

Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes
March 13, 2020
Salmond School
Emergency Meeting

Present: Mrs. Leah Miller, and Mrs. Kimberly Booker, Mr. John Geary and Mrs. Libby Corbo, Mrs. Ruth Lynch

Also Present: Matthew Ferron, Thomas Raab, Debbie St. Ives, Keith Guyette, Patricia Smith, Chief Walter Sweeney, Dan Birolini, Michael Oates, Joe Colangelo, Emmanuel Dockter

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 11:31am by Mrs. Miller

Mrs. Miller began the meeting by thanking all involved for coming together on such short notice. Noting that it's a situation that no one is prepared for and no one has experienced and all involved are doing a great job.

Public Comment: None presented

Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:

- **Update from DPH/DESE Commissioner** – Mr. Ferron noted that the call with the DESE commissioner was not as supportive as he had hoped it would be. The DESE Commissioner and the Governor are not supportive of a State-wide shut down, but instead are leaving that decision up to each district. Each district is working to not only respond to the virus but also address shortages as well. He also noted that they got very good and clear information from the Dept. of Public Health and the Hanover Board of Health. They were able to clarify certain questions surrounding isolation, close contact and quarantine that had remained open ended. The BOH noted that close contact with someone is defined as sharing a household, face-to-face contact for longer than 15 minutes, direct contact with secretions and sharing utensils.

Mrs. Corbo asked what is the difference between isolation and quarantine? Mrs. Smith noted that isolation is remaining at home by yourself while quarantine refers to just staying away from people.

Mrs. Lynch asked if people should quarantine if they have no symptoms. Mrs. Smith responded by saying that if someone has been in close contact with someone who is positive, they would be instructed to self-quarantine without symptoms, but they should only do that if told. Also noting that the local Board of Health will follow up with individuals who they think should self-quarantine.

Mrs. Smith gave the Committee four different scenarios that she thought would help answer questions.

Mrs. Lynch asked if people who are not symptomatic would be tested. Mrs. Smith said No. At this point only people who are showing symptoms are being tested. She also noted that the DPH's guidelines note that districts only have to close schools where a student is infected, and other schools can remain open. Both Mrs. Smith and Mr. Ferron agreed that this situation is not possible due to cross-pollination of students and families in schools.

As one scenario she covered discussed "Sustained Community Impact", Mrs. Smith mentioned that she is waiting to hear back regarding a definition of "Sustained Community Impact" and will follow up when she does.

Mrs. Lynch asked why the quarantine period is 14 days. Mrs. Smith answered by saying that this is the outside timeframe for the incubation period. As more and more information is gathered, we may see that time period shrink. She also noted that the definition of incubation period is the time between exposure and onset of symptoms.

Mr. Ferron noted that many helpful facts and definitions such as that will be shared out to the community next week.

Mr. Colangelo asked if First Responders would be notified of households that are infected. Mrs. Smith noted that our Hanover Board of Health Nurse, Nancy Funder would be able to provide that information for them.

Community member, Mrs. Parry asked if children are less affected than adults, is there a chance that they could be asymptomatic and be passing it around school? Mrs. Smith noted that the chance of someone who is asymptomatic spreading the virus was incredibly low. Also noting that the same universal precautions that we always use should always be in place to prevent the spread of any illness.

A community member asked if the DPH is reconciling the lack of testing supplies? Mrs. Smith noted that it is known that the supply for testing is very limited now, but her hope is that once it is made more available, that will show the true number of people affected and will give us great information to use moving forward.

- **Update from Lighthouse/South Shore Districts** Mr. Ferron noted that all 35 communities on the South Shore agreed on a two week closure that will go into effect on Monday, March 16th. That will be announced this afternoon. He noted that the reasons for the closure include facts such as how little we know about this virus, and hope that the increased testing capabilities in the next week will give us further information to make further decisions. We simply wouldn't have enough staff and resources to keep our students safe if we were to remain open.
- **Capacity for major operations** Mr. Ferron noted that we currently have plenty of supplies for cleaning, but future supplies are currently on back order. The hope is that with a two week closure, that will allow for supplies to arrive and for our staff to have the proper time to clean and we can then reassess. However, while schools and busses are being cleaned, we still can't stop the cross-pollination of students in those spaces were we to remain in session. He also discussed personnel issues, again noting we simply would just not have enough staff to serve our students due to wide spread community closures and our staff living in several of the surrounding towns. Another issue he wanted to let the Committee know he was working on was that of Food Service and ensuring that kids who depend on school meals can still get them. If they need food, parents should reach out to their child's principal and come up with a plan.

Mrs. Corbo noted that the Hanover Food Pantry would be working with community members who depend on them to deliver food to them if they are unable or too anxious to come out to the pantry. Mr. Ferron noted that if it was the wish of the Food Pantry, he could help in communicating that message.

Mr. Geary recommended that Mr. Ferron request that people of an official capacity and those people in this meeting refrain from sharing closure information until after the official

announcement had been made. Mr. Ferron asked to keep this information private until 3pm today.

Mrs. Smith noted that there would also be communication for addressing this with students in a more caring and reassuring way. This would be shared out today as well.

