

BROOKLINE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS
THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2021
4:00 PM-5:45 PM

Participants:

Legislators: Senator Cynthia Creem; Representative Nika Elugardo; Representative Michael Moran; Representative Tommy Vitolo; Ms. Catherine Anderson, Senator Creem's Legislative Director; Ms. Lisamarie Sears, Senator Creem's Policy Counsel; Mr. Pat Brown, Representative Coppinger's Chief of Staff; and Mr. Ben Kaufman, Representative Vitolo's Legislative Aide.

Brookline School Committee Members: Ms. Suzanne Federspiel (Chair); Mr. David A. Pearlman (Vice Chair); Mr. Dimitry Anselme; Ms. Helen Charlupski; Ms. Susan Wolf Ditkoff; Dr. Andreas Liu; Ms. Mariah Nobrega; and Ms. Barbara Scotto. (*Ms. Monopoli was unable to attend.*)

Brookline Schools Administration: Dr. Jim Marini, Interim Superintendent; Ms. Mary Ellen Normen, Deputy Superintendent for Administration and Finance; Ms. Casey Ngo-Miller, Deputy Superintendent for Student Services; and Ms. Robin Coyne, School Committee Executive Assistant.

Brookline Select Board and Town of Brookline Administration: Mr. Bernard Greene, Select Board Chair, and Mr. Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator.

Brookline Advisory Committee: Mr. Michael Sandman, Advisory Committee Chair, and Ms. Susan Park, Advisory Committee School Subcommittee Member.

Brookline Educators Union: Dr. Jessica Wender-Shubow, President.

Ms. Federspiel welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. The participants introduced themselves.

Ms. Charlupski and Dr. Marini provided updates on the following: state of education in Brookline during the pandemic, surveillance testing, major capital projects, budget challenges during FY 2021 and projected for FY 2022, and the search for a new Superintendent of Schools.

Ms. Charlupski and Dr. Marini provided an overview of Brookline issues and priorities.

Brookline School Committee Legislative Priorities for 2021

Since we met last January, education, like the rest of the world, has been turned on its head. We spent the greater part of the spring trying to adjust to the new reality of online learning. New words such as synchronous and asynchronous learning became part of our vocabulary. We learned about ventilation systems and air changes per hour, along with PPE. We were very grateful to get money from the CARES Act and with this financial support, and the efforts of staff to adjust building mechanical systems and operating procedures, have returned pre-K and kindergarten students to school full-time and grades 1-12 to school hybrid (two days a week in person, three days at home). Hybrid is necessary due to the distancing/reduced density guidelines in place. For students who

wish to remain out of buildings full-time, we are also running a 680 student K-8 Remote Learning Academy, and offering a remote option at BHS, which is currently being used by about one-third of the ~2000 BHS students.

Since July, Dr. Jim Marini, a retired Winchester superintendent, has been doing an excellent job as our interim superintendent. We are presently doing a search for a permanent superintendent who would begin in July.

Brookline has been very busy with school building projects:

- The **High School** addition and renovation is progressing, with a scheduled completion date of January 2022. There have been several issues with the MBTA which have cost the project additional funds. Last month (November 2020) Town Meeting voted favorable action on a warrant article to authorize additional borrowing for the increased cost.
- A debt exclusion passed for the **Driscoll School** in December 2019 and the project will be going out to bid shortly. The project has a two-year construction schedule with occupancy of the new building slated for Fall 2023.
- We entered into a Feasibility Study with the MSBA in April 2020 for the **Pierce School** renovation/addition. At the MSBA meeting in December 2020, a team from MDS/Sasaki was selected as the project architect.

The toll the pandemic has taken on the schools, staff, students and families is immense. We are just now seeming to reach a point where we feel some stability. We are planning for two FY22 budgets, one with the Remote Learning Academy and one that has school back to normal. In addition, for the first time in 20 years, we have experienced an enrollment reduction of ~800 students. Much of the decrease is international students who are typically here for a few years, many of whom went home during the pandemic and were not replaced by new students since visas have been hard to come by. In addition, our Kindergarten numbers are extremely low due to area nursery schools opening Kindergarten classrooms and parents deciding to keep their kindergartners home.

We are very concerned about our budget due to the Town's loss of revenue along with the State's economic condition. We are hoping to run robust remedial summer programs for students who have fallen behind through no fault of their own. We continue to be concerned about unfunded mandates, especially in the time of COVID. Please be vigilant about this.

Legislative Issues

1. **COVID-related Expenses:** Funding for COVID-related items such as surveillance testing, summer remedial programs and PPE are just a few of the extraordinary costs we are experiencing. We are hopeful for Federal relief but if not, need support from the legislature.

2. ***At a minimum, Level Funding of Chapter 70:*** *We appreciate the level funding of Chapter 70 for this year and are hopeful that Chapter 70 funding for FY22 continues to be level funded or increased.*
3. ***MCAS Moratorium:*** *We support the legislation put forward by the MASc for a moratorium on MCAS testing.*
4. ***Virtual Meetings:*** *Legislation to make permanent the March 12, 2020 Open Meeting Law Executive Order allowing remote meetings for the purposes of establishing a quorum and for voting is important for boards and commissions to operate. Remote participation has allowed for the public to be more involved in the work of the School Committee and allowed for greater flexibility of scheduling and attendance for members – these are all important benefits that will accrue even as the pandemic ends. This legislative initiative is also supported by the Brookline Commission for Women, and more broadly by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (see letter to Senate President Karen E. Spilka and House Speaker Robert DeLeo dated June 30, 2020.)*
5. ***Continuing Needs:***
*Thank you for your support for METCO, Special Education Transportation, Steps to Success, and the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health.
Health Insurance coverage for medically necessary treatment in School.
Universal Pre-K.*

The Legislators provided updates on State issues and funding. The Legislators offered their continued support to the Town of Brookline and the Schools. The group discussed the potential impact of allowing remote meetings to continue. Representative Elugardo requested data pertaining to the issue of health insurance coverage for medically necessary treatment in schools, and a follow-up meeting with Ms. Normen and Ms. Ngo-Miller. School Committee members noted that all districts will need additional resources to address academic loss during the pandemic as well as additional mental health and social and emotional issues among students. Dr. Wender-Shubow spoke against standardized testing, particularly during the pandemic when students/educators are under great pressure and have limited in-school time. She asked for additional information on progressive revenue streams. The group discussed the distribution of students in the various learning models.

Ms. Charlupski thanked everyone for coming and for their continued support.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 PM.