

Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes
August 5, 2020
Virtual Meeting

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

Also Present: Matthew Ferron, Thomas Raab, Debbie St. Ives and Keith Guyette and Matthew Plummer

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 6:03pm

Public Comment: None

Approval Minutes: Motion by Lynch to approve the minutes from June 22, 2020. The motion was seconded by Corbo. The motion carried unanimously.

Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:

- **Vote on Mascot change** – Mrs. Miller discussed the move to retire the Hanover Indian mascot and recapped the meeting held on July 29th.

Motion to retire the Hanover Indian mascot and logo by Lynch. The motion was seconded by Corbo.

Mrs. Miller asked each Committee Member for comment before taking a roll call vote.

Mrs. Lynch stated that she has listened and read messages from students, alumni and the community. She notes that when the mascot was adopted there was never any racist intent and it was seen as a symbol of integrity and strength. Mrs. Lynch stated that she has lived in Hanover for 48 years and her children were all Indians when they went to school here. She discussed her history of living and teaching in predominantly white towns and districts and has learned that it is essential that we begin to have conversations about stereotyping and racism. While those conversations are difficult, they need to happen. She stated that without reservation, she would vote to remove this mascot and logo.

Mrs. Corbo thanked everyone who participated in the forum saying it was very educational and she was thankful for all their time. Mrs. Corbo noted she was struck by the example of the declaration check boxes on forms that Native people fill out and we would never consider using any other race as a mascot. She agreed with all of what Mrs. Lynch said – That the intent was never racism, but she also stated that she knows that her opinion is not the one that matters. She recognized that it does not matter if she is offended or not; if the Native American people are offended, then that is all that matters. Mrs. Corbo stated even if the stereotype of the Indian mascot was intended to be positive, it's not right or healthy and if the majority of the Native American voices say they do not like this and we should listen to that. Mrs. Corbo stated that her vote would be to retire the mascot and move on to something else.

Mr. Geary stated that morally, he doesn't believe a race should ever be a mascot or brand, but he also does not believe that this agenda item is appropriate at this time with everything else going on and the

community feedback was very divided on this topic. Mr. Geary feels the timing should be more appropriate and this matter has been a distraction from getting the students and staff ready to return to school during a pandemic. He noted that he didn't believe we have been able to focus on this as we should, but morally, he would be voting to change the mascot.

Mr. Miraglia stated that he reviewed all the information he could on this mascot issue, noting it was the duty of the School Committee to make a decision. He noted that the Committee could wait for legislation regarding Native mascots and that would be the easy route. Doing it on our own terms will be more difficult. Mr. Miraglia noted that the mascot marginalizes an oppressed people and Hanover wants to welcome the best and brightest people to live and work here. That is not a welcoming symbol. He stated our students should go out into a global society and work alongside people who are unlike them and to carry with them a logo that oppresses a race of people would be a disadvantage. Mr. Miraglia understands that people feel either pride or shame on this issue depending on which side they stand on, but now, we have an opportunity to do the right thing. He stated he knows the issue is emotional and had the potential to become divisive, but he is glad that it hasn't become divisive and that instead people listened and learn. Mr. Miraglia stated that while it's sad to lose your mascot he would vote to change the mascot to move us forward.

Mrs. Miller thanked every person who engaged in this issue with us, from both sides. She stated that the Committee had a lot of information to gather and read and understand. She also thanked the speakers, noting the Committee and the Community received an education. Mrs. Miller also thanked the people who listened and were brave enough to say yes, we do need to make a change. She stated she is thankful for the process and how it went. She is confident there was no intention of racism when it was brought forward, but the impact over the years has had a negative effect; so, she noted that she would also vote to change the mascot.

After a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Mrs. Miller thanked the Committee for taking this issue seriously and putting the time in and now we will move to a process to replace the mascot.

Mr. Ferron thanked the Committee for their time on this process. He noted that he will be working with Mr. Paquette on a process to change the mascot and it will be best to start this once the students are back in school and we can gather their feedback. He stated that there will be a process to come up with a symbolic representation of what Hanover is. Mr. Ferron also thanked everyone who came forward to offer their opinions. He noted that he had given this a lot of thought for a long time and after last week's meeting, it solidified for him that this is the right decision. He noted that pride, tradition and honor will not change with the mascot. He also noted that he and Mr. Paquette will engage the students to work through the process and will bring updates back to the Committee.

