



QUABBIN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
School Committee Minutes
Tuesday, May 5, 2020
Educational Support Center

This meeting was held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, Section 2 utilizing Zoom Technology.

PRESENT

Chair	Lee Wolanin	Member, Barre
Vice-Chair	Mark Brophy	Member, Barre
	Dr. Richard Allan	Member, Barre
	Debra Chamberlain	Member, Hubbardston
	David Correia	Member, Hubbardston
	Dave Deschamps	Member, Barre
	Fred Jean-Francois	Member, Oakham
	Ned Kelly	Member, Hardwick
	David Marsh	Member, Barre
	Walter Nutter	Member, Oakham
	Marcelino Sarabia	Member, Hardwick
	Peggy Thompson	Member, New Braintree
	Mark Wigler	Member, Hubbardston

Absent: William Hansen, Hubbardston
Geoffrey Spier, Hardwick

ALSO PRESENT

Dr. Sheila Muir	Superintendent of Schools
Cheryl Duval	Director of Administrative Services
District Administrators/Staff	Kristin Campione; Gregory Devine; Colleen Mucha; Adam Couturier; Andrew Walsh; Clare Barnes; Shelly St. George; Jill Peterson; Tricia Worthington; Sue Musnicki; Nancy Landry; Stacey Skerry; Keri Dubois-Gould; Evan Barringer
Press:	Ellie Downer, Barre Gazette;
Town Officials/Residents:	Clare Hendra, Oakham FinCom; Susan Rayne, Hubbardston FinCom; Dan Galante, Hubbardston Selectboard; Maria Tourigny

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- March 12, 2020 - A motion was made by Dr. Allan and seconded by Mr. Marsh to approve the minutes of March 12, 2020. Motion passed unanimously.
- April 1, 2020 – A motion was made by Dr. Allan and seconded by Mr. Marsh to approve the minutes of April 1, 2020. Motion passed unanimously.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

a) Superintendent of Schools

- Superintendent's Report - Dr. Muir reported that some celebrations took place this week beginning with School Lunch Hero Day which took place on Friday, May 1st Educator Appreciation Week is May 4th through May 8th, and National Nurses Day is May 6th.
- Update on Regionalization Grant – Currently working with MARS Consulting Group to explore shared services and regionalization opportunities with area school districts. Also looking to obtain a comprehensive financial analysis that includes projections related to the financial sustainability of QRSD. Grant deadline is June 30th now due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been two meetings with MARS consultants so far. MARS has facilitated meetings with area districts who also have regionalization grants. These are North Brookfield, Quaboag and Spencer-East Brookfield.
- The District has contracted with NESDEC to complete a 10-year demographic study to support future planning for enrollment and program development. The study will take approximately 8 weeks.
- Meetings have begun to discuss planning for alternative end of year events.
- School Closure & COVID-19 updates – Since the closure of schools on March 17th, the District has been going through the different phases of school closure. Phase I began with optional enrichment for students which included outreach to families, technology support for educators, professional learning for educators and staff, cleaning & sanitizing all school spaces and feeding families. Phase II consisted of planning for remote learning for students. The district continued optional enrichment learning for students with outreach from educators to families. Planning and preparation for remote learning took place as well as planning for remote delivery of special education services. Cleaning and sanitizing of all school spaces continued. The Student Services Department started planning for Special Education services. Phase III began on April 13th with required remote learning for students. Outreach to families continued and implementation of remote services to students with disabilities began. Distribution of Chromebooks began to students.

At this time, the district is entering phases IV & V. The district administration will be examining what has been done so far and will be working on improvements. Administration is currently working on a survey for parents and students in regard to remote learning, as well as a survey to educational staff. The district will examine our priority standards as compared to DESE priority standards.

The district will also begin planning for remote extended school year, face to face extended school year, and for a hybrid model of both.

- Dr. Muir then reviewed expectations for remote learning for the different grade levels and gave examples of the “Week-At-A-Glance” boards for elementary and secondary. Students with disabilities are receiving services remotely based upon Individualized Service Plans. Annual reviews of IEPs are occurring remotely.
- The district is supporting families through delivery of paper copies, technology support services, parent support groups and video resources to support student engagement.
- The Technology Department has daily live technology support for educators. They have the ability to remote into a PC and share screens to provide technology support. A member of the technology team is at Central Office daily to distribute or troubleshoot for the Chromebook Loaner Program.

b) Director of Administrative Services

- Presentation of warrants – Payroll Warrants 19, 20, 21 & 22 and AP warrants 26A, 26B, 27BV, 28A, 29A, 30A, 31A, 31BV, 31R (R is for refunds to parents/guardian) were approved by the Warrant Subcommittee.

c) Teacher Advisory Council

- Evan Barringer, President of the QRTA, reported that the teaching staff is doing an amazing job with an increased work load of 40 – 50 hours per week partially due to the increase in parent emails. While

teachers have adapted to remote learning, they are concerned about those students who need them and need the human connection. At the high school level, some teachers are meeting students for the first time.

- d) Student Advisory Council
 - No report

4. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

- a) Administrative Review
 - No report was given
- b) Audit
 - No report was given
- c) Budget
 - No report was given
- d) Central Office
 - No report was given
- e) Collective Bargaining
 - No report was given
- f) Plant and facilities
 - No report was given
- g) Policy & Review
 - No report was given
- h) Special Education
 - No report was given
- i) QEMP
 - No report was given
- j) Technology
 - No report was given

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- FY20 Budget Discussion
 - Financial closure of current year – At this time, we are projected to have over \$1 million remaining in FY20 budget. The district is currently spending for only essential needs. If additional Regional Transportation reimbursement is received, we could post it to the Regional Transportation Reimbursement Fund to be used as an FY21 revenue source. Administration is proposing the use of this year’s funding for next year. \$1.4m of FY20 expenses were posted to the School Choice Revolving fund. We could decide to reclassify \$1m of expenses posted from School Choice back to Budget to close out FY20, leaving an addition \$1m in School Choice reserve. We would then reduce the FY21 budget by \$1m by posting expenses to School Choice. Any remaining unencumbered FY20 funds will close to E & D. Doing this allows earlier access to the unencumbered amount in the FY20 budget. This will also allow us to not cut the FY21 budget at this time. This is helpful because we do not know what schools will look like when we return nor what our needs will be. This will also allow us to reduce the amount that member towns are assessed for FY21.
At this time, the current approved budget is \$36,023,026. The “COVID-19 Plan” budget is \$34,993,542. With the \$1m transfer, the FY21 budget would be \$34,823,261 which represents a budget increase of \$170,281 or <0.5% increase. Discussion ensued that it may be prudent for the Committee members to review the budget presentation before taking a vote. The vote will need to be taken prior to town meetings.
 - Furlough/unemployment proposal and the financial impact – all employees, including hourly employees, are being paid during school closure. Ms. Duval conducted an analysis of the cost to furlough some employee groups. If employees are not given “reasonable assurance” that they

will be able to return to work by our scheduled opening day of school, they will be able to collect unemployment over the summer, with a furlough that would begin on May 18th. Unemployment cost calculation do not include the cost of dependent benefit which is \$25/week. If the district continues to payment through the end of the regular school year, the cost would be \$61,715. The estimated cost of unemployment through June 30th would be \$26,280 and through August 21st would be \$62,253. Through June 30th, the estimated savings would be \$356,035 and through August 21st, the estimated loss would be \$538. It would not be in the best financial interest of the district to assume unemployment costs at this time.

- Negotiations with transportation contractors – Ms. Duval renegotiated with JP McCarthy for regular transportation at 95% for April, 85% for May and June on home to school service cost only for a total savings of \$59,094. Special education transportation with Van Pool was renegotiated at 78% for April, May, & June for a total savings of \$75,705. Combined, this represented a total savings of \$134,799.
- Student trip refunds – many districts are having difficulty with travel agencies refunding 100% of class trips. MASS is working for districts to receive full refunds.
- Food service update – Food distribution began with five days per week. The district has moved to three days per week – Monday, Wednesday & Friday, with food for numerous days being distributed. For the month of April, 25,803 meals were distributed by pick up or volunteer delivery to homes. The MS/HS staff prepared 16,142 meals and the Hardwick staff prepared 9,661 meals. The district is looking at service to Hubbardston residents and discussing options of opening HCS as a distribution site. The Food Service Director applied for and received a grant for \$10,000 to purchase lawn signs, take home containers and machines to seal food containers. She also applied for and received an additional \$7,000 of DOD fresh fruits and vegetables. She has received donations from Table Talk Pies and Eastern Standard Provisions pretzels for extra items in lunches. She is currently participating in a program to bring free dairy products and produce boxes to the residents of the towns.
- Plant & facilities update – Ms. Duval gave an update on the Hubbardston Center School Accelerated Repair Project for which the negotiation of Owner’s Project Manager Fee is complete. The Schematic Design and budget documents have to be filed for a May 6th deadline. She also reported that there is a tear in the track. Due to the pandemic, we have been unable to reach the contractor, but have left messages.
- FY21 Budget Discussion – It is unknown when the House or Senate budget will be released. There is talk that the state budget process will not be completed by June 30th. It is also unknown if, when or how annual town meetings will be held. There is the possibility of being on a 1/12th budget status.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

7. SCHOOL COMMITTEE CONCERNS

- None

8. NEW BUSINESS

- None

9. REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION

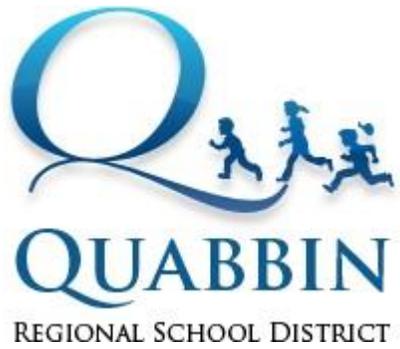
- None

10. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Dr. Allan and seconded by Mr. Deschamps to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.
The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica A. Bennett
School Committee Secretary



Director of Administrative Services Report to School Committee May 5, 2020

Financial Closure of Current Year

- **Projected to have over \$1 million remaining in FY20 budget**
 - **Currently spending for only essential needs**
 - **If additional Regional Transportation Reimbursement is received, we could post it to the Regional Transportation Reimbursement Fund to be used as an FY21 revenue source**

Normal process for unencumbered fiscal year budget balance

- Budget balance closes to E&D – June
- E&D balance is certified by Department of Revenue – due October
- Amount certified is available for use
 - If to be used in current fiscal year (FY21), it increases the budget total and must be approved by school committee and special town meetings
 - May be used for following fiscal year budget (FY22) if included in revenue projections for FY22 and budget is approved at ATM

Proposal to use this year's funding for next year

- **\$1.4m of FY20 expenses were posted to the School Choice Revolving fund**
 - **\$1.1m in salaries**
 - **\$284k for transportation**
- **We could:**
 - **Reclass \$1m of expenses posted to SC back to Budget to close out FY20**
 - **Leaving an additional \$1m in SC reserve**
 - **Reduce FY21 budget by \$1m by posting expenses to SC**
 - **Any remaining unencumbered FY20 funds will close to E&D**

What will this achieve?

- **Allows earlier access to the unencumbered amount in the FY20 budget**
- **Allows us to not cut the FY21 budget at this time**
 - **Unsure of what school will look like when we return**
 - **Unsure of what our needs will be**
- **Allows us to reduce the amount that member towns are assessed for FY21**

FY21 Budget Discussion

- **Unknown when House or Senate Budget will be released**
- **Some are saying the state budget process may not be completed by June 30**
- **Unknown if, when or how annual town meetings will be held**
 - **Expect to be on 1/12th budget status**
 - **Cash flow should sufficient until December**
 - **Can't finalize bargaining unit contract negotiations or any contract under 1/12th budget without DESE oversight**

Assessing Member Towns

- **Under 1/12th budget**
 - **Commissioner will most likely set 1/12th amount based on FY20 budget**
 - **$\$34,823,261 / 12 = \$2,901,938$ spending limit per month (able to carryover unspent monthly amount to next month)**
- **Under statute:**
 - **Assessments must use FY21 projected revenue sources and RLC in latest version of the state's budget to calculate assessments**
 - **Member towns must make assessment payment under the schedule in the regional agreement**

Budget adjustment with \$1m transfer

Current approved budget	\$36,023,026
“COVID-19 PLAN” budget	\$34,993,542
FY20 Budget	<u>\$34,823,261</u>
Budget Increase	\$ 170,281
Budget increase < 0.5% increase	

Questions, comments or concerns on this process?

Layoff/Furlough/Unemployment Analysis

- **On April 1st, the committee voted to continue paying all employees**
- **On April 21st, Governor Baker closed schools for the remainder of the year**
- **Conducted an analysis of cost to furlough some employee groups**
- **On April 24th, Department of Labor Standards lifted restrictions on custodial and work in schools. P&F staff back full-time on May 4th**

Reasons to consider a layoff or furlough of certain employee groups

- **Some employee groups are paid from revenue generated by the activity**
 - **Extended Day program**
 - **Food & Nutritional Services program**
- **Continuing to pay employees without revenue generation means:**
 - **Reserves will be depleted**
 - **Program may be in a deficit at year-end, meaning the General Fund Budget must cover the loss (Revolving accounts cannot have a negative balance at the end of the fiscal year)**

Post-Pandemic concerns to consider

- **Same level of participation may not be seen when school reopens**
- **Less participation will lead to reduced revenue generation**
- **Less revenue may lead to staff reductions**
- **Less revenue may affect ability to rebuild reserves**
- **Less reserves may cause increase in price to customer**

Cost analysis to layoff/furlough certain employee groups

Assumptions:

1. If employees are not given “reasonable assurance” that they will be able to return to work by our scheduled opening day of school, they will be able to collect unemployment over the summer
2. Furlough begins May 18th
3. Unemployment cost calculations do not include cost of dependent benefit (\$25/week/dependent)

Cost analysis to layoff/furlough certain employee groups

- **Cost to continue payment through end of regular school year**
\$61,715
- **Estimated cost of unemployment:**
 - **Through June 30** **\$26,680**
 - **Through August 21** **\$62,253**
- **Estimated Savings/(Loss):**
 - **Through June 30** **\$35,035**
 - **Through August 21** **(\$538)**

Negotiations with Transportation Contractors

- On March 27th, the Commissioner issued this message:

“we expect school districts to continue payments for outsourced operational services that are needed to ensure continuity of essential services when schools reopen. Such payments may be conditioned on negotiated changes to contracts in order to address unanticipated service needs during the state of emergency. These services include, but are not limited to, transportation...”

- Renegotiated rates:

- JP McCarthy (regular transportation) 95% for April, 85% May & June on home to school service cost only; total savings \$59,094
- Van Pool (special education transportation) 78% for April, May & June; total savings \$75,705
- Total savings \$134,799

Student Trip Refunds

- **Many district are having issues with travel agencies refunding 100% of class trips**
- **MASS is working for districts**
- **Attorney General's Office is involved**
- **New legislation pending to classify the refusal by a travel company, agency or other tour business to provide full monetary refund to a school related trip cancelled due to declaration of emergency to be considered an unfair or deceptive practice**

Food & Nutritional Services Department Update

- **For the month of April:**
 - **25,803 meals distributed by pickup or volunteer delivery to homes**
 - Middle/High School staff prepared 16,142 meals
 - Hardwick staff prepared 9,661 meals
- **Service to Hubbardston Residents**
 - Request for a closer distribution site
 - MART from Gardner is providing free transportation of meals from MHS to HCS
 - Discussing option to open HCS for distribution

Director's Initiatives

- **Applied for and received a grant for \$10,000 to purchase lawn signs, take-home containers that can be warmed in an oven or microwave, and machines to seal food containers**
- **Applied for and received an additional \$7,000 of DOD Fresh fruits and vegetables**
- **Requested and received donations of snacks from Table Talk (pies) and Eastern Standard Provisions (pretzels) to include “extra surprise” in student meals**
- **Is participating in a program to bring free dairy products weekly to residents of the 5 towns – and possibly one for fresh fruits and vegetables**

Plant & Facilities Update

- **Hubbardston Center School Accelerated Repair Project**
 - Negotiation of Owners' Project Manager Fee complete
 - Schematic Design and Budget documents to be filed for May 6th deadline
- **QRMHS Track**
 - There is a tear in the track. Unable to reach the contractor but messages have been left.
- **Town inquiry – Is the district proceeding with capital requests?**

Questions, comments or concerns on this process?