

**LINCOLN-SUDBURY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
AUGUST 13, 2020**

7:00PM

Google Meet

Present

Ellen Joachim, Chair; Cara Endyke-Doran; Kevin Matthews; Candace Miller; Patty Mostue; Harold Engstrom, Member-Elect. Carole Kasper, Vice Chair, joined the meeting via phone at 8:47 pm.

Also Present

Bella Wong, Superintendent/Principal; Kirsteen Patterson, Director of Finance and Operations

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:02pm

Public Comment

Dawn Solowey asks “The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that remote learning causes serious negative effects for kids and teens. For example, the AAP states that, “adolescents also have been placed at higher risk of morbidity and mortality from physical or sexual abuse, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.” This week, health experts wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post titled “Remote School is Putting Kids Under Toxic Stress.” Is the Committee giving significant weight to these important mental health risks for L-S kids if school continues to be remote? Why is this not a strong basis to move to a hybrid model?

Governor Baker’s letter to the superintendents is clear that green and white districts – like Sudbury and Lincoln respectively – should be back full time in person or hybrid (in extenuating circumstances). Given this expert guidance, informed by a wide array of both public health and education experts, what basis is there to vote for anything less than a hybrid approach?

If we go 100% remote, will there be a reduction in staffing levels for courses and positions that clearly are not needed? Can teaching positions be eliminated or does the teachers’ union have to approve?

These questions will be addressed after the Superintendent/Principal report.

Recognitions

Bella Wong recognized and commended the faculty on Learning Continuity Team, the Administrative Team, Academic Council, Buildings and Grounds and Tech Team who have been meeting continually all summer to prepare for school reopening.

METCO Parent Report

There was no METCO Parent Report.

Chairman's Report

The Community Statement on COVID19 Spread is almost ready for publication and has received wide support from all parties. The School Committees and various boards in the towns of Sudbury and Lincoln are concerned regarding making sure community members are being careful and following recommended social distancing and mask wearing so that schools are able to reopen and remain open.

Liaison Report

There were no Liaison Reports.

Superintendent/Principal Report

Ms. Wong reported that a submission from LS is due August 14th to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that includes recommended plans for reopening school in September. The submission must be preceded by a Superintendent's letter that provides an executive summary of the reopening plans.

The highest priority for school reopening is the safe return of as many students as possible to in-person school to maximize learning under novel and challenging circumstances and to address our students' emotional and physical well-being. New information since the July 31st submission: the hybrid and remote learning plans have been further refined; the LS Remote Learning Academy enrollment has been established (150 students out of a projected total of 1530 students); LS has extended an invitation to families whose students are part of specific programs at LS for an optional 4-day in-person model (Excel, LINK, REACH, and ACE); invitations have been extended to Boston students to choose from three options: Remote Learning Academy, 4-day in-person model for students interested in athletics programs; and the hybrid model. Boston students would attend LS from 8:25am to 3:15pm because the transportation time would impede these students returning home in time for the remote learning portion of the program. A survey was sent to staff to ascertain their concerns and interest in returning to in-person teaching.

Guidance from the state has become available regarding remote learning, time on learning, as well as social and emotional guidance. The new time on learning requirement is 930 hours. LS has submitted a request for a waiver for this requirement since the hybrid and remote learning plans would fall somewhat short of a strict interpretation of 930 hours. The waiver request has been submitted to DESE.

There are significant challenges to implementation of the hybrid model. Balancing scheduling needs of students and staff is challenging and may result in a change in scheduling possibilities. Limiting additional burden to staff working in person is an issue that strategies are being developed to manage. The timing of guidance received from DESE has been challenging since it is so late-breaking that it is difficult to absorb the guidance into our plans. It has been a challenge to keep track of infection trends and staying current with data and research. Lastly,

managing emotions and anxiety is a challenge as a result of so much uncertainty in the future with regard to the virus and how to implement the new learning models are a challenge for our staff, administration, and our community.

Ms. Wong reminded the School Committee members that it will be necessary to frequently re-evaluate decisions and affirm how we will operate school for learning throughout the entire coming year. It will be necessary to remain flexible and Ms. Wong encourages families to plan as best they can to remain flexible as well. Ms. Wong realizes that changes in school schedules directly impacts family schedules.