Report of Finance Department Presented by Dr. Thomas Raab:

- C.A.R.E.S. Funding Update: Dr. Raab stated that the CARES Funding update will be put online for the community to review. Dr. Raab reviewed the CARES Funding and noted that we are allowed to get reimbursed for many expenses related to COVID 19. A total of \$833,000 of expenses have been identified that can be submitted for reimbursement. Dr. Raab stated that much of that has already been spent on things such as additional chrome books, which will allow us the flexibility that

might be required for the upcoming year. He noted there has also been software that has been purchased at several of the schools to assist in the upcoming year as well as furniture and desks to allow for social distancing. Dr. Raab stated that PPE has also been purchased with the assistance of the Hanover Fire Dept. He noted that we have also started earmarking the remaining money and determining which areas will need it and which are priority. Dr. Raab stated that some of those priorities will be tutoring and additional support for those students who require that after last year's closure, counseling, diagnostic testing for students that we weren't able to take place last spring, \$150K for technology needs that might come up to allow for flexibility in remote or hybrid learning as well as money for the DPW for signage and partitions.

- **Chapter 70 Funding:** Dr. Raab stated that he wanted to revisit Chapter 70 funding, even though it is not something that they would typically speak a lot about. He stated that there was concern about this when the budget was discussed in April and May and the budget had been cut by 10% while planning for the worst. Dr. Raab stated that information was released stating that Chapter 70 will be Level-funded at the FY'20 level. He noted there will be no increase, but it will offset the need for much of the Free Cash received from the Town.

Report on Teaching and Learning:

- **Update on Reopening Plan:** Mrs. Miller began this agenda item by letting the community know that if they had a question, they should enter them into the Q&A section on Zoom and that Mr. Matthew Plummer would be monitoring the questions. She stated that there is not a set plan that has been decided yet because the Committee is working with the HTA on negotiations and want to wait to put out a plan. Mrs. Miller thanked the HTA for the time they have spent on talking to the Committee about this and also the HPS Administration and staff who have put in countless hours on this. She noted that a plan would be voted on at the meeting on Friday, August 7th. Mr. Ferron stated there are a lot more questions than answers at this point. He noted that they are working in collaboration with staff as the process moves forward and are taking feedback which has been very helpful. Mr. Ferron stated the reality that the plan will likely change after it has been voted on as he continues to get different information every day. He also noted that Hanover's plan might not be the most innovative, but the team will work to keep the students engaged whether it's in the class or remotely. He noted he wants a plan that is adaptable and that can grow over time as needed and he knows the staff is ready for the challenge. Mr. Ferron went on to review the PowerPoint presentation, which can be found in its entirety on the Hanover Public Schools Website. Mrs. St. Ives walked through the summary of feedback received from the community and she noted that they have read all of it and are using that information as they move forward with the process. Dr. Raab shared a video of a distance test showing different examples of 3ft and 6ft spacing in classrooms which could be utilized based on the reopening model chosen. Mr. Ferron explained in detail each of the models considered and noted that it is likely that at some point during the school year we will be forced to move from one model to another if students or staff become sick.

Community members were able to submit questions through the Q&A section on the zoom platform. Below is a summary of those questions and answers. It was noted that any questions that are not answered on the call will be put into a FAQ document that will be shared with the community at a later date. Mr. Ferron noted that he would do his best to answer these questions, but there may be more answers on Friday before the Committee votes on a reopening model.

- Will students at home be able to remote into the in-person cohorts? Mr. Ferron stated that they are working on this to make sure that whatever model we decide on, it will be effective for the students based on their grade level,
- Will siblings be in the same Cohort? Mr. Ferron replied yes.
- How will remote learning be improved? Mr. Ferron stated there would be more to follow on this.
- How will you support the social and emotional needs of students? Mr. Ferron noted that counseling and administrative staff are looking at this and will work with everyone to ensure they have strategies in place to help students build relationships and help with the transition
- How will you support “high needs” students? Mr. Ferron stated there is still a lot of work to be done in this area, but they are working closely with SEPAC and will work to come up with a solution and a model that works best for this cohort of students.
- What will cleaning in the buildings look like? Mr. Ferron stated the buildings will be cleaned as often as possible. He stated a lot of guidance has been received and we will not put people in a building that we can’t keep clean.
- What will trigger a pivot from in person to remote? Mr. Ferron stated he hopes to receive guidance from the state based on data and metrics and he will also work closely with local boards of health. He also noted that cohorts will be kept together so if someone is infected, contact tracing can happen quickly.
- Will there be mask breaks? Mr. Ferron said yes absolutely. We will get students outside as much as possible.
- Will there be classes outside – Mr. Ferron said yes. He hopes to set up outside classes.
- What will the transportation plan be? Mr. Ferron noted there is a plan, but this will be challenging as there will have to be rigorous protocols which will require the help of parents and kids to make sure the guidance is adhered to. He stated that those protocols will be enforced but we will need everyone’s help.
- What are the next steps? Mr. Ferron stated the team will work from now until Friday; then the Committee will vote on a model. He stated that there will be much more detail at that point for everyone. He noted that they worked with HTA through negotiations and are doing it right to give everyone a voice before we decide on a model. Mr. Ferron said after a model is voted, we will finalize details and communicate with families. He stated families who have identified as virtual only will be contacted and staffing will be planned accordingly. He noted that he will communicate all of our options to staff and families, including child care and before and after school programs and if we go to Hybrid model – there will also be a virtual only cohort, a high needs cohort and then the other cohorts will be TBD. He said there will be Zoom meetings and updates for parents and community members and the plan will be submitted to DESE on August 10th.

