, opening buildings to instruction on Wednesdays, and the burden on families when emergency remote learning decisions are made. The members and Superintendent thanked the community for their input and interest in providing the best education for their students. Ms. Crebase reiterated that she supports a return to in-person learning as soon as possible. At the current time, however, any planning in that direction has been put on hold until spread of the virus is reduced in the community.

Adjourn to Executive Session- The Chair announced the need to enter executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Hopedale Education Association since an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body. Upon a motion by Mrs. Alberto and seconded by Mrs. Hampsch, the members voted by roll call vote to enter executive session for the stated purpose as follows: Mrs. Alberto-yes; Mrs. Brytowski- yes; Mrs. McKeon-yes; Mrs. Hampsch-yes and Mrs. Butler-yes. The Chair stated that the Committee would not be reconvening in public session and declared the meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeanne McGuane, Recording Secretary
APPROVED: February 2, 2021