Ms. Wong recommends that school open with a hybrid model to permit teachers and students to get to know one another in the event that remote learning becomes necessary because of virus trends. Under any proposed learning model, students will not have all the options available in a non-COVID year as scheduling is significantly challenging and some teachers may not be present for in-person learning. Overall, the LS community should be prepared for a possible switch no later than after Thanksgiving because start/stop protocols are extremely challenging, the ability to use the outdoors will be curtailed since tents will need to be removed as the weather worsens, and the effect of increased risk of infection from returning college students. Implementation of a hybrid model will necessitate safety compliance monitors; instructional aides; a part-time day custodian to handle increased cleaning services; additional supplies to lessen sharing; personal protective equipment; higher energy costs because of increased air circulation; increased technological devices; training (during remaining summer and fall days); as well as transportation and testing.

Ms. Mostue inquired what the costs are projected to be for the COVID related expenses. Ms. Patterson estimated that it would be approximately \$100,000 in addition to grant monies that will be applied for to support COVID related expenses. Ms. Wong added that certain safety measures have not yet been quantified. Discussion ensued regarding the HVAC improvements recommended for the building which will require more time than the time left before the start of school but there would be a grant available to cover the cost. Ms. Wong believes that HVAC improvements will have a long-term value because of the possibility of additional viruses in our future. It was agreed that additional information would be required before a decision on enacting the HVAC improvements could be made.

Q: In a remote model, would there be a reduction of staff?

A: Ms. Wong projects that all instructional staff will be necessary.

Ms. Miller brought attention to parent concerns regarding support for the social/emotional welfare of students but reminded all that the safety from the virus was paramount. The uncertainty of the school year will be difficult. Ms. Miller posits that many more resources will be required to support students in the current environment. Ms. Wong reported that a need for an LS group to address mental health for all members of the LS community (students and staff) is on the radar and beginning to coalesce.

Ms. Miller inquired about the means by which the norm of wearing masks and maintaining social distancing will be enforced when students return to school. How will students be convinced that mask wearing is not optional but is vital for the protection of all other members of the school community? Students not wearing masks will be asked to leave the school; however, it will not be a matter of a disciplinary record.

The School Community members discussed the necessity of informative data and trends that will then inform LS whether a start/stop protocol will be enacted. The school committee members will be required to approve or recommend a shift to remote learning in the event of infections within the school populations. The threshold of infection cases that will determine when to transition to remote learning has not yet been determined but will be in collaboration with the Sudbury Board of Health.

Public Comment Questions

Q: Why can remote students not join hybrid classes through technology? I am told there are privacy issues yet those issues do not seem to apply to the hybrid model students on afternoons and Wednesdays.

A: It depends on how students will be scheduled, which has not yet been determined for the Remote Academy students.

Q: What plans are in place to provide for student isolation issues for those who have opted for the Remote Academy? Any plan to have remote efforts that will mingle the hybrid students and remote academy students?

A: Good question, we do not yet have a plan for.

Q: Will LS Remote Academy students be in classes with hybrid students on the remote learning days?

A: Scheduling has not yet been determined so it may be the case but not in all cases.

Q: Will the curriculum between hybrid and remote be the same for core classes such as history, science, world language and math?

A: Not all electives will be offered in the Remote Learning Academy. The curriculum for core classes will be the same – such as Algebra II but is not yet complete. Efforts are being made to meet the needs of the students and the teachers.

Q: If extensive disruptions are anticipated to the hybrid plan due to the possible illness and quarantining of students and staff in October/November, have you considered beginning the school year remotely until October/November? That would maintain consistency and safety.

A: Ellen Joachim responded that the chances of having students in classes in-person are highest at the beginning of the semester before increased virus risk is reached. Chances of being in person in November are far less than being in person in September. Ms. Miller reminded the committee that the numbers of infection are more now than they were in March when school was closed. Ms. Miller emphasized that LS educators feel that it is of paramount importance to have students and teachers establishing relationships and structure to improve the outcome of

the coming school year. Mr. Matthews opined that until there is reliable and wide-spread testing, the course of the school year will inevitably be affected by cold/flu season because the symptoms are indistinguishable from COVID.

Q: What happens to the outdoor spaces that will be used when EEE season begins, what changes will be made for teachers that have chosen to teach in the tents?

A: Mosquitoes are not a problem during school hours for tents close to the building and Sudbury will be spraying for EEE late this summer.

Q: If a teacher is out with symptoms, won't the entire class need to be quarantined? Would an instructional aide take the teacher's place?

A: A quarantine would be necessary only if the teacher tests positive for COVID.

Q: Is the Committee giving significant weight to important mental health risks for L-S kids if school continues to be remote? Why is this not a strong basis to move to a hybrid model?

A: Ms. Joachim replied that the School Committee is trying to balance many factors among which is the importance of mental health risks for students and their physical safety from infection. In-person school is what all members want for LS students and must be balanced with the safety of students, families, and staff. Ms. Miller recommends that all families who have grave concerns for their student's mental health to be proactive now to find assistance for them. Ms. Endyke-Doran added that in order to maximize educational benefits of in person teaching, school committees needed to be supported by the public health system relaying timely information regarding infection rates in the community. LS School Committee members have reached out to our state legislators for assistance in obtaining testing capabilities. High frequency, low-cost testing is available and would be of great use to local school systems.

Ms. Wong expressed her thanks to Ms. Endyke-Doran, Ms. Miller and Mr. Matthews for their efforts in collecting information regarding testing and reaching out to state legislators for assistance in obtaining tests.

Q: Have you thought about using the time before September 14th to establish relationships with teachers in smaller groups in advance of the start of school?

A: First Adventure for 9th graders is scheduled and discussions are ongoing regarding having small groups of 10th, 11th, and 12th graders in school before the school year begins.

Q: Are there no funds allocated in the three stimulus packages already approved by Congress to financially support testing in order to reopen schools?

A: Ms. Wong responded that there is no stimulus package that include funds for testing. The stimulus packages have addressed personal protective equipment and upgrades to school HVAC systems. Nothing is on the horizon at the moment.

Q: Governor Baker's letter to the superintendents is clear that green and white districts – like Sudbury and Lincoln respectively – should be back full time in person or hybrid (in extenuating

circumstances). Given this expert guidance, informed by a wide array of both public health and education experts, what basis is there to vote for anything less than a hybrid approach?

A: Ms. Wong appreciates the guidance but finds it unfortunate that the guidance arrived two days before plans for reopening are due. LS cannot reopen with 6 foot guidance separating students; consequently complete in-person reopening of school is not possible for 1500 students. There is no guidance regarding density nor does it take into account the fact that students and staff will be moving around the building and our local health department is overstretched.

Q: What is the actual percentage of students that will be in school in the hybrid model given the number of students in the Remote Academy and the 4-day opt-in.

A: Our projected enrollment is 1530 in district. Approximately 10% of students will be in the Remote Academy; 5% of students will participate in the 4-day plan so the remaining 85% of LS students will be participating in the hybrid model.

Q: How can hybrid students receive instruction from teachers who are teaching remotely.

A: Ms. Wong indicated that no final plan has been devised at this time but work on it continues.

VOTE: Kevin Matthews moved to accept the final learning plan as delineated by Superintendent/Principal Wong with the caveat that the plan may need to change based on future infection rates. Cara Endyke-Doran seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed unanimously via roll call.

Director of Finance and Operations

Ms. Patterson recognized Ms. Wong's thoughtfulness in realizing the difficult decisions being made by students and staff and reminded that there is a valuable resource in the employee assistance program should staff find a need. Ms. Patterson has been working with Department Coordinators to develop the operational aspects of the hybrid learning proposal such as bus transportation, food service, cleaning components and budget concerns.

Information and Discussion

There was no additional information and discussion.

Action Items

The calendar is not complete as a decision on the length of individual quarters has not been determined.

VOTE: Candace Miller moved to approve the adjusted LS School Calendar for 2020-2021 beginning on September 15, 2020 to permit staff professional development in advance of the start of the school year. Cara Endyke-Doran seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and all were in favor based on a roll call vote.

Approval of Minutes

Patty Mostue moved to accept the Minutes for July 21, 2020. Kevin Matthews seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and all were in favor via roll call vote.

Future Agenda Items

Candace Miller reminded the committee members that information regarding the closing of FY20 was outstanding and should be reported. Ms. Wong indicated that there is no official FY21 budget yet since Sudbury has not yet held its annual Town Meeting. Ms. Endyke-Doran brought attention to the added transportation variable the fact that September would be the beginning of the later school start time. Ms. Patterson reported that the results of the survey to LS families regarding use of bus transportation will be evaluated next week.

Ms. Miller requested time to discuss high school sports and restrictions recently put in place.

Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

Calendar

LS School Committee Meeting

August 25, 2020

Adjournment

Cara Endyke-Doran moved to close the meeting and move to Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategies with respect to collective bargaining not to return to Open Session. Kevin Matthews seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and all were in favor based on a roll call vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Francy Zingale

To view video of the meeting, please go to: <https://sudbury.vod.castus.tv/vod>