Mrs. Miller requested that the Committee move on to vote on the first day of school, which has been changed to September 16, 2020. Mr. Ferron stated that these extra days will allow staff to receive proper training. He also noted that he expects other changes to the calendar to happen down the road, but the start date will remain September 16th.

Motion by Lynch to approve the change in start date of the 2020-2021 school year to September 16th. Second by Corbo. The motion carried unanimously.

Mrs. Miller reminded the viewers that they do not have a hybrid model to share yet, but by Friday there will be one to share. There are several options available and they are considering all of them.

Mr. Plummer let the Committee know that there were more questions submitted to the Q&A platform.

Below is a summary of those questions and answers.

- When will we get all the information about the plan? Mr. Ferron said the plan will come out Friday and they will have more details after that.
- Will families that opt out of in person learning be able to change their minds? Mr. Ferron stated that would be possible, but there will need to be a process put into place.
- What if someone tests positive, how will we ensure they can return safely? Mr. Ferron stated that he had met with the local Board of Health and the Town Manager early today and they will have all of that information provided to families before school begins. He noted he is confident there will be a good protocol in place and there is a great team of people working on it. Mrs. Miller noted that they were also waiting on guidance from the state on this topic as well. Mrs. Corbo noted that this would not be a decision made by the district right away, and the information received from the state would be used. She noted that could change over time but right now we do not have the ability to make decisions about that.
- What about students who cannot wear a mask – would it be possible for them to wear face shields instead? Mr. Ferron said they will be working with the local health officials on that and will have more information soon.
- What criteria is there to be included in the High Needs cohort? Mr. Ferron replied by saying he wants to support those students with high needs or in special education who benefit from mostly in person learning.
- What models are we considering for Hybrid? Mr. Ferron said there are several models out there. Some of our neighboring communities have already released various models. He noted that we are trying to decide what is best and get the kids in school as much as possible and then also have good remote learning when they are not. He noted the plan will be one that supports the safety and learning of all our students and staff, which therefore is the safety and health of the community and we want to manage all of this as strategically as possible.
- What about full day Kindergarten? Mr. Ferron stated there will be more information regarding full day Kindergarten on Friday and also over the next couple of weeks.
- What is the difference between the 3ft. and 6ft of separation? Mr. Ferron noted that at the time they were asked to do the exercise, doctors had said that 3ft. distance with a mask would be appropriate for in-person learning. He also noted that many, if not all other sources are sticking to 6ft. The exercise was to show the distance of both 3ft. and 6ft. to evaluate all options.
- What about fire drills or ALICE drills? Mr. Geary noted there are subcommittee groups that are working on issues such as these that include the HFD and HPD Chiefs to discuss these protocols. All Hanover public officials are working through those situations.
- Do we have enough PPE? Mr. Ferron stated they do and are buying more all the time. He noted they are working with the HFD to continue to purchase it as needed.
- What would happen on a snow day Hybrid model? Mr. Ferron said there isn't a great answer and it will likely depend on the situation. He noted that if we are in a remote learning environment, then we can likely keep learning, but he expects guidelines from the DESE on that at some point.
- What will happen with band, art, etc.? Mr. Ferron stated the DESE has given some guidance, related to the ability to use musical instruments and Principals will be working with specialist on all of this. He noted they will work to make those experiences happen to the best of our ability.

Mr. Plummer stated that he would put the remaining questions not read on the call into the FAQ document to be shared at a later date. Mr. Ferron conceded that there were far more questions than answers at this point, but they would work to make answers available as soon as possible. Mrs. Miller echoed his sentiments by stating there are just some answers we do not have yet.

Mr. Miraglia noted that the effort put into this process by the Administration has been tremendous and the Committee and Administration all agree that emotional health is just as important as education and they will all work to answer the questions the best they can. He asked the community to continue to be patient as they work through the process.

Mrs. Lynch thanked the Administration as well, but also recognized the parents and community for their patience, noting that she is sure that many of them were hoping for more definite information today, but the Committee promises that Friday they will get that information. Mrs. Lynch stated there are so many moving parts involved in this and she hopes after tonight the community has a better understanding of that. She requested that everyone please be patient a little longer.