- **Ongoing Academic initiatives** - Mr. Ferron and Mrs. St. Ives addressed Academic plans noting that each school has been working on putting these plans in place for the last couple of weeks. Mrs. St. Ives noted that the plans were solid the way they were laid out and if the time period is extended they have a great basis to work from. Mrs. St. Ives also noted that each grade level has their own plan and they will look very different. Each teacher will be in touch with his or her students to share that plan.

Mrs. Miller asked parents to be patient. She noted that communications are coming and they will get all the information they need, but that we want the communication to be thoughtful and accurate so the Superintendent and his team need the time to do that.

Mrs. Corbo asked if we were making this decision too early? What if things are worse in 2 weeks and we have to close longer. Mr. Ferron responded by saying that this decision was not made lightly, but we have to realize that we just wouldn't be able to function come Monday due to absences.

Mr. Geary noted that just based on the reactions throughout the rest of the country, we might find that we are late making this decision.

Mrs. Smith said that it is her hope that in a few weeks it looks like we have overreacted and that it ended up not being as terrible as we all fear, because that would mean that what we did worked.

Mr. Dockter asked if staff would be paid normally and if there were any concerns with union and non-union contracts. Mr. Ferron responded by saying that any staff member that has a current agreement with us will be paid as that agreement outlines.

Mrs. Lynch asked if the School Administration office would remain open. Mr. Ferron said that it would, but that all staff would be juggling their families as well, due to closures.

A community member asked about Special Education and if there is a plan in place. Mrs. St. Ives responded by saying there is a call today at 3pm that will provide more guidance, but that just as regular Ed. Teachers, the Special Ed. Teachers would also be checking in with their students during the two weeks.

Mrs. Lynch asked if the schools would be open for students to get their belongings. Mr. Ferron stated that a decision would be made later today.

Mrs. Booker asked if Chrome book computers would be available to students who needed them. Mr. Ferron said yes, and that parents should reach out to principals to coordinate picking one up.

A Community member asked if the message sent out would include guidance for students to let them know they should be staying home, and the reality of this situation. Mr. Ferron noted that he would offer gentle guidance on the situation.

A community member asked about the timing of the academic plans being sent out. Mrs. St. Ives said they would be sent Monday. Mr. Ferron again noted that if a child is in need of food, to reach out to their principals.

A community member asked if there is any flexibility with the MCAS Testing. Mrs. St. Ives responded that it is a work in progress. The first round of tests is scheduled for March 24th. A waiver has been discussed, but there are no determinations.

Mrs. Lynch asked Chief Sweeney if his police and first responder staff have been trained on how to respond to a home where the virus is suspected? Chief Sweeney said that his team has been trained and they have all the required equipment needed. He also noted that during this time, responses would be tailored based on the symptoms of the person in need. If the virus is suspected, there will be less people who will be in close contact with the patient. He also noted that School Resource Officer John Voelkel would be used during his shifts to help the rest of the force, but if a school or family issue comes up, principals and administrators have been instructed to reach out to him as they normally would.

- **Upcoming Events** - Mr. Ferron addressed many of the upcoming events that are scheduled in our District. The MIAA Hockey Championship game for the HHS Boys Hockey Team was cancelled. Jr. Prom in two weeks is still be considered and other events for our seniors will be looked at. Mr. Ferron noted that he doesn't want to take away from those events and traditions if it is possible. School concerts and plays have also been postponed and the possibility of televising those once school resumes will be a great option to keep crowds down.

Mrs. Lynch noted that she was surprised by the change in tone from the DESE Commissioner, as the last message seemed more positive and supportive. Mr. Ferron noted that he understands that the Commissioner supports the decisions of the Governor and we will make our own decisions based on the health and safety of our community. He also said that it is a very complicated situation, but we are all trying to stand together to keep everyone safe.

Mrs. Corbo asked if a message from the school nurses could help out, perhaps in the form of a video to help ease the anxiety of some of our students. Mrs. Smith and Mr. Ferron both thought that was a great idea and would work to get that done.

Mrs. Lynch asked about reimbursements for school trips. Mr. Ferron said that he has been working with many other superintendents on putting pressure on travel companies to help their families out during this time. Mr. Birolini noted that the Middle School trip to Washington D.C. has been cancelled and the travel company is refunding families 75% if they did not purchase insurance. He also noted that he is still working to negotiate that rate.

- **Special Education/Out of District Placement** – Mrs. St. Ives let the Committee know that there is a conference call this afternoon at 3pm to discuss compensatory services. She is hopeful that this call will offer them the guidance they need to move forward. Mr. Ferron also noted that students who attend out of district schools would still be able to attend, should those schools remain open.
- **Current Issue at HMS and Outcome** - Mr. Ferron informed the Committee that the student who had come in contact with a person who tested positive for Covid-19 was considered to be at a very low risk and is not required to self-quarantine. The person

who was positive was asymptomatic at the time of contact and their contact was less than 15 minutes. So at this time, there is still no cause for concern in the Hanover Community.

Public Comment: None presented

Motion by Geary to adjourn at 1:00pm. The motion was seconded by Lynch. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Caitlin Potolicchio

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Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary