

GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES: Wednesday, July 30, 2020
Greenfield MA

Note: This meeting was held fully remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, §20.

Present: Katie Caron (KC); Susan Eckstrom (SE); Jordana Harper (JH); Susan Hollins (SH); Glenn Johnson-Mussad; (GJ); Amy Proietti (AP); Jean Wall (JW).

Absent: Roxann Wedegartner (RW)

Also present: Andy Paquette, TMS; GREAT members; other school staff; many parents and members of the public.

I. Call to Order

Chair Proietti opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Technical problems delayed start of meeting until 6:30, with quorum present: KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW.

II. Public Comment

Stephanie Allen, parent, requested clear communication to parents “from the district/superintendent/principals regarding Covid cases within the schools and steps being taken to address/contain the spread within the school system” and “encouraging a formal policy to be written outlining specific expectations regarding how the school district will keep families updated and informed as cases occur within the schools if in person schooling does take place this fall.” (Allen unable to attend meeting; comment submitted via email July 29 with request to be included in public comment)

Rachel Cronen-Townsend, GMS teacher & GHS parent, spoke to children’s developmental need for in-person instruction; in favor of outdoor classrooms, use of small cohorts, hybrid model.

Scott Keldun, parent, spoke to priority of keeping students safe; would rather students miss a year of school than get sick.

Garrett O’Brien, GHS staff and GEA representative, spoke in support of re-hiring all staff and protecting safety of students and staff alike.

Garth Brody, GHS staff, spoke in favor of remote start to school.

Iomay Caban, parent, spoke in favor of remote start or hybrid, due to lack of space and money.

Deborah Richards asked for information on ventilation systems of school buildings.

Natalie Feliciano, parent, shared concerns of high cost of in-person model; in favor of remote learning; recognized need for not-remote option for students with special needs or parents who need to work; likelihood of resurgence of infections.

Grace Del Vecchio, GHS teacher, expressed fears of consequences of in-person model; likelihood of students making mistakes (in precautions); supports gradual move toward in-person, with safety as priority.

Julie Erickson, GMS teacher, recognized tension between needs of vulnerable students for in-person learning and risks to some students and staff; supports starting fully remote with means to support most-vulnerable students; pandemic is opportunity for positive change to educational system; build capacity to use technology successfully.

Marykate Smith Despres, parent, said that, despite difficulties of engaging students in remote learning, safety must be priority; ensuring in-person safety of special education students and staff is especially difficult.

Michael Sustick, 4C teacher, spoke to likelihood of remote start but need for flexibility with instruction and scheduling for working parents; supports in-person “meet & greet” before moving to remote.

Sarah Chase, parent, noted that her child has health vulnerabilities, supports remote model for safety reasons, especially considering old school buildings; school can continue without buildings.

Ashley Winn, GMS teacher, supports remote learning; will be better than system that was suddenly implemented last spring.

Jaimye Bartak described success of her office’s return to in-person work; masks work; supports hybrid or in-person model, especially for younger students.

Kasey Erickson, parent, supports hybrid model; children’s mental health is suffering from isolation.

Fern Smith, parent, favors remote and hybrid; she & husband are essential workers and have no child-care; suggests that some classrooms be in-person and others remote.

AP acknowledged and expressed appreciation for many comments received from community.

III. New Business

A. Fall Reopening Plans

- Supt. Harper thanked GREAT members, introduced presentation.
- Katie Caron, School Committee representative, described GREAT’s process that included discussions by full group and subcommittees, feasibility study, communication with all staff and community. Acknowledged strong opinions by all groups.
- Kia Burton-King, parent representative, presented timeline; gradual release of guidance from DESE for opening schools. Many meetings (700+ hours) by topic sub-groups; meetings will continue. Encouraged community members to read GREAT documents.
- Supt. Harper explained that slow, gradual release of guidance from DESE and delays in fulfillment of supply orders have slowed GPS progress. Purchased PPE; purchased new Chromebooks, repaired old ones. Proposing outdoor spaces (40x40 tents) at every school. Strategies to expand available space. Surveys of families and staff show different opinions; cannot please all. Removing some furniture from classrooms; improving ventilation. Improving remote learning platforms: keep and build on what worked well. Professional development for teachers.
- Mike Kucheski, Athletic Director, reviewed survey responses (staff, families).
- Melodie Goodwin, Newton School principal, pointed to change inherent in all models, including need for families to monitor children’s health every day; social distancing; new school routines.

- Pam Owen, Lead School Nurse, described safety requirements (handwashing, masks, medical waiting rooms, cleaning protocols, physical distancing) and responsibilities of students and families.
- Supt. Harper described GREAT walk-throughs, identification of changes needed re: physical capacity; cleaning; HVAC/ventilation. Anticipate 30-50% energy cost increase due to increased ventilation.
- Karin Patenaude, GHS principal, described 3' and 6' distancing configurations.
- Tara Cloutier, GHS teacher, presented transportation, staffing needs (including substitutes) in hybrid or in-person model.
- Janet Dickinson, Interim Director of Pupil Services, described potential approach that would prioritize high-need and vulnerable student groups in phased return to in-person instruction.
- Eliza Caulkins, Food Service Director, gave reassurance that in all models, school meals will be provided. Thanked food service team that has served 138,996 meals since March 16.
- Supt. Harper defined terms for models:
 - In-person
 - Hybrid
 - Remote learning
 - Remote-Plus
- Each model was described – challenges with solutions, challenges without solutions. Slides provide details. Presenters: Melodie Goodwin, Newton principal; Eric Stone, Newton teacher; Lynn Dole, GMS principal; Karin Patenaude, GHS principal.

School Committee's task: Approve all plans now to submit to DESE; identify a preferred model. School Committee to meet again August 4. Process will continue as pandemic evolves.

SE moved to endorse all three plans as put forward by the GREAT committee. SH 2nd.

Discussion:

- SE recommended one-month duration for cohorts.
- "Three plans" in endorsement motion is meant to include in-person, hybrid, remote and remote-plus.
- Accelerated timeline: re-opening plan with "leaning-toward" selection, due to DESE July 31. Final plan due to DESE by August 10.
- DESE could change options despite our endorsement. Who makes decision? Local schools working with local health departments. DESE suggested they can override local decision, but not realistic or likely.
- Need to know cost of options before making final recommendation.
- SH recommends "Flex 2020" plan to give virtual option to families. Can be fluid as families' preferences and circumstances change. Consistent curriculum will allow adaptability – in-person or virtual students in same grade will be learning same topics, skills.
- Flexibility must take into consideration safety and financial realities.
- Support for remote start with long phase-in of in-person; and flexibility to return to all-remote if needed.
- All models bring need for project-based learning.
- In-person too expensive. Support for Hybrid and Remote-Plus.

- Some high-risk students recommended for in-person may do better in remote; consider students' individual needs.
- Local health boards can be stricter but not less strict than state requirements.
- Essential that parent choice be included in all GPS models. Other districts' plans restrict remote only to students with medical needs. Desire for GPS to offer remote option; wouldn't force student to attend in-person if family doesn't want.
- Remote-Plus offers improved remote instruction (teachers have had time to prepare); prioritizing students who most need in-person; allows all students to begin school.
- Support for "meet & greet" at start of school, as suggested by Mr. Sustick.
- Suggestion of virtual volunteer program – e.g., mentors to help young students with reading or support advanced learning for college-bound students.
- Concern that buildings' air-handling systems can spread virus. GPS working with HVAC contractors to increase fresh air, but there are limitations to how much fresh air the system can handle. Opening windows, fans will help. Won't use interior rooms as classrooms. Making improvements, but safety not assured. Except for remote option, no guarantees that we can keep everyone safe. Every community is dealing with push-pull of bringing as many students back as possible, and keeping everyone safe. Outside air-quality evaluations are possible, expensive.
- Pavilions would be useful now and in future, but unaffordable. Potentially eligible for grant-funding? Tent rentals would be only temporary solution (cold weather). We can't afford to prepare for all models.
- How do we afford any extra costs? Already working under \$1.8 million budget reduction. One-time federal grants allowing for some supply purchases but can't support ongoing salaries. State funding reduced, uncertain.
- Seeking guidance from city's liability insurers if students or staff become ill. Need attorney guidance?
- Concern that GPS continues to pay out-of-district tuition for services not being provided. Budget & Finance Subcommittee to review.

Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion [to endorse all three plans] passed unanimously.

GJ moved to endorse the remote learning model [which includes Remote-Plus] as our preferred model. JW 2nd.

Discussion:

- Begin with remote plan, with desire to evolve toward hybrid model as finances and pandemic situation allow.
- Remote-Plus allows choices for parents who may otherwise have to seek in-school option in other districts (choice-out) if fully remote is only option.

Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Changes to School Year Calendar

DESE has authorized reduction from 180 to 170 required school days to allow additional professional development for staff.

SE moved to amend the School Calendar to reflect 10 additional training and professional development days at the beginning of the school year. GJ 2nd.

Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion passed unanimously.

GJ moved that we change the calendar so that first day of school for students would now be September 16 for grades 1-12, and Kindergarten to start on Sept. 18, and request the Superintendent to apply for a waiver to September 17 for grades 1-12 and September 21 for Kindergarten. SE 2nd.

Discussion:

- Allowing PD days within school calendar important to budget: too costly to pay teachers per diem for training before contracted start-of-school date.
- PD will be for orientation to remote instruction; improvement of remote-instruction strategies, and anti-racism training.

Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion passed unanimously.

C. FY21 Budget Update & Discussion

Andy Paquette, TMS, reviewed reports on year-end closing and FY12 budget. Pointed to uncertainty of projections, given frequent changes in DESE guidance and pandemic situation. Anticipates that increased needs due to pandemic will extend into next fiscal year.

Discussion:

- Extended Learning Time grant may not be renewed in full or at all. ELT not included in budget report.
- School Resource Officer: Included in “truant officer” budget line. Funding was removed in city budget. Superintendent working with police dept. to negotiate, remove position. State requirement for truant officer and SRO.
- Budget Subcommittee directed to review transportation budget. Potential massive cost increase.
- Paquette reported that last report’s “deficit” has resolved itself, as predicted; return to positive balance after year-end-closing entries completed.

IV. Executive Session – MGL c 30A, §21, (2) & (3): (2) To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.

JW moved to enter Executive Session. SH 2nd. Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion passed unanimously. Entered Executive Session at 9:24 p.m.

Returned to public session at 9:52 p.m.

VII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn. 2nd. Roll call: Yes – KC, SE, SH, GJ, AP, JW. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Farber
Recording Secretary

Meeting Documents

1. Agenda: July 30, 2020
2. Memos from DESE Commission Jeffrey Riley:
 - a. Two-Step Process and Online Form/Template for Fall Reopening Plans (July 15, 2020)
 - b. Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios (July 17, 2020)
 - c. Transportation and Facilities Guidance (July 22, 2020)
 - d. Guidance on Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations and Remote Learning (July 24, 2020)
 - e. Additional Staff Training Days This Fall (July 27, 2020)
3. Safely Reopening our GPS Schools: 3 Models, G.R.E.A.T. Presentation and Draft Reopening Plans (July 2020), including AEL (preschool) photos, Outdoor Pavilion Locations
4. GPS Business Operations Update and Budget Reports, from Andy Paquette, TMS (July 27, 2020)