Mrs. Miller reminded the community that on Friday the Committee will vote on a model, but that does not mean that parents will find out what their children's schedules will be, noting that there will be much work to do after Friday to determine logistics.

Mrs. Corbo questioned if sports could be addressed and if there has been any guidance issued? Mr. Ferron replied that he expects the MIAA to make some announcements in the next week or two. He also noted that he wants to be realistic about being able to do this safely. Mr. Ferron recognizes the importance of athletics and all the other clubs and activities; so, hopefully we will have more information on all those things soon.

Mrs. Lynch questioned if school vacations would remain the same? Mr. Ferron replied by saying at the moment only the start date has changed. He noted that he believes you can expect there to be other changes down the road, but it is likely the vacations will remain the same.

Mr. Miraglia questioned if there was thought given about day to day metrics at a community/local level for whatever mode we choose going forward. Mr. Ferron replied yes, and the Administration will be looking at many different metrics going forward and using them for decisions. He noted they will start with the guidance from the State and then go from there as we move forward working with our local Board of Health.

Mr. Plummer informed the Committee that there were community members who had requested to speak during the meeting. Below is a summary of their comments and responses.

- Community member Kara D asked: What could possibly change between now and Friday and what plan are you learning toward at this time? She also noted that she felt this decision should have been a town vote and that the parents of students should have had a chance to decide how school reopens. She noted that personally, she believes in-person learning should be offered and those who choose to opt out can do so, Mr. Ferron thanked this community member for her feedback and explained that unfortunately he was unable to share a plan at this time as one has

not been decided and there are many moving parts to be considered before one can be decided. Mr. Geary also responded by saying that part of the exercise tonight is to listen to the feedback and take that into consideration in the next 48 hours as part of the decision. He noted that not taking a vote today is deliberate and they still have external resources that also have to be considered. Mr. Geary said it's all part of the process and we will make an educated decision on Friday.

- Adriana Mason thanked the Committee for the moment to talk and noted that she has sat in a lot of meetings since March and Hanover has been praised as one of the high benchmarks in the area, showing how well Hanover rolled out the remote learning in the spring. She noted she knows emotions are high and people are worried, but it's important to know that this administration and School Committee is consistent in their dedication to not roll out information then have to roll back because that can lead to more frustration. She stated she appreciates the diligence that is taken to make decisions and listen to all different sides and analyze the responses and feedback.
- Community member Karalyn asked: How much sway does the HTA have in this decision? He noted from what he had read, teachers don't want to come back to school. Mr. Ferron stated they are working very closely with the HTA to come up with a decision that everyone can move forward with. The Community member stated he knows teachers who have strong opinions on coming back. What is the percentage that don't want to return? Mr. Ferron said he couldn't answer that as he did not know, and we are only concerned about Hanover teachers at this point. Mrs. Miller stated that the conversations were going well with the HTA, but collective bargaining is not an open process and that is why they are unable to discuss it further.
- Lauren Hess asked: Is there a plan coming out for Preschool or Pre-k learning? What we were given in the spring was not a lot. Mr. Ferron replied by saying they are working actively on plans for Prek-12 but understands that remote learning for Pre-school is not very effective, but the Cedar school is looking at options.
- Tracy Coughlin asked: Why did we do the survey if 90% of families said they want in-person learning? Why are we still voting? Mr. Ferron replied by saying they are taking every bit of that feedback into consideration and we are doing everything that can be done to make this experience as good as possible, but it needs to be done safely. He noted we all have to be part of the solution and keep people healthy and there are vastly different opinions on how to do this. Mr. Ferron stated there should be a sustainable and flexible plan in place that won't fail on the first day.

Mrs. Miller stated that the FAQ's not answered during the meeting would be sent out to provide answers that they can answer at this point and there would also be more information provide on Friday.

Mrs. Corbo thanked everyone for all their work, not just the district but the community as well. She noted she has never seen such a collaborative effort to get education back on track. She assured the community that the Committee and Administration are spending hundreds of hours on this issue and there are many moving parts. It's not a simple process and we are doing everything to have a workable plan for the entire community and there is no learning like in person leaning. Mrs. Corbo stated the goal is to have a workable plan for the entire community, but we need to do it safely. She stated she is very proud to be a member of this committee.

Mr. Miraglia echoed Mrs. Corbo's sentiments by saying there are so many agreements that need to happen, and he understands that everyone is anxious. He noted that all these things involve human beings and we need to take that into account as we make these decisions. He thanked the community for all the questions today and promised they will be answered as soon as possible.

Mrs. Miller thanked everyone again and stated that there is a fantastic and innovative group of educators in Hanover working on this.

Motion by Lynch to adjourn at 8:18pm. The motion was seconded by Corbo. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Caitlin Potolicchio

Caitlin Potolicchio

Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary